

Robert McNamara makes population cuts the criterion for economic policy

by Kathy Burdman

“The most fundamental point underlying all our foreign policy needs is overpopulation. This is the theme in every area.”

The speaker was Robert McNamara, in a March 16 interview with a journalist. McNamara, who applied the same “cost-accounting” methods to both mismanaging the Ford Motor Company and prosecuting the Vietnam War as a “population war,” retired last year as the head of the World Bank. He is associated with the Brandt Commission on Third World development established in 1979 by the World Bank and the Socialist International, which promotes the decoupling of underdeveloped sector economies from the industrialized nations, except for resource grabs.

The international banker remains very politically active and expressed special concern over Mexico, whose population is much too big, he said, adding that rapid population growth in Mexico is already one of the greatest “national-security threats” to America today; the U.S. priority right now is to get Mexico to keep the Mexicans in Mexico. He proposed that the United States provide the Mexican government with all sorts of macro-economic policies which will promote labor-intensive low-wage jobs. Otherwise, Hispanics are likely to be the largest population in this country, he said, declaring that “It will create horrible political problems. We’re going to be up to our tails in unemployable Mexicans.”

McNamara now sits on the Committee for the Year 2000, an organization set up by former Secretary of State Cyrus Vance to lobby for national and international decision-making to be guided by the criterion of population reduction.

McNamara, asked if Mexico’s recent peso-devaluation was “a population-control policy,” said yes, emphasizing that when Mexico “overvalues” the peso, it can afford to import what he considers too many high-technology capital-intensive goods from the United States, and pay excessively high wages in the oil sector. The devaluation, he said happily, will encourage instead less imports and reliance on more labor-intensive jobs. It

means making the economy more labor-intensive.

Obviously, Mexico took the devaluation measure under international pressure, McNamara acknowledged, citing Bank of America, Citibank, and David Rockefeller as pressure-points for devaluation. But, he added, Mexico is still importing “too much,” and wages are still “too high.” He advocated a continuous devaluation, more and more every month, “like Brazil.”

Asked if he favored sealing the border, McNamara said that he did, but termed the move impossible under this administration, since to keep Mexicans from being employed in the United States, all Americans would have to be issued ID cards.

His other “macrostrategy” is for Mexico City. “We have to obtain a better balance between urban and rural population, and the only way to do that is get people out of the city,” he said, proposing punitive taxes and regulations against heavy industry on the city, and encouraging labor-intensive agriculture with higher food prices. That will also keep down population in the cities.”

McNamara called the turmoil in Central America “Mexico’s problem, not ours.” He explained, “It is an immediate danger to Mexico. There is a tremendous overpopulation in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala, and they’re all ready to spill over into Mexico. And if that happens, with rural poverty in Mexico a breeding ground for radical activity, then Mexico could face turmoil. We should tell the Mexicans that it is their job to deal with the area, and to keep people in their countries.”

McNamara emphasized that he would be happy to have communist regimes in any nation, as long as those regimes are committed to reducing population and migration. “Allow them to have whatever regime they want, whether we like it or not. Sandinista, whatever the people want. We should stop worrying so much about Cubans and start creating the conditions where people don’t roam.”

McNamara explained that “We have a quiet group of people who are working on all different areas in which U.S. policy must be changed. But the most fundamental

point underlying all our foreign policy needs is overpopulation. This is the theme in every area. That's what we're really concerned about."

Cy Vance, and Carter State Department hatchet-man Warren Christopher as members of his group, he said, "It's true a lot of us are Democrats." It also includes liberal Republicans like Charles Mathias of Maryland and Charles Percy of Illinois. Thomas Enders at State is very helpful on Mexico, he said; and "helped us get through David Rockefeller's initiative on the Caribbean basin, the free-trading zone. . . ."

Prospects for Africa

He supported David Rockefeller's efforts in Africa as well, which he described as encouragement "for what indigenous regimes can do in Africa, even socialist regimes," if they promote the right policies. He declared that in southern Africa, there is going to be a "population-caused race explosion" over the next several years, unless Reagan stops backing apartheid. All of southern Africa will explode in strife. He endorsed for South Africa the "thorough-going reforms" pressed by Ted Heath, former Tory British prime minister and spokesman for the World Bank's Brandt Commission. McNamara himself will speak on behalf of this approach at Witwatersrand University in South Africa later this year, he said.

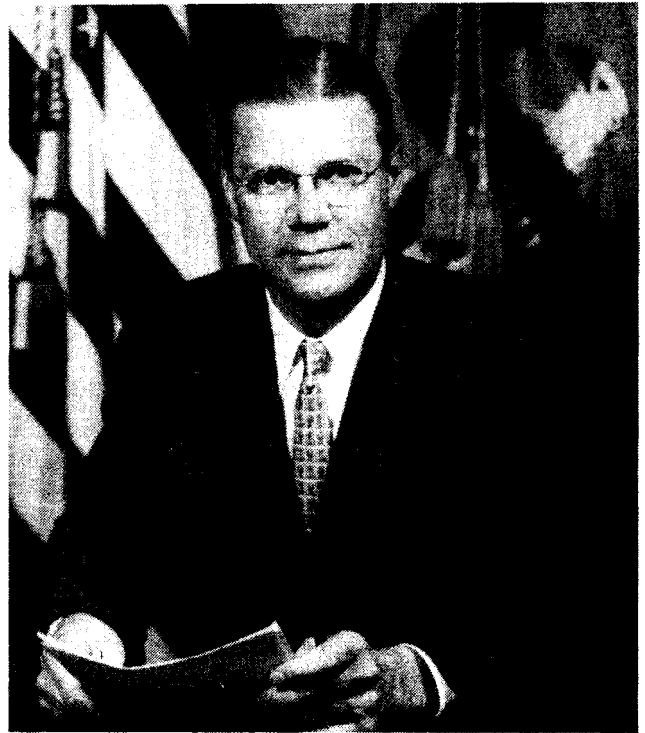
"Nigeria," he continued, referring to Africa's most populous nation, "has serious population problems, just like Mexico, horrible, and they're doing nothing about it. Not to mention Kenya, growing at 4 percent a year and doubling their population every 17 years already. There is a very dangerous situation there, and unless we cooperate with them to institute the kinds of reforms I mentioned in the case of Mexico, there will be war and horrible suffering. There may be war and horrible suffering anyway. . . ."

McNamara was asked if he expected a "huge crisis" in Mexico or Africa. "Mexico will continue to hemorrhage over a long period," he replied, adding that he would prefer to see an explosion that would alert people on both sides of the border to the crisis.

Summarizing the efforts of his "quiet group of people," McNamara said that the fundamental theme underlying those efforts is the danger of overpopulation. "David Rockefeller talks on Africa, Cy Vance is doing something on arms control, I talk on South Africa. I'm also planning to do a speech on this nuclear weapons issue; it's terrible what's happening with us."

Is McNamara of Vietnam War fame supporting the nuclear-freeze proposal? "Nuclear war, as I said in one article this week, is the only thing more dangerous than the population crisis," he replied.

"But the pressing need to cut world population will not come soon in policy. This can only be achieved



McNamara as Defense Secretary

within an overall change in current U.S. government policy. That will probably come first on the domestic front. . . ."

Comments on Volcker

Does this mean that Reagan will come under attack from the peace movement and on other domestic fronts, he was asked. "Yes," he replied, "but there could be all sorts of situations. For example, the President has a budget proposal to Congress which Congress will never pass. Reagan is going to have to get the debt ceiling raised on the national debt, and that's not going to be done without a lot of blood on the floor. That could be a real domestic crisis."

McNamara said that he would join liberal Democrats in criticizing Paul Volcker's interest-rate policy at the Federal Reserve, but only "in public." "In fact, I agree with Volcker's monetary policy. He's not going to change his monetary policy now, nor do I think he should change it until Congress cuts the budget deficit." But before that happens, there will be real trouble, he said.

"Reagan is going to have trouble on the economy, trouble on the budget, and his arms-control policy is not out of the woods by any means either. In fact, as Cy Vance points out, he has no arms-control policy. He also has no nuclear policy, as I intend to point out. So, within another six to nine months, the situation in Washington could change."