

West Europe faces population crash

by Mary M. Burdman

The bitterest irony of the massive media campaign now being waged in Western Europe against the supposed threatened invasion by “hordes” of refugees from Russia, Eastern Europe, and Africa, is that Western Europe itself is facing an impending population crisis: a disastrous *collapse* in population in the near future. Under any circumstances but the current “New World Order,” whose Anglo-American rulers consider people their greatest enemy, Europe would be recruiting a new labor force, as the United States, Ibero-America, and Russia did in the 19th century.

Demographics, the study of population, must always be a long-term study, and the “head-counting” approach of the crew of malthusian horror-mongers at most universities is a fraud. The issue is not how many people exist on the face of the Earth at any given moment, as these non-scientists claim. Population size and age are determined by *rates* of birth and death, of early or late family formation, and the basic time frame is the human life span of 75 years. If one looks at current trends in Western Europe from these criteria, the outlook is bleak.

The 1990 demographic statistics from the European Community, which include most figures for 1988, show that the trend of population collapse of the past 15 years continues. At this point, the overall fertility rate for the 12 EC nations is 1.6 children per woman, almost 20% *below* even the replacement rate (zero growth) of 2.1. Fertility, which has been falling sharply since 1965, fell below the replacement rate in 1975, and has been plummeting since.

It appears that live births bottomed out from about 1987 at 1.5, and there has been a very slight statistical upturn, but this means little or nothing. Despite current high living standards in Germany, France, and northern Italy—at least as compared to the United States—decades of economic decline and the proliferation of malthusian pessimism have created a population “hole” that is becoming so enormous it will soon not be possible to fill it without large-scale immigration into Europe. At the present fertility rate, the population of the original 10 EC nations (before Spain and Portugal joined), which was 270 million in 1985, will have *fallen* to 240 million by 2025. The population of former West Germany, with-

out the five new eastern states, which was 60 million in 1985, will fall to 35 million, and of France, at 54.4 million in 1985, to 48.6 million.

The population of Europe has shrunk dramatically as a proportion of the rest of the world. In 1950, one in six people lived in Europe; in 2025, it will be one in 26. By 2000, the average age of a European will be 43 (up from 34 now) and 20% of the population will be over 60.

Family formation discouraged

The problem is not just a drop in the number of births. The fundamental factors of family formation are endangered, and unless this is reversed, the population collapse will continue. Now, the only EC demographic statistic that is rising is the number of births outside marriage, which has skyrocketed since 1978. At this point, 45% of the births in Denmark, and 25% in France and Britain, are outside marriage. Only in Italy and Belgium are fewer than 10% of births outside marriage.

The average age of women at the birth of their first child has been climbing appreciably since 1970, the year of earliest first births in the past 30 years, from age 24 to 26. This reflects many trends: later marriages, instability of marriages, and the now-endangered “yuppie” lifestyle, which encouraged women to delay childbearing into their late thirties, widening the span of a generation by at least a decade.

Currently, the lowest birth rates are in Italy, at 1.34, Spain, at 1.38, and Germany, at 1.42—a slight rise from the historical low of 1.28 in 1985, when West Germany had a significantly lower birth rate than the former East Germany. These three nations have a net reproduction rate of 0.63, 0.77, and 0.64 respectively. The only EC country which has a birth rate as high as 2.2 is Ireland, and this is a drastic fall from 1965, when the birth rate was 4.0. France, because of a massive government program to encourage births, including large subsidies for children, has a birth rate of 1.8—but that is still below zero growth.

Now the government of Italy also wants to take action against what Italian demographers have called an impending demographic catastrophe. Three demographers recently drew up a confidential paper for discussion by the 12 EC social affairs ministers at EC headquarters in Brussels, which warned that European women are no longer having enough babies to prevent absolute decline of the population, and fertility rates in Germany, Italy, and Spain are the lowest in the world. The paper says that “Europe can no longer exist without the dynamism of its youth, necessary for the innovative and creative spirit,” but also raises the specter of an “inevitable” tide of immigration from North Africa and the Mediterranean basin, if Europe does not replenish its labor force. The Italian paper says that the time has come for action, including fiscal reform favoring marriage. The British government opposes such measures, and has already clashed with Brussels on calls for Europe-wide standards for pregnancy leave and pay for working mothers.