

# WESTERN CIVILISATION IS NOT REPLACING ITSELF

## "Borrowing From Other Countries Won't Solve The Falling Birthrate Problem"

FOR many years now nearly every married couple has openly discussed the question whether to have children, how many they would like, how many they can afford, and so on. The fact, for instance, that in both Britain and Australia the birthrate has been reduced by half in 60 years shows, I think, that parents have been deliberately discussing and deciding upon the size of their families. All these millions of individual decisions in millions of British and Australian homes means that we are now faced with serious population problems. We cannot continue indefinitely to discuss the question of children solely in the privacy of our own homes. It is becoming a matter of vital concern to the whole community.

At the present time more people in Britain are becoming interested in the problem. They are realising that the effects of declining numbers and an elderly nation can only be harmful. From every point of view — cultural, social, and economic — the consequences are likely to be serious. More elderly workers, less adaptability and adventure, a smaller home market, fewer wage-earners with more old people to support, and a host of other difficulties will arise. In short, a nation with more old-age pensions than children is hardly a cheerful prospect!

Then there are two other reasons for this increased interest in babies. First manpower is in short supply—in other words, the value of ordinary men and women has risen. When we and the rest of the world all had large armies of unemployed it seemed foolish to talk about "too few babies." The earth seemed overcrowded and the ordinary man in Britain thought we might be better off with a smaller crowd. Now things are very different.

### Effect on Reconstruction Plans

The second reason why we are beginning—only very slowly—to ask questions about the birthrate is because we are having to think about principles of reconstruction. Let me give you an example. We've got an immense job of rebuilding to do after the war.

What sort of families are going to live in these houses? Are we going to build them for old people? (We have a million more old people to look after now than we had 10 years ago). Or are we going to design these houses for small families or for large families? In fact, what is going to happen to the birthrate? These are the sort of questions that are being asked to-day.

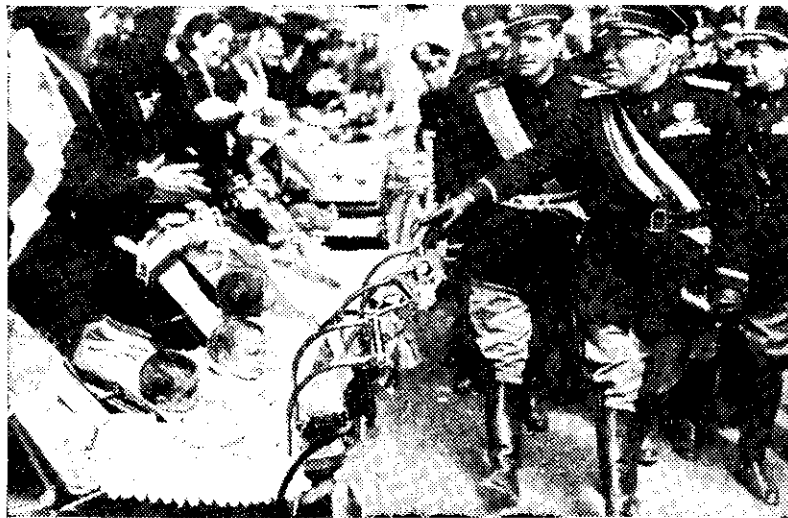
Before the war, the position in Great Britain was roughly that every four mothers were producing three daughters—or potential mothers of the future. Obviously this can only lead to a decline in numbers, and it has been estimated that within two or three years, Britain's population will begin to go down. The war has caused a further decline in the

birthrate, but not a serious one. In 1942 the rate went up slightly, but only because there were over a quarter of a million extra marriages. This was, in effect, borrowing from the future, and is no permanent solution. As the Australian Commission pointed out years ago, the problem is not solved if every woman marries and has one child. If we are to replace existing numbers, many families must contain three, four or five children. A change from a one-child or

children up to the age of six and then a gap until the 'teens. When these groups grow up you can visualise what may happen when for three or four years there are practically no school leavers to enter adult life.

### Mothers Take Longer Than Bombers

So we can't expect to solve our population problem by borrowing from other countries as badly off as we are. I think we must face this fact. And I think,



Bonus-earning babies and rewarded mothers formed this guard of honour for Mussolini in June, 1939.

two-child pattern to a four or five-child family would, in my opinion, amount to a revolution in attitude to parenthood. Because it is so much a matter of choice, children are now free contributions to the public good.

### Common to Many Nations

To-day there are not enough free contributions. Britain has two million fewer children to-day than in 1914. The U.S.A. has three million fewer than it had 10 years ago. When we understand why all these countries and Western civilisation generally are not replacing themselves, we can get down to studying remedies. I'm not going to suggest any of the answers now—that is for you to discuss—but I do think that this problem ought to be seen as a problem common to many nations.

Nor is it any use for people over here to say that we can encourage migration to Britain. Scandinavians and other Western Europeans are faced with birthrate problems just as serious as our own—perhaps more serious. I should also guess—but I don't know the facts—that over most of Europe the birthrate has slumped very badly since 1939. This will mean that some occupied countries, such as France, Belgium, Denmark and Norway will have extremely grave problems after the war. They may have, for instance, in their schools several age groups practically missing. There may be

too, that Australia and Canada and other countries must also look this situation in the face.

The age when the white people moved about the world in large numbers and populated new territories has gone. Every white country now has, in varying degrees, its own birthrate problem. I believe that many of the causes of the dwindling family are common to all countries — there are much the same human factors involved in the failure of London, Melbourne, Toronto and Chicago to reproduce themselves. What we have to realise is that population problems are settled years in advance. We can turn out a bomber in less than 12 months, but it takes about 20 years to produce a potential mother. The upper limit of Britain's voting strength in 1960 is already known, and it is much smaller than it is to-day. Nothing can alter this fact. So naturally when we begin to think of building houses to last for 50 years, we wonder who is going to occupy them.

Although we are beginning to recognise the nature of this problem, Britain is behind several other countries who have been population-conscious for some years. Four countries have in recent times introduced deliberate population policies — Germany, Italy, Japan and Sweden. The dictatorship countries have done so for purely military reasons. We can, I think, learn something from the

Most people think of a falling birthrate as something that may matter 100 years ahead. Others see in it a demand for immigration. Neither group will be greatly encouraged by a talk recently given by Richard Titmuss, a member of the Council of the British Eugenics Society, in the Pacific Service of the BBC

results of these campaigns. Let me take Germany as an example of the dictatorship approach.

### Hitler's Attempt

The Nazi policy has been the most thorough going and intensive campaign the world has ever seen. When it began in 1933, Germany had about the lowest birthrate in the world. Every conceivable weapon was brought into play—race propaganda, family allowances, marriage loans, monetary bribes, the banning of contraceptives and abortion, preferences for large families, and so on. Women were forced back into the homes, and were regarded simply and solely as breeding machines. Illegitimate births and promiscuous sex relationships were encouraged in every way. The Nazis had some success, and the birthrate rose. This was probably because of the banning of abortion — during the 1920's there were about a million abortions every year in Germany.

But Hitler never succeeded in raising the birthrate high enough to ensure a hundred per cent replacement of the German people. In 1939 the birthrate was one-third higher than that for England and Wales. To-day, for the first time for many years, the German rate is now below that for Britain. By the middle of 1942 it had fallen by 25 per cent, while the British rate had risen slightly. So ends the most intensive campaign to force parents to have more children.

Mussolini has had even less success with his campaign. In Japan the birthrate was falling for some years before the war. The lesson I draw from the Nazis' failure is that no policy, based on force or bribery, can succeed in the long run: it may force people to march and shout, but it cannot force every couple to have four or five children.

### The Democratic Approach

This problem of fewer and fewer babies can, I believe, only be solved by a democratic approach. It is such an intimate, personal question, bound up with so many human problems, ambitions, desires and frustrations. The Swedish Government was trying to tackle it democratically before the war—its programme was based on "the nation only wants wanted children." They had at least got the stage of working things out, while we, and other members of the British Commonwealth, had given the subject much less study.

One of the biggest difficulties of the democracies in such a fundamental problem as this is that the Government cannot attempt to frame a policy before public opinion is ready. If it did, it would run the risk of being accused of all sorts of things. The only hope of hammering out a policy which may succeed in averting the population danger is the existence of an informed, understanding opinion among the mass of people. Then and only then, will a democratic population policy emerge.