

Editorial

POPULATION AND ENVIRONMENT

Perhaps the most significant aspect of present day population growth and natural resource depletion is that both are on a scale quite without historical precedent. It is, of course, a great temptation in situations of this kind to project the likely future state of affairs which will come about if current trends are maintained, usually with rather gloomy results. Now it is well known that forecasting is a hazardous business, be it concerned with the weather or the level of economic activity. But this has not deterred a substantial and diverse group of physical and social scientists, supported by a large, if rather disparate, lay chorus, from asserting that explosive population growth in the third world and the levels of exploitation of non-renewable resources in the developed countries are combining to produce a set of conditions which are beyond the 'capacity of the planet' to sustain in the long run. Despite the crude nature of the assumptions on which these projections are based, it has to be conceded that there is some force to them. The pity is that rational debate has been made more difficult by the strident and lurid tone of much of the language of the 'environmentalists'. For example, one physicist calculated that if Adam and Eve had lived 10,000 years ago, and if they and their descendants had procreated at a compound rate of just 1 per cent per annum, the human race would now be a sphere of living flesh several galaxies in diameter, expanding radially at the speed of light -- if such were relativistically possible.

In the midst of this rather apocalyptic vision of an overpopulated globe choked by fumes and other kinds of pollution, it has been largely forgotten that the majority of the world's population are so stricken with immediate poverty that they are unlikely to have many interests in common on this issue with an increasingly agitated affluent minority. Why, after all, should the poor be moved by the argument that their natural increase is endangering mankind's future when each

of those advancing the argument will consume during his lifetime a quantum of resources 50 - 100 times greater than that consumed by each of those to whom the argument is addressed? As it happens, there are serious attempts in many poor countries to limit the growth of population, but it is difficult to believe that they stem from an acceptance of the sorts of propositions now being advanced by the developed world. In their anxiety to point out the moles in the eyes of the poor, the rich are quite unaware of the beams in their own.

The articles in this issue of the *Bulletin* are concerned with a number of implications for the Third World of this new preoccupation. Presenting an ecologist's view, Gordon Conway points out some fundamental differences in the nature and importance of ecological problems confronting rich and poor countries, and goes on to relate them to recent diplomatic moves (the 1972 'Stockholm' Conference) and the need to build up indigenous skills and techniques (a familiar finding in a new field). Turning to the long run, Bruce Mackay surveys one of the latest set of doomsday projections and traces the rise of concern in international and bilateral agencies with rapid population growth. While laying fashionable stress on how little time is left if population in the Third World is to be stabilized at a level which can be sustained and if resource use in rich countries is to be arrested before unacceptable depletion occurs, he also emphasises an often neglected facet of the position of many doomsday men: that their plea for a state of static 'bliss' explicitly excludes the maintenance of international inequality. Within a more immediate time scale, there are a number of possible repercussions of obsessive environmentalism in rich countries on attitudes to development and international economic relations. The more obvious of these include restrictions on the kinds of technology supplied through aid, the relocation of pollutive industry from developed countries to the Third World through private capital flows, and measures to protect industries in rich countries faced by the products of competitors in poor countries unencumbered by the costs of growing environmental legislation. These issues are taken up in different ways by Brian Johnson and Michael Lipton.

As is now usual, the *Bulletin* also includes an article on a piece of research being undertaken currently at the Institute. Paul Collins, who has spent a considerable amount of time in Tanzania, reflects here on some aspects of his work.