

by Miss Ann Thropy

"Education," whether general or specifically related to family planning, is the nostrum most often mentioned as a solution to the world population crisis, usually based on statistics from developed countries correlating a rise in education levels with decreased birth rates. The fact is, like all technological solutions to technological problems, education programs have been an ecological failure, even where they *do* decrease birth rates. The statistics fail to bear out the social context of such programs, which tend to be associated with urban, industrial, consumer-oriented economies. Post-War Japan provides a striking example. It miraculously halved a 3.45% birth rate during the '50s — the same decade that saw its transformation into an industrial giant threatening ecosystems around the globe. Similar scenarios are happening in Korea, Singapore and elsewhere. This is mainly due to contraception, abortion and birth control information, but again the distinction between general education and family planning is nominal since the latter relies on the former at some stage.

Education programs, then, may indeed cut birth rates from four to two children, but if this decrease is based on overall movement toward industrialization, those two may consume ten times as much as before and actually accelerate environmental degradation.

I'm not aware of any biocentric discussion of overpopulation which acknowledges this relationship. (Anti-Malthusians, like Boserup in her *Technology and Population*, see the causal relation and praise education as a means to their panacea of technological growth.) Family planning and education are linked to the technocratic control responsible for the ecological crisis in the first place,

and deep ecologists should research ways to dissociate them from it.

Part of the problem is our insufficient definition of the term 'overpopulation.' Demographic definitions are hopelessly anthropocentric, usually suggesting a disfunction in the ability of humans to use resources for higher living standards. We need a biocentric definition. I'll venture one now by saying any human population is overpopulated when it disrupts the cycles of nature so as to threaten to permanently reduce global diversity. By this definition the US and all industrial nations are vastly overpopulated, no matter how wealthy they are or how efficient their use of resources is. Industrialization means overpopulation.

Technological solutions to technological problems do not work. We must ask how population stability occurs naturally, not through sociological tinkering. The last time this happened was in the Mesolithic period, when humans were hunter-gatherers. Population was held in check not by low birth rates, but by high infant mortality rates (although studies of extant tribes like the Djuka and Motu suggest they also practiced techniques to limit offspring). When we hear that medical science has increased longevity from about 35 to about 70 years, this means it has reduced infant mortality. People in the Pleistocene didn't drop dead at 35 — if they lived past infancy they probably lived to 70 as people always have (three score and ten, says the Bible). But since approximately half the population died in childhood, the average was 35.

The central cause of overpopulation is not high fertility (although we should strive to reduce that too) but lower infant mortality due to technological intervention. This happened in Europe and, through colonial expansion, spread to the Third World, where Western medicine, green revolutions and higher education are ensuring a bleak future for us all.

If we really are serious about overpopulation, we have to confront this fact and try to reintroduce a situation where technology does not interfere with infant mortality (or any mortality, although deaths at other ages have remained quite constant through history — except during wars and plagues). Social justice is an interesting topic which seems to have taken over the overpopulation debate, but the only just way to control population is to let natural processes do it.

If we can save children, we will. I'd use any method, technological or otherwise, to protect my child. But remove the technology to do it, and it is no longer an issue. It may be sad that children (or anybody) have to die to keep populations stable; but it's high tragedy to create a technology that insures children will reach reproductive age and then limits birth rates, all by rationalizing Earth into an industrial society. The good effects of technology are inseparable from the bad.

Reestablishing natural mortality rates essentially means dismantling the technological network that supports medical science. Is this utopian? Not really. The technological complex is more fragile than its discourse lets on. We have seen in the area of wilderness preservation how monkeywrenching succeeds in undermining the plans of corporations. At least the idea of technology dismantlement isn't *distopian*, as is, for instance, talk about forced sterilization — another technological solution which requires the propagation of the very technological complex which is the problem. Technological interference with mortality rates is the root of the crisis and must be confronted. Nothing else will do.

Here are some suggestions, inadequate at best. I'd like to hear more. Finding practical ways to dismantle industrial technology is, to my mind, the most important task of deep ecology.

1) Preserve areas where mortality rates are still natural. This means preventing the export of technology to undeveloped nations. The US is the worst culprit here and its tool is the World Bank. Put pressure on the World Bank to stop its destructive loans to Third World countries. The industrialization of indigenous populations is a conscious policy — it can be changed.

2) Take back areas controlled by technology. We might follow the example of the nuclear-free zone movement and establish technology-free zones through plebiscite. Local communities could decide for themselves what technologies to limit.

3) Fight technological advances. Don't let the high-tech mythos delude you. Universities, research institutes and corporations should become targets of paper monkeywrenching and protests. Recent legal action and the successful Earth First! protest in California against genetic engineering shows this is possible.

4) Extend monkeywrenching to urban areas, corporate offices, research institutions. This is a controversial idea, which may not be wise, but should be discussed.

5) Spiritually reject technology. Become a pagan and ask the old gods, and ancestors to defeat technology. It's probably not a coincidence that the world started going downhill when we rejected our ancestral gods.

*No doubt, many readers will agree that this piece fairly glows in the dark! Others may consider it blasphemous. Responses may be sent to Earth First! (but we will consider printing only those which emanate from a deep ecological perspective; bleeding-heart liberals (christian or secular humanist) and Marxists need not write).*