

PART III

THE SOCIALIST RESPONSE

Proletarian horniness therefore, not capital, produces social misery.

Ernst Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* 2:542 (1967 [1959])

Working-Class Neo-Malthusianism

What remains of neo-Malthusianism? There is still to consider the sufferings of maternity for the woman, but constipation too is a great suffering and prevents some people from listening to reason, why not create a league of human regeneration by laxatives!¹

Neo-Malthusian currents have coursed through working-class movements since Francis Place's efforts to promote birth control in England in the 1820s. Sharing Malthus's view of poverty as rooted in overpopulation caused by excessive individual procreativity, neo-Malthusians broke with Malthus over the issue of contraception. Just as uncontrolled copulation brought about poverty, so too individually implemented population limitation could eliminate it. This chapter provides an historical outline of the literary and, to some extent, practical expressions of belief in the efficacy of birth control as a means of ameliorating the proletarian condition.

One crucial difference marked off some neo-Malthusians from their movement's eponymous fountainhead: whereas they viewed family limitation merely as an individualist strategy that households could successfully pursue to ward off poverty, Malthus himself had regarded overpopulation as the overriding cause of macroeconomic poverty. James Mill, Malthus's contemporary and follower, stated this position expressly: "The precise problem...is, to find the means of limiting births to that number which is necessary to keep up the population, without increasing it.... The limitation of the number of births, by raising wages, will accomplish every thing which we desire...[and] may be carried so far as...to raise the condition of the labourer to any state of comfort...." John Stuart Mill straddled both camps inasmuch as he took up Malthus's doctrine in the 1820s not as an argument against perfectibility, but "in the contrary sense, as indicating the sole means of realizing that improbability by securing full employment at high

wages to the whole labouring population through a voluntary restriction of the increase of their numbers.”²

This difference between Malthusians and neo-Malthusians received its sharpest profile at the time of the so-called birth-strike debate shortly before World War I, when some German Social Democrats urged birth control as a method of alleviating individual sources of superadded misery while emphasizing that capitalist exploitation was the primary cause of poverty, which could not be eliminated by the advent of small families. They did not attempt to quantify the relative proportions although several nonsocialist investigators, especially in England, did purport to identify the share of the poor whose poverty derived primarily from excessive family size.³ This controversy, shorn of its socialist or even party-political trappings, has reemerged in contemporary welfare debates: while some argue that individuals can just say no to poverty by just saying no to sex or at least to “unprotected” sex, others believe that poverty at large is a result of macrodemographic overpopulation.

A self-taught artisan and businessman-employer who fathered 15 children, Place was instrumental in the repeal of the anti-labor-union Combination Acts in 1825, although he himself believed that neither the law nor unions themselves were significant determinants of wage levels. Despite his Malthusian belief in the crucial importance of population for establishing equilibrium between supply and demand in the labor market, Place led the struggle against the Combination Laws because he saw them as creating an unnecessary antagonism between employees and their employers. As a utilitarian, he also converted Malthus’s theory of population to the cause of Benthamite birth control among artisans.⁴

In his *Illustrations and Proofs of the Principle of Population*, Place sought to “teach these truths” to “the commonest mechanics and labourers”—that “inevitable poverty and misery would result from marrying and having a family” while wages were depressed by the overstocking of the labor market; abstinence from marriage for a few years or the use of “precautionary means” would, however, by reducing the supply of labor below the demand, raise wages “so high as to enable them to maintain themselves respectably, and give many of them a fair chance of rising in the world.”⁵

Place, who adhered to a fundamentalist Malthusianism, which projected population backward and forward in history in inexorable lockstep with food production, propagated this program of Malthusian embourgeoisement in contraceptive handbills distributed in 1823 by 17-year-old John Stuart Mill and others.⁶ In them Place addressed the specific impoverishing effects of large families on the “genteel” and the working class:

In the present state of society, a great number of persons are compelled to make an appearance, and to live in a stile, which consumes all their incomes, leaving nothing...as a provision for their children. To such persons a great number of children, is a never failing source of discomfort and apprehension.... This state of things pervades...that respectable class of society called genteel.... To those

who constitute the great mass of the community, whose daily bread is alone procured by daily labour, a large family is almost always the cause of ruin, both of parents and children; reducing the parents to cheerless, hopeless and irremediable poverty.⁷

Place infused the wage-fund doctrine in a handbill designed especially for this latter group of workers in such a way as to lay the groundwork for working-class neo-Malthusianism into the twentieth century:

It is a great truth...that when there are too many working people in any trade or manufacture, they are worse paid than they ought to be paid, and are compelled to work more hours than they ought to work....

When wages have thus been reduced to a very small sum, working people can no longer maintain their children as all good and respectable people wish...but are compelled to...send them to different employments;—to Mills and Manufactories, at a very early age....

By limiting the number of children, the wages both of children and of grown up persons will rise; the hours of working will be no more than they ought to be....⁸

This neo-Malthusian strategy was, however, comforting to class conciliators because it purportedly operated to reestablish a profitable equilibrium by making use of workers' own biologically innate reproductive drives. Consequently, capitalists who were grievously distressed by "the probability of the labourers reducing their numbers so low, as to oblige the capitalists to give them a large share of the produce instead of a small one," did not need to be alarmed: "the universal propensity and desire to possess offspring, forms a perfectly efficient security that the numbers of the working classes would never decline beyond that point at which a fair remuneration was obtained for their labour."⁹

Place's contraceptive campaign set off a lively debate in the newly founded working-class press, prompting a spate of anti-neo-Malthusian diatribes.¹⁰ The attack was particularly pointed in *The Trades' Newspaper, and Mechanics' Weekly Journal*—Britain's first trade-union newspaper—which was established by unions that had been strengthened by the repeal of the Combination Acts and sought to prevent their reenactment. The newspaper, which Place had helped found, marked the breach between Place's middle-class utilitarianism and trades-unionism emancipating itself from a naturalistic acceptance of capitalism.¹¹

The front pages of the first issues were dominated by the alleged connection between wages and procreation. The ostensible occasion was Place's distribution among workers of notes of a lecture on the wages of labor delivered by John McCulloch, an orthodox political economist with whom Place was associated. Discussion of McCulloch's views occupied the front page of the inaugural issue. In keeping with the Malthusian variant of the wage-fund theory, McCulloch had counseled the working classes not to "combin[e] to exact what you may think fair rate of wages," but that they could keep their real wages high by

restricting their numbers “so as not to overstock the demand for labourers.” *The Trades’ Newspaper* then imagined a series of absurd examples of how workers might implement McCulloch’s imperative to thin their ranks. The most efficient, it suggested, was abstention from or delay of marriage and propagation, but in addition to believing that marriage was a duty and the “attempt to limit the consequences of marriage...ridiculous,” the newspaper asked a practical question: “How can any man possibly tell when, by adding one or two more to the mass of the population, he will help to overstock, at some future day, the market for labour?” It consequently denied that workers practically had the power to comply with McCulloch’s injunction:

Whatever influence you could possibly exercise...must be *prospective*; and that in so remote a degree, that no rational being would ever think of taking it into his consideration. [Y]ou can at best only resolve that you will not introduce into the world one, two, or more beings who may add to the number of labourers...*some twelve or fifteen years hence*. But how can you tell so long beforehand that one, two, or more hands may not be wanted? Although at one time the market of labour may be overstocked, how many are the casualties—war, pestilence, famine,—which may occur to thin the population in the course of another fifteen years. Again, each man can at best only act for himself; he cannot make sure that any considerable number of other persons will do as he does; he cannot make sure that new inventions in machinery will not, by supplying the place of men, in our arts and manufacture have the same effect as if millions and tens of millions of men were added to the number of labourers in the country; nor can he make sure that some neighboring country—Ireland for example—will not pour in its swarms to assist in baffling all the efforts of individual patriotism to keep down the numbers of our working population.¹²

The Trades’ Newspaper thus astutely and acutely combined analysis of the impediments to the realization of the rationality of collective action under a dynamic-spontaneous political-economic system of constant and unforeseeable long-run change with a special focus on the labor-market havoc wreaked by labor-saving capital accumulation and capital-friendly state-aided immigration from lower-wage areas. This prescient anticipation of socialist critiques of neo-Malthusianism made the most of the particularly pressing problems inherent in the interaction structure involving an activity as committed to private, decentralized, individualistic decision-making (or inability to control) as sex and procreation. In this direction *The Trades’ Newspaper* went beyond even Sismondi, the anti-Ricardian economist, whose underconsumptionist critique of the classical assumption of equilibrium permitted him as early as 1815 to question the ability of the urban worker to “calculat[e] the lot of the succeeding generation.... How can he judge...the general demand for labor in his country, whilst his master who employs him is incessantly mistaken on these points?”¹³

The Trades’ Newspaper quickly shifted from a questioning and ironic

posture to aggressive vituperation as it spoke out “in the name of British manhood” against “these eunuch philosophers” who deserved “universal execration...for their conspiracy against nature...”¹⁴ Linking “Messrs. Malthus, M’Culloch, Place and Co.” to the “revolting and inhuman...efforts without a name...to introduce into practice, certain abominable means,” the newspaper chided them for overlooking the taxation of working-class consumption commodities:

But what has restriction of population to do with all these evils? It may lessen the pressure on them certainly, because it would lessen both the number of sufferers and the share of suffering to each, but it could by no possibility ever remove them. All the self-denial which it is in the power of the working classes to exercise, could never prevent an aristocracy, possessed of all the powers of the state—the power of capital—the power of making what laws they please, and the power of interpreting and administering them as they please—from interposing these and a thousand other obstacles and restrictions, to prevent the poor and generally *unrepresented* man from obtaining a fair remuneration for his labour. The number of the working classes might tomorrow be reduced one half; and yet the corn tax, the beer tax, the light tax, and all the other taxes which now press British industry to the earth, remain in as much force as ever.¹⁵

This political deconstruction of Malthusianism “as a self-serving doctrine produced by the upper classes for the purpose of controlling the lower classes” faintly echoed the hyperbolic argument published two years earlier in the radical working-class paper, *The Black Dwarf*, which had been conducting its own debate on the subject: “Why, if the race of labourers were to refuse to propagate the species, Parliament is so omnipotent that it would make it highly penal for any journeyman who should neglect to have a christening every year!”¹⁶

In response to a letter arguing that, if a laborer were given “a taste for comforts,” he would reason and conduct himself like the classes above him, who restrain themselves lest they or their children “should lose their rank in society,” the editor of *The Trades’ Newspaper* replied in effect that unlike those classes, even the birth-controlling laborer was in control of too few of the variables affecting his wages to be able to rely on such a procreational strategy: “With Malthus and Co. he [the letter writer] would reduce the whole matter to a question between Mechanics and their sweethearts and wives; but...the whole matters rather resolves itself into a question between the employed and their employers—between the Mechanic and the corn-grower and monopolist—between tax-payer and the tax-inflctor.”¹⁷ Indeed, just how committed the newspaper was to the logical consequences of Ricardo’s admission two years earlier that the use of machinery may “render the population redundant” was evident in its rhetorical question to McCulloch: “how a mere diminution in the number of improvident marriages, even to one in a million, could *possibly*...prevent the competition of machinery with human labour?”¹⁸

The Trades' Newspaper also excoriated Place for aligning himself with the “supply and demand gentry,” who urged the labourers to reduce their numbers “for we have already enough of you,” and for devising a system the practical effect of which “would be precisely the same as if our capitalists were, after the example of Pharaoh, to order every fifth or tenth son that is born of a labourer to be cast into the river.” Why capitalists would have wanted to adopt Malthusianism or neo-Malthusianism, thus reducing the oversupply of labor that allegedly redounded to their profit and made it unnecessary for them to “reduce...the unduly large share which [they] have hitherto been pleased to take to [them]selves of the national product,” the newspaper failed to explain. Instead, it advocated the “Live and Let Live System,” which expressed the theological belief “that there can be no more mouths in the land, than Providence has, for some good purpose, sent there....”¹⁹

Neo-Malthusian adherents have struggled ever since with socialists over the question of whether working-class misery stems from excessive numbers or a “bad organization of society.” The surface plausibility of the Malthusian explanatory framework to the working-class experience, Henry George observed in 1879, was hardly mysterious: “To the mechanic or operative the cause of low wages and of the inability to get employment is obviously the competition caused by the pressure of numbers, and in the squalid abodes of poverty what seems clearer than that there are too many people?”²⁰

As early as 1870, the prominent American economist Francis Bowen stated that in a densely populated country, “children are a hindrance, from the difficulty of establishing them in an equal position of life with their parents.” Commentators have observed that by the 1870s English middle-class parents began limiting the size of their families in an effort to close the gap between their aspirations and levels of living caused by the increasing cost of children and the decreasing supply of servants. In particular the transformation of secondary and university education from attributes of social status into means of achieving and maintaining status and the advent of free state-provided mass education impelled middle-class parents to focus on costly education for their sons. Hence the origins of the middle-class “strike against parentage.”²¹

According to the received stylized accounts of the phases of the demographic transition to modernity, a variant of this middle-class construction of the good life eventually trickled down to the working class, which with a time lag modified its procreational behavior to reduce its fertility. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, when industrialization and child labor laws meant that children had to be maintained by their parents at least for 10 years—twice as long as in an earlier period—they ceased to be an “economic asset.... When depression followed the problem arose as to which of the least necessary things should be dispensed with.” The choice was made easy: as “an unrelieved expense, [i]n the individualistic competitive struggle, children became increasingly a handicap...and the greater the number of children the smaller the chances of each child (and of the parents) of advancing in the competitive struggle....” Therefore, the British Royal Commission on Population later concluded, “it paid to travel light.”²²

By the turn of the century, neo-Malthusianism had become a political movement in Britain, France, and other advanced capitalist countries. More than the nuances of each national movement were governed by its attitude toward the struggle between socialism and capitalism. In Germany, where some socialist-feminists propagated smaller families, the aim was not to supplant socialism, but to provide individual parents (and especially mothers) with the economic and social-psychological wherewithal to participate in the socialist movement. In contrast, British neo-Malthusians, for example, did not limit themselves to advocating birth control merely on the basis of the benefits accruing to the individual (small) family. Rather, by adoption of a policy of working-class-wide restriction of fertility based on the wage-fund theory and the notion—later known as optimum population (growth)—that a diminution in the growth of the labor supply would bring about an increase in per capita production, they expressly offered an ideological alternative to the socialists' answer to the social question.²³

Ironically, neo-Malthusians shared both the socialists' goal of eliminating poverty on the macrosocial rather than merely on the individual level and their rejection of reliance on personal natality policies. However, because British neo-Malthusians also rejected collectivist social policies, they, unlike the socialists, were compelled to found their future on the invisible hand's governance of procreativity. Indeed, just as bourgeois neo-Malthusians alleged that British socialists opposed them because smaller and economically more secure working-class families would be less receptive to revolutionary appeals, there is also evidence that the Malthusian League saw itself as contributing precisely to that antirevolutionary evolution.²⁴

In France, too, socialists saw neo-Malthusians as quacks promising illusory instantaneous and painless happiness to those unwilling to be part of a struggle that might last ten years or a century. Without adopting a unified position or, like their counterparts in Germany, even conducting a formal debate, French socialists launched even more vitriolic and less reasoned attacks on the neo-Malthusians. Some spewed contempt for a movement that merely sought to ameliorate the condition of the proletariat which it was the goal of socialism to eliminate. Segments of the French trade union movement, in contrast, adopted a much more sympathetic attitude toward neo-Malthusian goals. Reducing proletarian misery, the supply in the labor market, and the reproductive travails of women all appealed to a number of labor unions. The main journal of the unified Socialist Party published a laudatory review of Robert Hertz's socialist attack on neo-Malthusianism, a brochure that emphasized the consequences of French depopulation for the country's military rivalry with Germany.²⁵

The more militant critical neo-Malthusians allied to socialism even charged that the "proletarians, the makers of children, are the accomplices of capital" in the sense that the reserve army of the unemployed, which rendered strikes unsuccessful, "is not of capitalist origin, but rather of a sexual and proletarian origin. It is the workers who aliment it by their procreational incontinence and who thus furnish the capitalists with the means of perpetuating

their serfdom.” This position was, to be sure, associated with a eugenic approach, which castigated these counterrevolutionary incontinents for procreating “in their misery beings dedicated to downfall, resigned and brutish, alcoholic, degenerate, tainted in all ways, incapable of thought and action, ineducable.”²⁶ Anti-Malthusian socialists who did not oppose individual proletarians’ personal decisions to improve their situation by remaining childless reminded them, however, that they were no more contributing to the emancipation of their class than a worker who became a wine merchant. But even socialists such as Hertz identified sufficiently with the existing state and society to worry that declining population might enhance the relative importance of the most fertile but also most “backward” European peoples who were still “refractory to the ideas of emancipation....”²⁷

As was the case in Germany, the most influential French leftists rejected neo-Malthusianism. Because the decline in fertility had begun much earlier and assumed a much sharper demographic and political profile in France, the neo-Malthusian movement there was older and more diverse. The Left’s reaction to it was therefore also more diverse. Although the primary argument of anti-neo-Malthusian socialists in both countries was the ruling classes’ use of the population question to deflect attention from the social question, the French Left also stressed two points that were alien to German Social Democrats: first, that “nature or providence” would insure that the uncontrollable demographic process would not eventuate in overpopulation; and second, that by relieving women of their natural duties, birth control would undermine the family. This French socialist peculiarity of supporting bourgeois family and gender norms, it has been suggested, derived from the Left’s self-perceived need to demonstrate that socialist economics would not bring about social disintegration.²⁸ The German Social Democratic Party (SPD), in contrast, was preoccupied with the purely demographic-economic dimension of neo-Malthusianism because it was concerned to project itself as worthy of being entrusted with the legacy of Europe’s most powerful economy.

While a similar division between working-class pronatalists and antinatalists also manifested itself in Sweden and Norway before World War I, the struggle over the socioeconomic and political content of neo-Malthusian birth control was nowhere sharper than in the United States.²⁹ There it was exemplified in the career of Margaret Sanger, who converted from the belief that birth control was a weapon in the class war to deprive capitalists of military and industrial fodder to its aggressive “biological and racial” use to spare society from “spending...billions, keeping alive thousands who never, in all human compassion, should have been brought into this world. We are spending more in maintaining morons than in developing the inherent talents of gifted children. We are coddling the incurably defective and neglecting potential geniuses.” In the course of this transition to Malthusian eugenics Sanger concluded that “[u]ncontrolled sex has rendered the proletariat prostrate, the capitalist powerful.” Overpopulation was the ultimate cause of low wages, unemployment, peonage, sweatshops, and child labor, and all labor problems, which workers could get rid of if they would just “stop breeding.” Indeed, Sanger declared that the “most serious evil of our times is that

of encouraging the bringing into the world of large families. The most immoral practice of the day is breeding too many children.” Thus she wound up blaming the victims and especially women. Labor’s enemy in general was “the reproductive ability of the working class which gluts the channels of progress with the helpless and weak,” and therefore “the workers who produce large families have themselves to blame for the hundreds of thousands of unemployed grasping for jobs, for the strike breakers....” More particularly the culprit was “woman...unknowingly creating slums, filling asylums with insane, and institutions with other defectives.... Had she planned deliberately to achieve this tragic...human waste and misery, she could hardly have done it more effectively.... By failing to withhold the multitudes of children who have made inevitable the most flagrant of our social evils, she incurred a debt to society.”³⁰

For some socialists the ideological filtration that shapes neo-Malthusian procreative decision-making has always stood in need of deconstruction. J. C. Kincaid, a British academic Trotskyist, for example, applauds the rationality of the proletariat’s rejection of the “bourgeois” norm of producing fewer children but providing them with a certain standard of living.³¹ He considers it “a sensible response” to low and unstable earnings, exclusion from educational opportunity, and the struggle for housing

to build up a large family which will provide resources of social and psychological support to its members.... For the poor to convert themselves to middle-class values and strategies would be disastrous, given the insecurities they face. They are thoroughly sensible in relying on their own kin rather than on the uncertain benevolence of bureaucratic agencies of support and control. Besides, the enthusiasts for eugenic or Malthusian solutions to poverty take too little account of the possibility that the very poor *like* to have a lot of children, given that to be poor is to be excluded from many other kinds of social opportunities.³²

Kincaid’s reference to the proletariat’s noneconomically motivated lust for big-family life not only takes Engels’ Hungry Forties’ culture-of-poverty view of the proletariat’s reduction to primitive sensual pleasures one step further, but reproduces John Stuart Mill’s assertion that the working class, rarely wanting improvement, had as many children as were consistent with the condition of life to which they had been born.³³ Kincaid tries to evade the charge that poor adults would, by and large, not need patronizing state subsidies if they did not have large families to support in the first place by pointing to a limited association between large families and poverty: poor families with a breadwinner had on average only 3.3 children in 1966 in Britain—a figure only marginally higher than the national average. He finds it “important to stress that quite large numbers of workers earn low wages, because in public discussions it has been assumed that the real explanation for poverty among wage-earning families lies not in the lowness of wages, but in the largeness of families. [T]he implication would then be that the

fault lies not in the wage system, but in the unwillingness of certain sections of the population to limit their family size to reasonable proportions.” Though constrained to admit that “it would seem that many children cause poverty” for the one-fifth of the wage-earning poor with five or more children, Kincaid takes refuge in the venerable argument that if any causality can be identified, it runs in the opposite direction—from poverty to large families.³⁴

But as British large-scale studies from the turn of the century to the present have repeatedly shown, regardless of the causal mechanisms at work, it is the combination of low wages and large families that constitutes the basis of poverty for those below retirement age in Britain. Peter Townsend’s monumental study of poverty in the United Kingdom, for example, revealed that the probability of poverty increased steeply and monotonically with family size. In 1968-69, the share of man-and-woman-headed families in or on the margin of poverty was 21 percent among those with one child and 69 percent among those with four or more children; whereas only 5 percent of such families with one child received gross disposable income below the deprivation standard, the corresponding figure for those with four or more children was 61 per cent. These large families were the modal group, accounting for one-sixth of all poor persons.³⁵

Here the extremes touch as workerism finds a strange anti-neo-Malthusian bedfellow in Catholic moral theology. John Ryan, one of the spiritual authors of the early twentieth-century living-wage movement, conceded that in theory neo-Malthusianism would, through supply-and-demand forces, raise wages. But even apart from the “disgusting...criminal...and degrading” practices involved, Ryan argued that justice nevertheless did not obligate the laborer to limit his procreativity:

The man who marries and brings into the world children whom he cannot maintain in the minimum conditions of decency, will sometimes sin against prudence, but he violates no rights, either of his wife, his offspring, or his fellow laborers.... His wife freely consents to the union; his unborn children have no rights sufficiently potent to annul his right of fatherhood; and the right of his fellow working men to the larger advantages that they would obtain if fewer children were born to the group, is inferior to his right to become the head of a family. Indeed, it is doubtful whether even charity toward his children or his fellows obliges the laborer to forego the advantages and consolations of family life in order that the hand of social injustice may fall less heavily upon them. It would seem that charity does not bind at the cost of such great personal inconvenience.³⁶

Apart from such moral compunctions, the prisoner’s dilemma or free-rider obstacles to a neo-Malthusian strategy are said to be considerable. Theoretically, if workers accepted the correctness of Malthus’s analysis, a decision to trade off a larger number of children for a generally higher wage level would improve the condition of all working-class families. But critics find such an approach flawed

even as an individualistic strategy because no small family would benefit from higher wages unless many or all limited their size.³⁷ Modern demography voices a similar objection:

as soon as individual families expect others to change to lower fertility, their private satisfactions will be maximized by not going along with the scheme. Since their individual actions concerning childbearing will have only an infinitesimally small impact on [the labor market], rationally they will attempt both to maintain full parental satisfaction (by having [more] children) and enjoy [the higher wages] inherent in the [smaller-family] system. Identical calculations on the part of other families will result in the stability of the initial fertility behavior.³⁸

However, unlike the canonical free rider, proletarian procreators may have no incentive to defect from the collectivity; for by limiting the number of children it must support, each set of parents can achieve an increase in its family's standard of living equivalent to a real wage increase regardless of its class-mates' reproductive behavior and whether the Malthusian macroeconomic wage-fund mechanism ever functions.³⁹ In other words, since private, individualistic action prior to, independent of, and even in the absence of collective decision-making or action would motivate them to reduce family size, free riders would not be a problem—unless the general wage increase expected from a smaller supply of labor and tighter labor markets were so much larger than the increase in per capita family income to be derived from the smaller number of children to be supported that a family would have the best of both worlds by defecting. Moreover, so long as children begin to earn more than they cost at an early age, once child labor is prohibited and children become long-term financial drains, family limitation benefits any individual family regardless of what other families do.⁴⁰

But the certainty and immediacy of the effects of the personal decision to limit fertility vis-à-vis the speculative and long-term impact of the collective decision make this latter imagined scenario implausible. It is precisely the palpable and significant benefits accruing to individual sets of parents (and their already existing children) that presumably reinforced that segment of the so-called demographic transition that was manifested in the shift to smaller families.⁴¹ Thus whereas 63 percent of marriages entered into in 1860 in England and Wales produced five or more children and 16 percent ten or more, the corresponding figures for those entered into in 1925 were 12 percent and 0.7 percent. Similarly in Germany, in 47 percent of all marriages taking place between 1900 and 1904, four or more children were born compared to only one in twenty marriages entered into between 1968 and 1972; by 1990, a single child lived in 51 percent of all households whereas three or more children lived in only 13 percent of households. The U.S. data exhibit, from a slightly different perspective, the same trend. The proportion of the cohort of ever-married white women born in the mid-nineteenth century and surviving until the 1910 census that gave birth to seven or more children was about one-third; in contrast, fewer than one-twentieth of their

counterparts born between 1915 and 1924 reported seven or more births at the 1970 census.⁴²

The most plausible conclusion is therefore that when the requisite changes in economic conditions, the proliferation of cheap contraceptive techniques, and the transformation of the position and consciousness of women all coincide, working-class (and other) procreators, prompted by the new societal conditions of collective rationality, make individual decisions to produce fewer children. In the 1820s and even later, only some preconditions were in place. In particular, widespread child labor continued to give parents an incentive to defect from any neo-Malthusian birth-limitation schemes. In pre-World War I France, fertility declined more dramatically than in Germany or Britain, but differentially as the bourgeois family preceded the working-class family in lucratively shedding its share of procreational “duties.” Socialist opponents of neo-Malthusianism resented the “injustice and especially the absurdity” of the manner in which an anarchic society allocated these costs, which were wearing out proletarian parents.⁴³

It was precisely because all the conditions had been met by the time of World War I that the so-called birth-strike movement was so threatening to the ruling classes in Germany, who had nevertheless not fully grasped the reasons why fertility had spontaneously been in decline for decades. The threat was, to be sure, considerably undercut by the ease with which the employing class could import cheaper labor. Once the labor market was internationalized, a working-class population control movement would have had to respond in kind or lose even its hypothetical force.⁴⁴ The failure of the socialist parties to achieve even the far more basic solidarity of refraining from slaughtering one another’s national proletariats during World War I revealed how unrealistic an international working-class neo-Malthusian movement was.

NOTES

1. Dr. Oguse, “Socialisme et Néo-Malthusianisme,” *Revue socialiste* 46:97-124 at 123 (Aug. 1907).

2. James Mill, *An Essay on the Impolicy of a Bounty on the Exportation of Grain*, in *idem, Selected Economic Writings* 41, 55-56 (Donald Winch ed., 1966 [1804]); James Mill, *Elements of Political Economy*, in *ibid.* 203-366 at 242-44 (3rd ed. 1826) (quote); John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography*, in *Essential Works of John Stuart Mill* 68 (Max Lerner ed., 1965 [1873]) (quote).

3. See below ch. 7-8.

4. Graham Wallas, *The Life of Francis Place [1771-1854]* (1919 [1898]); I.J. Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century London: John Gast and His Times* 172-82 (1979); Angus McLaren, “Contraception and the Working Classes: The Social Ideology of the English Birth Control Movement in its Early Years,” *Comp. Studies in Society & Hist.* 18 (2):236-51 at 238 (Apr. 1976).

5. Francis Place, *Illustrations and Proofs of the Principle of Population* 164-65 (Norman Himes ed., 1930 [1822]).

6. F.P., "Machinery—Employment—Population," *The Republican* 14 (6):162-70 at 169 (Aug. 18, 1826); William Petersen, *Malthus* 124 (1979).

7. Francis Place, "To the Married of Both Sexes," reprinted in Norman Himes, *Medical History of Contraception* 214 (1936 [1823]).

8. Francis Place, "To the Married of Both Sexes of the Working People," reprinted in Himes, *Medical History of Contraception* at 216-17.

9. A. Z., "Depression of the Bulk of the People: Causes and Remedies," *Black Dwarf* 11(20): 664, 676 (Nov. 12, 1823).

10. "Practical Endeavours to Apply the System of Mr. Malthus in Checking Population," *Black Dwarf* 11 (12):404, 405 (Sept. 17, 1823): "we do not see how the exact quantity of children should be born, to keep up, what some of our political economists would call, the exact ratio between mouths, and the means of keeping them employed."

11. Sidney Webb & Beatrice Webb, *The History of Trade Unionism* 76 n.2, 85-100 (new ed. 1902 [1894]); E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* 769-78 (1963); Prothero, *Artisans and Politics* at 183-91.

12. "Wages of Labour," *The Trades' Newspaper, and Mechanics' Weekly Journal*, No. I at 1-2, July 17, 1825. For the background of the lecture and its repercussions, see N.E. Himes, "McCulloch's Relation to the Neo-Malthusian Propaganda of His Times: An Episode in the History of English Neo-Malthusianism," *J. Pol. Econ.* 37:73-86 (Feb. 1929); Prothero, *Artisans and Politics* at 205-206.

13. Gary Langer, *The Coming of Age of Political Economy, 1815-1825*, at 175 (1987); J. C. L. Simonde de Sismondi, *Political Economy* 124-25 (1966 [1815]).

14. "The Population Restricting System," *The Trades' Newspaper, and Mechanics' Weekly Journal*, No. II, July 24, 1825 at 7.

15. "Population and Wages," *The Trades' Newspaper, and Mechanics' Weekly Journal*, No. III, July 31, 1825, at 33-34.

16. Angus McLaren, *Birth Control in Nineteenth-Century England* 61 (1978); "Inquiry into the Principles of Population: No. 2," *Black Dwarf* 11 (21):695, 703 (Nov. 19, 1823).

17. T.R.L., "To the Editor," *The Trades' Newspaper, and Mechanics' Weekly Journal*, July 31, 1825 at 34; "Population and Wages" at 34.

18. David Ricardo, *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*, in *idem, The Works and Correspondence of David Ricardo* 1:388 (Piero Sraffa ed., 1952) (chapter added to 3rd ed. in 1823); "Population Restricting System," *The Trades' Newspaper, and Mechanics' Weekly Journal*, No. VI, Aug. 21, 1825, at 82.

19. "The Economy of Nature Defended Against the Population Restricting System," *The Trades' Newspaper, and Mechanics' Weekly Journal*, No. IX, Sept. 11, 1825, at 129-30.

20. André Armengaud, "Mouvement ouvrier et néo-malthusianisme au début du xx^e siècle," 1966 *Annales de Démographie Historique* 7-19 at 7 (quote); Henry George, *Progress and Poverty* 98 (n.d. [1879]) (quote).

21. Francis Bowen, *American Political Economy* 145 (1969 [1870]); J. Banks, *Prosperity and Parenthood: A Study of Family Planning Among the Victorian Middle Classes* 139-207 (1954); D. Glass & E. Grebenik, "World Population, 1800-1950," in 6 *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe: The Industrial Revolution and After: Incomes, Population and Technological Change (I)* 56, 117 (H. Habbakuk & M. Postan eds., 1965); J. Banks & Olive Banks, *Feminism and Family Planning in Victorian England* (1964); J. Banks, *Victorian Values: Secularism and the Size of Families* (1981); H.G. Wells, *Socialism and the Family* 37 (1908 [1906]) (quote).

22. John Innes, *Class Fertility Trends in England and Wales 1876-1934*, at 37-55 (1938); Ethel Elderton, *Report on the English Birthrate*, Part I: *England, North of the Humber* 233-34 (1914) (quote); [U.K.] Royal Commission on Population, *Report* 39-40, 42 (Cmd. 7695, 1949) (quote).
23. F. Micklewright, "The Rise and Decline of English Malthusianism," *Population Studies* 15 (1):32-51 (1961-62); G. Searle, "Socialism and Malthusianism in Late Victorian and Edwardian Britain," in *Malthus Past and Present* 341-56 (J. Dupâquier et al. eds., 1983); L. Devance, "Malthus and Socialist Thought in France Before 1870," in *ibid.* at 275-86; Madeleine Rebérioux, "The Attitudes of French Socialists to Malthus During the Third Republic," in *ibid.* at 287-98; [National Birth-Rate Commission], *The Declining Birth-Rate: Its Causes and Effects* 284-89 (1916) (testimony of John Hobson).
24. Richard Soloway, *Birth Control and the Population Question in England, 1877-1930*, at 70 (1982); Rosanna Ledbetter, *A History of the Malthusian League: 1877-1927*, at 94-99, 110-11 (1976).
25. Oguste, "Socialisme et néo-malthusianisme" at 97; Francis Ronsin, "La Classe ouvrière et néo-malthusianisme: l'exemple français avant 1914," *Le Mouvement social*, No. 100, at 85-117 at 95-107 (Jan.-Mar. 1979); Henri Guernut, "Review of Robert Hertz, Socialisme et dépopulation," *La Revue socialiste* 53 (317):475-76 (May 1911).
26. Gabriel Giroud, "Le Néo-malthusianisme prépare le socialisme," reprinted in Francis Ronsin, *La Grève des ventres: Propagande néo-malthusienne et baisse de la natalité française (XIX^e-XX^e siècles)* 187-88 (1980) (without source). Giroud was one of the founders of the French neo-Malthusian movement. *Ibid.* at 71 n.13.
27. Robert Hertz, "Socialisme et Dépopulation," in *Les Cahiers du socialiste*, No. 10, at 16, 9, 11 (1910).
28. Angus McLaren, "Sex and Socialism: The Opposition of the French Left to Birth Control in the Nineteenth Century," *J. Hist. Ideas* 37(3):475-92 at 477, 492 (July-Sept. 1976).
29. Allan Carlson, *The Swedish Experiment in Family Politics: The Myrdals and the Interwar Population Crisis* 7-16 (1990); Ida Blom, *Barnebegrensning—synd eller sunn förnuft* 178-81 (n.d. [ca. 1980]).
30. Margaret Sanger, "Is Race Suicide Probable?" *Collier's*, Aug. 15, 1925, at 25 (quote); Margaret Sanger, *The Pivot of Civilization* 165 (1969 [1922]) (quote); Margaret Sanger, *Woman and the New Race* 3, 146, 57, 150, 143, 4, 6 (1923 [1920]) (quote). See also David Kennedy, *Birth Control in America: The Career of Margaret Sanger* 109-13 (1970)
31. Rosalind Petchesky, *Abortion and Women's Choice: The State, Sexuality, and Reproductive Freedom* 377 (rev. ed. 1990 [1984]).
32. J.C. Kincaid, *Poverty and Equality in Britain: A Study of Social Security and Taxation* 184-85 (1973).
33. John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy* 159 (new ed. W. Ashley ed., 1926 [1848]). In contrast, Ricardo adopted a sociopsychologically more optimistic perspective: If a worker's wages rise, his amended condition "does not necessarily oblige him to marry and take upon himself the charge of a family.... But although this might be the consequence of high wages, yet so great are the delights of domestic society, that in practice it is invariably found that an increase of population follows the amended condition of the labourer...." Ricardo, *On the Principles of Political Economy* at 406-407.
34. Kincaid, *Poverty and Equality in Britain* at 183-84. Kincaid is not the first to try to have it both ways. Francis Bowen asserted both that it "is not the excess of Population which causes the misery, but the misery which causes the excess of Population," and that "a man's condition as married or single, and the size of his family, are decisive of his

worldly fortune.” Bowen, *American Political Economy* at 143.

35. Peter Townsend, *Poverty in the United Kingdom: A Survey of Household Resources and Standards of Living* 288-89, tab. 7.12 at 290 (1979). The income standard here refers to that below the state supplementary benefit scales plus housing cost or up to 40 percent higher; for a description of the standard, see *ibid.* at 267-71.

36. John Ryan, *A Living Wage* 152, 151 (rev. ed. 1920 [1906]).

37. Linda Gordon, *Woman's Body, Woman's Right: A Social History of Birth Control in America* 81 (1981 [1976]).

38. Paul Demeny, “Welfare Considerations in U.S. Population Policy,” in U.S. Commission on Population Growth and the American Future, 6 *Research Reports: Aspects of Population Growth Policy* 153-72 at 163 (1972).

39. For a contrary suggestion from an early-20th-century Canadian neo-Malthusian, see Angus McLaren & Arlene McLaren, *The Bedroom and the State: The Changing Practices and Politics of Contraception and Abortion in Canada, 1880-1980*, at 74 (1986).

40. For a distinct but related argument, see Ann Ferguson & Nancy Folbre, “The Unhappy Marriage of Patriarchy and Capitalism,” in *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism* 313-38 at 323 (Lydia Sargent ed., 1981).

41. Blaug’s assertion that by the 1830s “saving the cost of bearing children...was probably thought to be too slight an incentive for family limitation,” is unsubstantiated. Mark Blaug, *Ricardian Economics: A Historical Study* 115 n.47 (1958).

42. Royal Commission on Population, *Report*, tab. XVII at 26; *Verhandlungen des Deutschen Bundestages*, 8. Wahlperiode 1976, Anlagen-Band 256, Drucksache 8/3299: “Antwort der Bundesregierung: Grundprobleme der Bevölkerungsentwicklung in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland,” tab. 2 at 4 (Oct. 26, 1979); Marlene Lohkamp-Himmighofen, “Deutschland,” in *Zwölf Wege der Familienpolitik in der Europäischen Gemeinschaft: Eigenständige Systeme und vergleichbare Qualitäten?—Länderberichte* 81-148 at 92 (Erika Neubauer et al. eds., 1993); U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*, Part 1, ser. B 42-48 at 53 (bicentennial ed., 1975).

43. Louis Blanc, *Organisation du travail* 68-71 (5th ed. 1848 [1839]); Hertz, “Socialisme et Dépopulation” at 22 (quote).

44. L. Brentano, “The Doctrine of Malthus and the Increase of Population During the Last Decades,” *Economic J.* 20 (79):371-93 (Sept. 1910).