

# **DEMOGRAPHIC DESTINIES**

## **Interviews with Presidents of the Population Association of America**

### **Interview with Paul Demeny PAA President in 1986**



This series of interviews with Past PAA Presidents was initiated by Anders Lunde  
(PAA Historian, 1973 to 1982)

And continued by Jean van der Tak (PAA Historian, 1982 to 1994)

And then by John R. Weeks (PAA Historian, 1994 to present)

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## PAUL DEMENY

PAA President in 1986 (No. 49). Interview with Jean van der Tak in Dr. Demeny's 43rd-floor office at the Population Council, New York City, June 8, 1988.

**CAREER HIGHLIGHTS:** Paul Demeny was born in 1932 in Hungary, where he also grew up, which makes him one of PAA's three European-born presidents to date, following Louis I. Dublin (president in 1935-36), who was born in Lithuania, and Alfred J. Lotka (1938-39), born in Poland. He received his first degree in statistics from the University of Budapest in 1955. As a staff member of Hungary's Central Statistical Office, he was at a meeting in Geneva in the spring of 1957, following the Soviet crushing of Hungary's anti-Communist uprising in 1956, and opted to remain outside Hungary. He then went to Princeton as a Population Council fellow and received an M.A. in economics in 1959 and Ph.D. in economics in 1961. From 1961 to 1966, he was Associate Professor of Economics and Research Associate of the Office of Population Research at Princeton. In 1966 he went to the University of Michigan, leaving in 1969 as Professor of Economics and Associate Director of the Population Studies Center. From 1969 to 1973, he was with the University of Hawaii as Professor of Economics and first Director of the East-West Population Institute, which he founded. Since 1973 he has been at the Population Council, where he has been, variously, Vice-President, Director of the Demographic Division and its successor, the Center for Policy Studies, Distinguished Scholar, and Editor of Population and Development Review, which he launched in 1975. He has published widely on the economic aspects of demographic change and population and development policy in less developed countries and is also coauthor (with Ansley Coale) of Regional Model Life Tables and Stable Populations (1966) and Methods of Estimating Basic Demographic Measures from Incomplete Data (1967).

**VDT:** How did you become interested in demography?

**DEMENY:** I am somewhat sheepish to claim that I knew more about birth and death rates when I was age 12 than I do now. That must sound absurdly improbable, but it is true. My father was a judge in the Court of Appeals in Hungary. For some reason, he had a special fondness for statistics and in his library there was an impressive number of statistical publications. I regularly raided that library and read into all kinds of unlikely things for a youngster. I got very interested in population matters in Hungary, which were much discussed in the 1930s, the time from which most of this literature, though, of course, I was doing this in the early postwar years from 1946 on. So I had a very early interest in statistics and population matters in particular. And it was natural that I picked this up at the university, where I specialized in statistics in the [faculty of economics?] at the University of Budapest. When I graduated, it gave me an opportunity to get a job.

The job I got upon graduation in 1955 was through a very dear, old friend to whom I owe a great many things in my later career, Louis Dhirring, who was head of the vital statistics division at the Central Statistical Office. He brought me in there and I worked under him as a budding analyst of fertility and mortality statistics and also did work related to the then planned next Hungarian census.

**VDT:** This was in 1955-56. What happened to you when Hungary erupted in 1956?

**DEMENY:** Before the big eruption in October 1956, I made some name for myself in my census work. I worked out a proposal aimed to simplify classifications used to analyze occupation statistics. The idea was to have an eclectic combination of statistics relating to occupation, branch of employment, and status in the profession, this three-way classification in which each has its own

tradition, and whittle it down to a small number of composite socioeconomic categories; for instance, to study differential mortality or differential fertility--in general to simplify description while still retaining essential features of these occupational categories.

Now, the Economic Commission for Europe has an annual conference of European statisticians and in that somewhat friendlier atmosphere after Stalin's death, Hungary tried to be more in evidence and cooperative in its official representation. But it didn't have much to offer and it so happened that in September 1956, I think it was, the little memorandum I worked out with this proposal of combined classifications was picked up by the then head of the Central Statistical Office and taken to Geneva and put in with other memoranda as suggestions for this conference to study. And--surprise, surprise!--the French delegate was apparently very interested in this and proposed that the conference study this question and submit a report to the next year's meeting. So the president came back with the message that the Office had had a certain success and they wanted to send an expert group to study this question and work out a report to be submitted to the next year's meeting. There was only one problem. There was no budget to provide translators for the working group and since the proposal came from the French side and the Frenchman who had proposed this was promptly appointed to chair the committee, they decided that the work would be performed only in French. There would be no translation; the so-called experts had to speak French.

My French at that time was about like my English is now; perhaps not as fluent as I am in my ungrammatical English, but I had an easy working knowledge of French at that time. Not having used French for 30 years, my spoken French is now miserable. Well, they told me that, really, I was too young to be on this working group, but since (a) I was the one who knew this subject, having proposed it, and (b) spoke French, I would have to be there, although since I was a very junior person, I would be accompanied by a proper representative of Hungary and I would be there as a technical adviser.

A month or so later came the confrontation in Hungary. You know about those times, I'm sure, if only from secondary sources; it was a very sad time in Hungary. But, I must say, although the borders were totally open for about six weeks or two months after that and one could leave the country without great risk, it never occurred to me to leave Hungary. I felt that people should take life at home, no matter how difficult, and because of my family background we had had a terrible time after 1948 when the regime changed. But anyway, I didn't want to leave Hungary.

So I was just doing my daily work when this proposal for an expert group suddenly re-emerged in the form of a letter from Geneva to the Central Statistical Office, saying that they scheduled this meeting for April and please send your representative.

**VDT:** This was by now April 1957?

**DEMENY:** It was perhaps February 1957; the meeting was scheduled for April 1957. Besides France, who was given the chair, and Hungary, who proposed the matter, the members included Yugoslavia, Belgium, I think, and either Spain or Italy. I was put in the very awkward position that they expected me to go to Geneva; awkward because the political situation in Hungary was so bad and I didn't want to leave. The notion of going to Geneva didn't bother me. What did bother me was the prospect of coming back from Geneva under these circumstances.

Well, I was in an awkward position with the man who was the formal Hungarian delegate; I was his technical adviser. Needless to say, when the Hungarians showed up at this international meeting at that time, they were constantly asked, "What is the situation in Hungary?"--it was still constantly in the headlines. Two days after we arrived, some prominent [journalists] were, for instance, after us. In these conversations, the head of this delegation was, of course, representing the official position of the Hungarian government. And since I was always around and would be brought into these conversations, he tried to induce me to hold this kind of line and, of course, I refused. A whole series of episodes occurred in these conversations that upset this person exceedingly and it was

obvious that I would be in very big trouble if I went back and he reported my bad behavior in Geneva. To make a long story short, at the end of the meeting I applied to the Swiss authorities for political asylum and within 24 hours after they interviewed me, I got it.

A week later, I found myself a student at the Institut des Hautes Etudes Internationales in Geneva. It was my good fortune that Professor Roepke, who was a prominent professor there and had visited Hungary in the past and was in particular fond of my hometown, took a liking to me and helped me a great deal to settle in Geneva. In fact, that summer he arranged for me to go to a university course in Nimes in southern France. This was basically an American-sponsored summer institute; people like Henry Commager were lecturers there. For the first time, I had some wide exposure to English. I read English pretty fluently, but it was totally book-learned. I never studied English, never took any grammar lessons, nobody ever taught me English; it was all picked up later. I had great trouble following the lectures in English, both at the Institute and at the summer university institute in Nimes, but it was also clear to me that I understood everything I saw without looking in a dictionary and I wouldn't have great trouble picking up English if I had to swim rather than sink.

As a result, I thought it would be more to my liking if I could get training not at the Geneva Institute, which was primarily international politics and economics, but something closer to the area that really interested me, namely, demography and its relation to other things, of which there was little at the Institute or the University of Geneva. I contacted Louis Dhirring, my former boss in Budapest, and he wrote to Frank Lorimer, whom he knew through correspondence and perhaps one personal meeting, saying nice things about me.

**VDT:** You could still write out of Hungary?

**DEMENY:** Yes. Hungary was never like China or North Korea. Even at that time, for instance, I could have long-distance telephone conversations with my family. I would know that the conversations were recorded but I didn't think anything of picking up the telephone in Geneva and telephoning home.

**VDT:** Where was Frank Lorimer at this time?

**DEMENY:** At American University in Washington. What Frank did was to write Dudley Kirk at the Population Council and Dudley, knowing nothing about me, nevertheless promptly sent me a brief letter along with a blank application form for a Population Council fellowship. I filled this out with the help of a Porky Campbell, who was with one of the Smith College contingents regularly at the Hotel de Russie at that time and whom I lost trace of a long time ago. I wrote it out in French and she supervised the translation into English. And, probably in early September, I sent this application to the Population Council. It was a little late in the game and I didn't think much might come of it. But all of a sudden, lo and behold, I got a special delivery letter cable, locally posted, saying that Dudley Kirk is in the Hotel Beau Rivage and would like to see me that day to interview me. Beau Rivage is a lovely hotel right on the lake [in Lausanne, just to the east of Geneva].

**VDT:** I know, it still is; costs a lot of money.

**DEMENY:** It has a certain Austro-Hungarian memory attached to it, because Queen Elizabeth, Franz Josef's wife, was murdered in front of the hotel and was brought into the hotel, where she died. There's still a little memorial room commemorating this event.

I showed up at this beautiful Beau Rivage and had lunch on the terrace with Dudley Kirk, a marvelous gentleman, as I felt right away. It was just my good fortune that he took a very strong interest in me, a certain liking it must have been, because he virtually on the spot told me that he would

get me a Population Council fellowship and suggested that I go the University of Chicago.

It was very impertinent and ungrateful on my part, but I confessed that I had virtually no knowledge of the American university system and very little about America. I knew pretty much the demographic and population scene in Western Europe, particularly on the continent, but had little notion about America, with the single exception, of course of Princeton. I knew about Princeton, because I knew works by Frank Notestein and Population Index, which at that time was the only American periodical in demography. I also knew that Princeton is located close to the Atlantic Ocean, whereas Chicago is very far from . . .

**VDT:** I'm sure you thought of Chicago as a wasteland.

**DEMENY:** Well, I don't want to bore you with such detail.

**VDT:** Wonderful story!

**DEMENY:** Chicago at that time in Hungary was very much Al Capone. There was a district in Budapest with, I'm sure, the highest crime rate in the city, for which the popular name was "Chicago." I'm not suggesting that these were important considerations, but the positive one was that I knew Princeton was a marvelous place and had great professors. And I told Dudley, like somebody who had made a valid fore-judgement, that it would be great to go to America, but could I go to Princeton.

Of course, Dudley told me that he had been in Princeton for a number of years; I didn't know that originally. He had worked on the League of Nations European population studies during the war; he wrote a great book [Europe's Population in the Interwar Years, 1946]. Dudley was skeptical and said I would have much trouble there. I must say that much of this conversation was in French and my French was greatly superior to Dudley's. But he consented, with the proviso that he would, of course, have to find out if Princeton was willing to take me. Essentially, we parted with the notion that the Council would bring me to the United States and probably to Princeton, subject to their accepting me. Their acceptance was not for any formal course or degree work; it was to do one year's work on a Population Council fellowship, as a sort of visiting fellow at Princeton.

Now a word about my arrival in America, which was on October 3rd, 1957, and indeed I was told that I could go to Princeton. I arrived at Idlewild Airport, which was just being built and in a shambles at that time. Someone from the Population Council was waiting for me, put me in a taxi. We went to Pennsylvania Station, the old station, demolished a long time ago, and I was put on a train to Princeton. I was told that I would have to take the shuttle there and when I arrived at the end of the shuttle, there was Warren Robinson, who was a graduate student there, who took me over to OPR [Office of Population Research] to see Frank Notestein.

Notestein wasn't in, but while I was waiting a few minutes for him to arrive, another student came. Unlike Robinson who was a graduate student, this was obviously an undergraduate, with tennis racquet and shorts, and he greeted me. Well, it turned out that the undergraduate was Ansley Coale; he looked like a sophomore.

**VDT:** He'd been an undergraduate 20 years before that!

**DEMENY:** Right, but he still looked like a sophomore. That's how my career at Princeton started. That very evening I was ensconced in the annex of the graduate college and had to eat my dinner in a black bachelor's gown in the chapel of the graduate college, a very peculiar place at that time. Women were still not permitted to enter that holy of holies, except that we were served by young women dressed in white starched uniforms. Life at Princeton was very special.

**VDT:** And this was only a few months after you left Hungary; amazing how quickly things happened.

**DEMENY:** Indeed, it was like a dream, and life on the Princeton campus at the graduate college was just marvelous, although very difficult for me, because my English was in very poor shape. At the same time, I was eager to take formal graduate courses and I was permitted to attend the courses, as an auditing student, of such luminaries as Professor Baumol, on economic theory, and Professor Jacob Viner, on international trade. I was also permitted to take examinations and by the end of the second semester, I had grades from five or six graduate courses. Well, I wasn't a straight A at this time; I was an A in the most important course there. They turned me into a regular student by the end of the year and I got a second-year extension of my Population Council fellowship and stayed at Princeton and got an M.A. in 1959. Then I got a Milbank Memorial fellowship and got my Ph.D. in 1961.

Now, I was under the tutelage of--my boss was--Frank Notestein during the first year and a half. Then Frank left to be president of the Population Council and my Ph.D. was done under Ansley. Of course, I took courses from Ansley too, so Ansley became the professor who was my mentor there, although Frank always maintained a very kind and paternal interest in my progress and later career. I was just very fortunate to have great opportunities.

**VDT:** You had great opportunities but obviously you seized them too. You arrived in October 1957 and had everything finished for your Ph.D. by 1961; obviously you were strong enough to write a dissertation, for Princeton, in English. What was your topic? Were you beginning to work with Ansley Coale?

**DEMENY:** No, it was in economics; I think it was investment allocation of population growth. The work on life tables with Ansley was partly later. My main task there was computer programing. At that time, very few people knew computer programing and I taught myself a couple of computer languages. I started in computer programing in 1959. But I wasted much time in getting to know the country; I wasn't totally ensconced in the library. I had a very happy and different life there.

**VDT:** The Population Council and Milbank Memorial Fund fellowships gave you enough to live on, in addition to tuition?

**DEMENY:** Well, it didn't make you rich, but it was a very generous fellowship, particularly since it was combined in the first two years with this housing in the graduate college, and that was just great. All you needed was a bicycle to bicycle from your graduate college residence to OPR at the other end of the campus. I didn't move much out of Princeton during those first few years. Yes, it was perfectly sufficient for a bachelor.

**VDT:** Then when you finished the Ph.D. in 1961, you stayed on.

**DEMENY:** I stayed on as an assistant professor of economics in the department. Besides population, I was teaching complex economic systems and economic theory, which was what assistant professors did, teaching three subjects; small-group teaching was part of a large course.

**VDT:** And you were doing research. In those years, you and Ansley did your regional model life tables.

**DEMENY:** Yes, I dealt with various subjects.

**VDT:** The one I particularly like was "Early Fertility Decline in Austria-Hungary" [Daedalus, 1968].

That must have been a forerunner of the European Fertility Project.

**DEMENY:** Yes, it was an early result from that. I dropped out as an active member of the project. Unfortunately, I never finished up my book on Hungary, which I was supposed to write; an unfinished project. I don't know how to describe myself, but I'm a great one at writing a paper and then feeling that it shouldn't be in the public domain and filing it away and just letting it gather dust.

**VDT:** Then you were also involved in The Demography of Tropical Africa [1968] at Princeton. Was that sort of the beginning of your interest in the demography of developing countries? Where did that come in?

**DEMENY:** No, it wasn't; it was strictly demography. My main interest was economic aspects of demographic change, development economics. I had to do rigorous coursework in formal economics for my Ph.D. in economics and some of those courses were extremely stimulating and memorable. For instance, I took Jacob Viner's international trade course twice, I liked it so much. I took his history of economic thought course; again, a marvelous intellectual experience. I was interested in development economics.

You ask where it comes from. I always thought of Hungary as a developing country, in many ways, and even my experiences as a child and youth I felt were relevant to many things that were happening in the Third World. As a matter of fact, Princeton saw Hungary that way. One of the important works of this League of Nations series was a study by Wilbert Moore on The Economic Demography of Eastern and Southern Europe [1945], including Hungary. I did some research assistance work for Wilbert Moore, a very eminent person who at that time was still associated with Princeton's sociology department and with OPR.

So the development aspects of population change were very much in the center of my interests at Princeton, although it is true that a good deal of the work at the early stage of my career, perhaps primarily under Ansley's tutelage, was analytic demographic techniques, particularly how to make silk out of sow's ears, namely, how to do demographic estimates from limited bad data. One manual from the United Nations that I coauthored with Ansley was on this subject [Methods of Estimating Basic Demographic Measures from Incomplete Data, 1967].

But, eventually, I kind of grew tired of that work, which was finding out whether a country had a birth rate of 46 or 44 or 44.2. I thought it was fascinating but perhaps not something I would want to spend a lifetime on; I hope that doesn't sound bad. My interest was more in the direction of development aspects of population change and also population and development policy. Also, I always had a historical interest. I didn't finish my work on the Austro-Hungarian demographic change but I always spend a good deal of time reading ancient [demography].

**VDT:** That showed in your PAA presidential address, "Population and the Invisible Hand" [published in Demography, November 1986]. I was going to ask you about your good historic sense, but now you bring it up, with your Austro-Hungarian article as an example.

**DEMENY:** One thing I didn't want was to become tagged as an expert on Eastern Europe. I thought that I'll just be Hungarian; it's not something that should stamp me forever in professional activities. So I never had ambitions to do much academic work in area studies that related to the area I was most familiar with, namely, Hungary.

My interest in other places of the Third World was perhaps manifested in a paper I did for the World Bank, a background paper presented at the World Population Conference in Belgrade in 1965, called "Demographic Aspects of Savings and Investment." I think that paper, more than anything else, had to do with Michigan approaching me and Ron Freedman routing me to Ann Arbor, which

happened in 1966.

I went to the University of Michigan as an associate professor of economics and then research associate of the Population Studies Center, of which I became associate director a year later, in 1967. Ron Freedman was director and the founder of that institute, a very stimulating, active, and prominent place. I didn't stay long in Michigan, although I did achieve a full professorship in economics in 1969.

**VDT:** Very young!

**DEMENY:** Yes, but very soon afterward I left Michigan. In fact, in between I was away for a semester teaching at Berkeley as a visiting professor in that demography department, chaired by Judith Blake at that time, a very interesting place. Nathan Keyfitz was there and I met a number of young people who were taking courses I gave and I was fortunate enough to persuade some of them to come to Hawaii, where I moved in late 1969.

That was kind of an adventurous move and I must say that many of my friends, not only at Michigan but elsewhere, took a rather skeptical view of how much sense such a move made. Hawaii wasn't on the map as one of the leading lights of academic study in the United States and resigning a full professorship in economics and associate directorship in the population center at Ann Arbor seemed to most intelligent people a very foolish thing to do. Well, I was 37 years old then and I thought that having migrated from Hungary to Geneva to Princeton to Ann Arbor, I might just as well go as far West as I could without getting into Japan or China.

**VDT:** Hawaii approached you, did they?

**DEMENY:** Yes. What happened had to do with the East-West Center, which at that time was formally associated with the University of Hawaii but was nevertheless a governmental institution, established on the Hawaii campus by Lyndon Johnson as an incorporation between the federal government and the state of Hawaii. They got a large grant, for no good reason because they had nothing there whatsoever, to move into the population field and they looked around and approached me with an offer to be in charge of building up a program of population studies.

So I went to Honolulu, joining the University of Hawaii as a professor of economics, but mostly because of the prospect of setting up something at the East-West Center. That was a difficult battle, but I won it very quickly; namely, I persuaded the chancellor to make me the director of a formal institute called the East-West Population Institute, which, unlike the then programs of the East-West Center which were entirely service programs--arranging visits between East and West and arranging fellowships for people who then studied at the University of Hawaii--became a program to do research and analysis and was formed as an institute within the Center. I had a single secretary and a retired ambassador, who was the person who obtained the grant for the institute from the State Department, using his political connections. So, I went there and stayed for four years.

**VDT:** Was the ambassador on the staff?

**DEMENY:** No, he quickly retired. The institute was my brainchild. As a matter of fact, subsequently the Center used it as the model for four more such institutes in other spheres.

**VDT:** That must have been unusual; you had no contacts with people in the Pacific Rim countries.

**DEMENY:** That's true and, of course, I had to compensate for that lacuna in my background by constant travel. I did very little teaching during those years.



**VDT:** Had you been involved with the Taiwan program when you were at Michigan?

**DEMENY:** No.

**VDT:** You were constantly traveling, setting up contacts?

**DEMENY:** Our son, our second child, was born there and my wife has exact records of how much I traveled. On the average, I spent half of each of those four years away from Hawaii in various countries in Asia, from Japan to Pakistan. It was very interesting and stimulating but I think a little hard on my dear wife--and hard on me too. But the institute thrived and when I left, there were 18 PhDs on the staff. And I am glad to say that ever since the institute has been well established, a center of research on the map; very satisfactory.

**VDT:** The students that are there, are they at the institute or the university?

**DEMENY:** The students who studied had to study at the university. As I said, I was on the university faculty; I taught courses. But my main aim was to have a research center. Most of these 18 PhDs had a joint appointment between the university and the Population Institute but the institute had to get half-time, six months a year, of the researcher's time. So it was essentially a research program focused on the Pacific area, Asia all the way to Pakistan. South Asia was included, although most of the work was Southeast and East Asia. Very little on Mainland China, which at that time was kind of an impossible place to reach.

It reflected my interest in trying to institutionalize population research in ways that go beyond a research program subordinated to a teaching program or to the overlordship of a particular department. The group I got there is really eminent; many of them still there.

**VDT:** Was Jay Palmore there at that time?

**DEMENY:** Oh, yes. I lured Jay away from Michigan barely after I got there from Michigan. And I got people whom I taught at Berkeley, such as Geoffrey McNicoll, whom I subsequently lured to the Population Council. Bob Retherford and Bob Gardner, also from Berkeley, Jim Fawcett from the Population Council, Lee-Jay Cho from Chicago and Michigan. And a number of very fine people who were in the departments of sociology, geography, and economics, who then got joint appointments at the institute. Griff Feeney from Berkeley, Fred Arnold from Michigan, a former student of mine there. And all these people stayed and thrived and became very well-known figures in the profession.

Why did I leave? Well, as I said, when I went to Hawaii it was an adventure, to get more in my life. I had taken big risks before and I thought here is another such opportunity. But I didn't really picture myself staying forever in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, much as I enjoyed it. I never got to the beach; I had to work day and night or travel.

One day came an approach from the Population Council. Barney Berelson, the president, gave me an offer that was extremely tempting and eventually I found it irresistible, namely, to come to Population Council as a vice-president and director of the demographic division, with the mandate of building up a much broader-based social science program in the demographic division.

**VDT:** Dudley Kirk had left long before this?

**DEMENY:** Four or five years before [1967].

**VDT:** You were to build up the demographic division?

**DEMENY:** To be in charge. Perhaps buildup is not the right word, but to shift its direction in a way that I tried to do, was doing, at Michigan, of which Barney was well aware, namely, to have a more interdisciplinary group, focusing not so much on demography as such, but what demography means in economics, sociology, ecological studies, and so on. That is, less demography than social science.

I decided to do this when I was in Tokyo, of all places, where there was a Second Asian Population Conference where I was in the one and only formal diplomatic capacity in my life. I was deputy head of the U.S. delegation of which Philander Claxton was head. That was in November 1972. By mid-December, I said yes to the Council, having come to New York and discussed the arrangements. I came back to the East coast in 1973.

Well, ever since I have been at the Council and it was a hectic event for history. For the first two years as director of the demographic division, my main ambition was to expand the international outreach of the division, bringing in people who then got appointments as members of the demographic division serving overseas, including people like Fred Shorter, Ron Lesthaeghe, Hillary Page, Dennis Detray, Allan Hill, Frank Mott, Doug Ewbank, Shea Rutstein. These people were scattered from Peru to Nigeria to Kenya to Tanzania to Pakistan.

**VDT:** And you set up all the arrangements for them to go there?

**DEMENY:** Yes. Well, of course, there was a well-established tradition, but the aim was to broaden the interests beyond just demographic measurement. People like Dennis Detray, now with the World Bank, were taken as development analysts. They were not demographers, but of broader social science interests.

But this came to a fairly early end, unfortunately, because of the resignation of Barney Berelson as president, which was followed by a longish period of uncertainty at the Council, eventually resolved by George Zeidenstein coming in as president in 1976. As a result of the new president's reorganization of the Council, the demographic division was succeeded by a Center for Policy Studies. I proposed both the name and the substance of the group. What I didn't propose was that the Center be limited to New York staff. The overseas staff of the Council was assigned to the unified management of the international program, of which I have no management responsibility. Thereby the Center was put in a somewhat isolated position on the 40th floor of 245 Park Avenue, first, and then on the 43rd floor when we moved to Dag Hammarskjold Plaza. But it was a very fine interdisciplinary group with many eminent people on the staff, most of them brought in by myself. I would mention primarily such fine people as Geoff McNicoll, who followed me when I moved from Hawaii, John Bongaarts, Michael Todaro, and, later, people like Odile Frank, Samuel Lieberman, Susan Greenhalgh--a distinguished group, indeed.

But after this isolation of mine, or, rather, removal of responsibility for overseas, there was a bit of a limited mandate. I tried very hard to change the situation, by trying to persuade George Zeidenstein to give back to the social science group direct responsibility for overseas staffing. The overseas staffing went more and more into technical assistance and foreign assistance, AID-related work assignments. Social science work overseas, I believe, suffered greatly.

What I did in compensation, however, was something that I started already in the second year that I came to the Council, that is, before Zeidenstein came in, based on my old feeling that the field lacked a periodical that would bring into focus these broader social science and development-related issues of population change. In 1975 I launched Population and Development Review.

**VDT:** That was your invention? I was going to ask about that.

**DEMENY:** Not only my invention, but it was a difficult birth, because all my good friends took a

very skeptical view of this--not just friends, but senior advisers and mentors. People felt that the last thing the field needed was another periodical. Frank Notestein told me that anything written in this field would always get printed somewhere; we didn't need a periodical. Ansley said the same thing, and Ron Freedman and Parker Mauldin. But I had a pretty clear blank authorization from Barney that something tht I really wanted to do, he would back me up. And while Barney himself was very skeptical about the journal, when I said I wanted a journal, he said, "Well, fine, go ahead." And so in 1975 this journal was born.

**VDT:** It was well timed; it came after the Bucharest population conference, where the slogan was, "Development is the best contraceptive."

**DEMENY:** I think the journal made a substantial contribution to the field.

**VDT:** Undoubtedly. It's the most readable thing in the field.

**DEMENY:** And it's not easy to sustain because this is not the normal mode in which population students write or work.

**VDT:** You try first to get readable articles?

**DEMENY:** Party readable and competent too; there's a lot of editorial push and pull when they start off. But mostly to open windows to neighboring areas more than existing journals, certainly Demography, even Population Studies or Population; namely, to see the field as broader social science, rather than a technical organ of a discipline that became, in my opinion, more and more narrowly focused and more and more demographers talking to each other. The field wanted to elevate itself to a respectable department-level discipline and that meant more and more specialization and a nose-to-the-grindstone attitude to focus on demographic analysis and sort of shun contacts with neighboring disciplines--economics and sociology, the nearest neighbors, not to speak of history and philosophy--to shun, if you will, policy studies, development economics. I feel there is a tendency in the profession that paralleled the positive aspects of specialization and scientific rigor, but at the expense of an excessively narrow focus and too much inward-looking and demographers talking to demographers. Both the Center for Policy Studies concept and, in particular, the journal tried to counteract this in ways that I hope were at least partly successful.

**VDT:** Oh, absolutely, I think you have. Although I'm inclined to think that some of these things have been tried in the past, certainly with the economists.

**DEMENY:** Yes, which is already a big breakthrough. But we tried hard to bring in anthropology, for instance, village studies, and the more fashionable aspects of modern demography, namely, survey research.

**VDT:** You haven't had too much on the World Fertility Survey; you've had lots of studies in family planning, of course.

**DEMENY:** Yes, not by accident, certainly by design.

**VDT:** Did you inaugurate the historical section in PDR? I realize now that you must have.

**DEMENY:** Oh yes, the archives . . .

**VDT:** The readings of the great predecessors.

**DEMENY:** It's 95 percent of them. I write those little introductions to them. So, I got a good deal of enjoyment from the journal and was very gratified by the very good reception it got from the profession.

**VDT:** Absolutely. It must be tremendous work, though; each issue is so thick and you've got authors all over the world.

**DEMENY:** It's a lot of work. It's like putting out four books a year and a huge amount of work goes into it. I was fortunate to have very eminent colleagues--from the very beginning, Ethel Churchill as managing editor. In the first few years, the two of us were basically the journal. Then after a few years, things got formalized with an editorial committee, with Geoff McNicoll in particular, Michael Todaro, Mead Cain, and, later on, Susan Greenhalgh and Odile Frank. Odile Frank is now gone. The Council was a very hospitable home for the journal.

**VDT:** You talk about it in the past tense; it's not past tense, is it?

**DEMENY:** Well, I hope it remains. My status at the Council will change as of next January 1st [1989]. There will be no Center for Policy Studies; it will be replaced by a research division. And I retire from management responsibilities at the Council and will be so-called Distinguished Scholar here. I anticipate full freedom to do my own thing--write and, most of all, devote more time to editing the journal.

**VDT:** You might get it out a little faster; it's getting a little behind.

**DEMENY:** I must say, particularly under the impact of the internal turmoil in the Council for now quite some time, the history of the journal--it's badly behind and my first ambition is to bring it back to the normal schedule.

**VDT:** Well, it's eagerly anticipated. I grab my copy, read it immediately, and phone my former Population Reference Bureau colleagues and say, "Have you seen this in PDR?" and they say, "Has it come in?"

**DEMENY:** It's very kind of you, Jean, to say that. I must say I'm loathe to compromise on anything for time reasons. In the long stretch of history, I feel that if somebody three or four years from now--which is a short time--picks up the journal, he will not say, "My God, this March issue came out really in May; how come?" But if he sees it's poorly edited . . .

**VDT:** We don't all have to emulate American Demographics, which comes out a few days before the month it's dated.

**DEMENY:** Well, look at me a year hence and my hope is that I can tell you that we are totally on time and maybe we appear the month before.

**VDT:** Here's a big question, you've answered it some along the way. Who have been some of the leading influences in your career? Now, obviously Dudley Kirk in a sense, Louis Dhirring already in Hungary, and Ansley Coale.

**DEMENY:** You have named a few of them. In Hungary, Louis Dhirring; now he has died. He came from a very distinguished family. His father was very well known in the International Statistical Institute, had an illustrious post there, and was a prominent scientist in statistics and economics in Hungary.

**VDT:** You kept in touch with him until his death?

**DEMENY:** Yes. I became an American citizen in 1966. By that time, there was a general amnesty in Hungary, so it was very easy to travel back, although I must say that when I first went back to Hungary, I was a little nervous. In 1966 I was in Vienna with Ansley Coale and Ansley had an invitation to Budapest and he said, "Come on, Paul, let's go to Budapest." And I said, "No, no." And he said, "Oh, come on now." And we rented a car in Vienna and drove into Budapest. That was my first visit since I left in 1957.

**VDT:** Did you have a visa?

**DEMENY:** Yes, you had to have a visa. Now you can even fly in without a visa and I have been back in Hungary about 60 times.

**VDT:** Three or four times a year?

**DEMENY:** That's right. I was there two weeks ago to see my mother, who was 80 years old, and in February, July, and November last year [1987].

**VDT:** You're a contemporary of Andras Klinger; were you in class with him?

**DEMENY:** Yes, I know Andras very well. In fact, he worked at the Central Statistical Office with me and he's a good friend.

**VDT:** One of the first tasks I had in one of my jobs was to tour him and Szabady around Washington. I have a photo I took of them in front of the Capitol.

**DEMENY:** Andras had the same boss as I at that time, Dhirring. I'm talking about back in the 1950s. Szabady was there but he was a kind of super boss, an elevated kind of bureaucrat.

[On my influences], I should single out Dudley Kirk; most of all Frank Notestein; Ansley Coale very, very warmly; and Frank Lorimer.

**VDT:** Tell me about Frank Lorimer.

**DEMENY:** Frank was just a unique and terrific person. He helped me at the very beginning, as you know. Then when he came to Princeton, he looked me up and I looked him up and we were in touch. Then Frank went into the Africa studies phase of his and came back to Princeton to join the Africa project. He was part of that book we did [The Demography of Tropical Africa, 1968], by William Brass, Coale, Demeny, Don Heisel, Lorimer, Anatole Romaniuk, and Etienne van de Walle. So there was a period of perhaps one and a half years when we were in daily contact.

**VDT:** I thought he stayed in Washington, but he physically came to Princeton?

**DEMENY:** Yes, he came. He rented a house there and he was at the office. He was just a very

remarkable fellow--in many ways, a cantankerous and difficult person, but extremely interesting company, with lots of ideas, sometimes strange ideas.

**VDT:** He lived on a commune at one point.

**DEMENY:** Yes. He hailed from a Protestant minister's family; he himself was an ordained minister at one point. Frank also liked my wife Lynn very much. Then he and his wife had a child, who was about the same age as my daughter.

**VDT:** With the nurse, whom he met in a bar in Nairobi.

**DEMENY:** Yes, Petra, a New Zealander. To be honest, I had more disagreements than agreements with Frank, but I had enormous respect for him. As I said, he was a very intellectually stimulating person to talk with, even though the stimulation was partly by eliciting your disagreement with some of his ideas and work and views.

Then the friendship and influence of Ron Freedman were very much appreciated. Also there were some of the younger scholars at Princeton: Charlie Westoff, Bob Potter, a very dear fellow, perhaps you know of.

**VDT:** Yes, of course, a mathematical genius.

**DEMENY:** And Wilbert Moore, as I mentioned. He was still there, but then his wife died and he left. And Barney Berelson was someone I looked up to.

**VDT:** Tell me about him. He was not a demographer, he came from another field.

**DEMENY:** Communications. He was a Chicago man.

**VDT:** How did he get into this field?

**DEMENY:** I think Barney was primarily Frank Notestein's discovery for population. Frank had dealings with Barney at the Ford Foundation. Frank was a Ford Foundation executive and he spotted Barney for his interests and ideas and lively mind. He lured him over to the Population Council as a vice-president to do communications. And the Council tried to dabble in odd things, contracting with Walt Disney to do a population information film; that was back in the early 1960s. I think Frank Notestein and Barney were much on the same wave length. Frank liked his lively mind and colorful English and when Frank decided to step down from the presidency, Barney was the logical successor to him. Barney's collected papers in population have just appeared. I call your attention to it.

**VDT:** Berelson on Population, edited by John Ross and Parker Mauldin, published by Springer. That's a nice picture of him too.

**DEMENY:** I should add to that list, in a different category--much more a coworker and collaborator--I tremendously enjoyed interaction with Geoff McNicoll, a brilliant fellow, whom I lured to the Council and who was at the Council until two months ago when he left, to my great chagrin, to join ANU's demography department. Geoff is an Australian, so he was going home in a sense, but I hope that one of these days we will be able to attract him back to the Council [Indeed, that did happen--he returned as a Senior Associate and co-editor of PDR].

**VDT:** Australians, or people who are there, never seem to stay put; I think they are the most peripatetic demography department. Jack Caldwell doesn't often seem to be there; Lincoln Day is as often in Washington as anywhere else.

**DEMENY:** Another person whom I had much contact with and, in fact, was successful in persuading him to accept an appointment at the Population Council was Davis Glass.

**VDT:** Was David Glass ever at the Council?

**DEMENY:** No. When he was about to retire from the London School of Economics, I offered to meet him in London and then he was here and I persuaded him to come to the Council as senior scholar to do what he wanted, and he agreed to this. He was to come for eight months and be free for four months to do other things, consultant to go to India and back to London. He died before he could take up his position.

Another person I worked closely with and who was associated with the Center for Policy Studies here for a number of years, an outstanding scholar, was Harvey Leibenstein of Harvard, a Princeton Ph.D., a very dear fellow.

**VDT:** That's a long list of those who have been leading influences in your career. What explains your elegant writing style? You claim you had only book-learned English 30 years ago, but you have superb English and your writing style is really admirable. Is that a classical education in Hungary?

**DEMENY:** You are very kind and I don't take that at face value.

**VDT:** I mean it; I'm an editor and I don't say that often.

**DEMENY:** My spoken English hasn't improved in the last 20 years or so, my accent.

**VDT:** You finish your sentences, which is more than most English-speaking people do.

**DEMENY:** I write very slowly, I must say; I don't write easily.

**VDT:** I see a WordPerfect book, do you have a word processor?

**DEMENY:** That's a new thing. Last October I bought a word processor for our son for his homework and I very quickly discovered that that's indeed a very nice device and I have done a lot of work at home and I carry floppy disks back and forth.

**VDT:** Had you previously typed or done everything longhand?

**DEMENY:** I never could do typing. I always worked longhand or dictation. I never dictated serious writing, just letters. But it's easy with a word processor, because whatever you don't like you can put into instant oblivion, demolishing it, whereas in a typewriter, it stares back at you. I like it.

**VDT:** You'll be interested to know that Ansley Coale is doing the same. He'd been doing a lot with Lotus, doing tables, but he hadn't actually been doing text with a word processor, but he said he was going to learn to do that this summer. You and Ansley actually look a bit alike--curly hair and square heads.

**DEMENY:** He's a marvelous fellow, admirable, ideal teacher and professor.

**VDT:** Did you study with Charles Westoff or was he just a colleague?

**DEMENY:** I never studied with him. I once took a course he taught, but it was never a close interest of mine; it was survey research.

**VDT:** Where did you meet your wife?

**DEMENY:** At a cocktail party three blocks from here.

**VDT:** Wow, you mean real genuine relationships come out of New York cocktail parties!

**DEMENY:** A few months later, I sent her a cable from Europe proposing marriage; I was traveling. She came over to Europe and we got married in Geneva.

**VDT:** Good heavens, just like that. Is she American?

**DEMENY:** Yes, from Massachusetts.

**VDT:** That's very romantic. Another big question and you've answered it also in a sense, certainly through your writings: What do you see as leading issues in demography over the years you've been involved? Obviously, you have been most involved in the issue of population trends in less developed countries and with their impact on economic development and so on. A lot of your writings have focused on the rapid population growth in developing countries.

**DEMENY:** As I noted, I had a very early liking for this field and I have a great respect for the scholarly production that is going into it. But I always felt that as a field of discipline, it's not among the glamorous spheres of study for its own sake. As in this little paper that I sent you [Social Science and Population Policy, Working Paper No. 138, Center for Policy Studies, The Population Council, May 1988], based on a lecture I gave at the Carolina Population Center earlier this year and a paper I gave at the New Orleans PAA meeting [1988, in the session, "Two Centuries after Malthus: The History of Demography"], I note that there are fields like Assyrian architecture or musicology that I can see being studied for their own sake. But for demographic study, I think the justification for it has to be that it leads to some improvement in the lot of mankind, that it's basically a science that should lead to useful applications in particular matters of public policy; that is, demography cultivated for its own sake doesn't have tremendous appeal. God knows, the big population issue of the second part of the 20th century is this inordinately rapid expansion of the human population that is probably much faster than would be consistent with the best interests of mankind and its future. So I have always been interested in trying to see that what population studies does is something that can be effectively used, influential in shaping public development policy.

**VDT:** In this paper, you claim that most funding for current population research comes from what you term the "population industry" and that research must be directed toward justifying family planning programs, or "operations research," as you call it. You're saying now that demographic research is most valuable when it leads to population policy. But in this paper, the way I interpret it, you also are saying you don't think it should be devoted to operations research, program research. What kind of research do you think would be ideal?



**DEMENY:** I see the field as in many ways in bad shape, because the very richness and funding of population programs and their ownership, so to speak, by international agencies and foreign assistance programs resulted in these programs having overweening influence and a determining hand in what gets studied and even with what results, and how the results are used. Population research got institutionalized and in a very palpable way subordinated to the day-to-day needs of international population programs. And this is not how research should be done. In order to get useful knowledge, you have to have a more detached and independent base, to look at the world and try to figure it out, what is going on, with what results, how it could be changed, rather than simply kowtowing to existing population programs, which have to spend hundreds of millions of dollars, which means that they have to have very definite notions of what it is that they want to do. And they expect the research establishment to certify that what they are doing is just right and just what the doctor ordered.

So, I see kind of an institutional design in the way of the financing and the use of population research. I think what would be needed is a much more conscious separation between operational programs and demographic analysis and analysis looking at what demographic trends do to society and what society can do about those trends, to the extent that it doesn't like them.

Now, you might say that don't universities do this? My answer would be that universities could do it and ought to do it, but I'm not sure that they are doing it, or certainly not doing it to the optimal degree.

**VDT:** Doing it with respect to the problem of the rapid growth in developing countries?

**DEMENY:** Well, indeed, I said that the rapid growth is the most manifest element in the second part of the 20th century. But the issue is broader than that. There is also spatial distribution, mortality trends. And, of course, there is the potential problem of unduly low fertility, which affects Western Europe and North America. I don't say that is necessarily a problem, but at least it should be the object of sustained attention and analysis by population scholars.

**VDT:** In addition to Ben Wattenberg [The Birth Dearth: What Happens When People in Free Countries Don't Have Enough Babies?, 1987].

**DEMENY:** Ben Wattenberg doesn't do it in a very scholarly fashion, but certainly he deserves commendation, in my opinion, for being alert to what is potentially an important issue. It's characteristic that he comes from a think tank and not a university, although universities are not so far behind. We ourselves in cooperation with another think tank, the Hoover Institution, had a conference on this topic about the same time that Wattenberg's book was being written and we published a special issue of Population and Development Review.

**VDT:** Excellent publication: Below-Replacement Fertility in Industrial Countries [supplement to Vol. 12 of Population and Development Review, 1986].

**DEMENY:** But, again, this illustrates that the field is too fractioned, fractioned into many university-based centers. Some of them are very small in size and each of them, I think, especially and unnecessarily, is under the sway of their teaching programs and under considerations that have to do with department ownership and departmental organization. And a field like population studies, which is interdisciplinary and should be extending its reach in the direction of neighboring disciplines or attracting people like historians and economists and philosophers and biologists from other disciplines, it doesn't have a natural and comfortable home for it.

Now, universities organize their programs either under the ownership of a major department field, like sociology, or follow the inclination--understandable in a university setting--to make

population studies, demography, an independent discipline. This further narrows the field of investigation and makes it more of an esoteric study than it ought to be.

I think the field cries out for some institutional base that has some minimum critical size and is not subordinated to the whims of AID or UNFPA or even foundations. Now foundations used to be--perhaps if you have read Notestein's PDR article of December 1982 about this field ["Demography in the United States: A Partial Account of the Development of the Field"], he points out what important influence foundations had in this field. He compares the innovative mass and the new ideas being injected, how much more effective foundations were in the past than universities. And he's a good judge of this. But I think the recent performance of foundations in this field is very mediocre and betrays very little independent thought or willingness to stake out positions.

**VDT:** And you had hoped that was what you could do at the Population Council? Were you promised that by Berelson?

**DEMENY:** Well, I did. I don't like to talk about the [politics] of this institution. But this is an institution that doesn't have financial independence, certainly not the kind of financial independence that can sustain a \$24 million annual budget, and this is our current annual budget. That means that we really have to be very close and on friendly terms and look for the direction from which the wind blows to be able to sustain our programs at this high level. So what AID or UNFPA wants is terribly important for us and we can ill afford to be independent from them. An alternative to this would be to live with a much smaller staff. If this were a much smaller institution, I think it would be in many ways more influential and more important. But it's simply not in the cards the way things are organized now.

In this paper [[Social Science and Population Policy](#)], I make a heuristic reference; I'm not saying that it is necessarily the model to follow. In a country so much smaller and by any standard poorer than the United States, they have an INED-type institution, an independent research institution, government supported, that is not at the beck and call of any administration, that has a mandate of formulating a scientific program and keeping an eye and fingers on the pulse of what is going on. [The paper refers to Canada's International Development Research Centre and the German Foundation for International Development in the then Federal Republic, p. 28.] INED [Institute Nationale des Etudes Demographiques] in France [deals] essentially only with France; they are interested in French national issues. Well, show me the institute that is comparable in scientific standing and institutional integrity that works in the field of, say, Third World population issues. There is simply no such thing.

There is the United Nations Population Division and they do fine work, but . . .

**VDT:** Number crunchers.

**DEMENY:** Well, partly that and partly, of course, they are hemmed in with the terrible personnel policies and constraints that characterize United Nations organizations. You have to watch to see, "Do we have too many Indians; shouldn't we hire a Pakistani; or why don't we have somebody from Brazil?"

**VDT:** They also don't have people from a broad array of disciplines. Does INED, for instance, have, as you mentioned, anthropologists, biologists--people from different disciplines?

**DEMENY:** Its emphasis is in demography, but they do have an impressively wide mandate, including, for instance, genetics, human biology.

**VDT:** You mentioned in this paper the independent researchers like Gunnar Myrdal, his [American](#)

Dilemma and Asian Drama, and INED, and I asked you over lunch if you would like to see innovative research like the Caldwells have done in South Indian villages and Nigeria.

**DEMENY:** Their innovation in Nigeria was under Population Council auspices. Jack Caldwell is a flower cultivated by the Population Council.

**VDT:** Meaning you?

**DEMENY:** No, before my time. We overlapped. He had been in the demographic division perhaps not quite a year when I came in, then he went back to Australia. Jack's launching as a field researcher was a Population Council product.

**VDT:** Do you consider what he did operations research?

**DEMENY:** No, not at all. Operations research should now be interpreted as what it predominantly is; you can measure it by dollars and cents, namely, what AID calls operations research. Not to object against the term, but the way it is interpreted by AID, it's really a very misconceived direction of work.

**VDT:** Don't you think it a bit ironic that AID is still pushing operations research, still pushing family planning programs? Yet, as you said in your 1986 PAA presidential address, "Population and the Invisible Hand" [published in Demography, November 1986], when we were all in the throes of reacting to the NAS report [Population Growth and Economic Development: Policy Issues, 1986], which in turn was a reaction to the U.S. turnaround in policy at the 1984 Mexico population conference, you made it very clear that we still needed, in your estimation, family planning programs; that one couldn't just say population is just one of the many issues that one takes into account in economic development. You were bearing quite hard on the downgrading of population in the NAS report.

**DEMENY:** There is no contradiction here, because I indeed take a very dim view of what is happening in the Third World, the rapid population growth. But I feel it is almost scandalous how little original thinking bubbles up in the countries that are most affected by this. This is something that should be of [grass roots] in the countries themselves and they should be helping themselves. It should be a more autochthonous process than it is now. It is now more of an international business that exports readymade models of what countries should be doing. We are selling recipes to Africa that should be emerging in Africa, responding to African problems.

**VDT:** At one place in your paper [Social Science and Population Policy], you said that the minister in charge of family planning, rather than meeting a foreign scholar at 9 o'clock, should go out to a family planning clinic to check whether the staff is there and it's clean. I liked that.

**DEMENY:** That's right. They have a problem and they should tackle that problem. And to the extent that they have an operational problem, their business is to make that program work. I don't think the program would be so much better if the minister spent his time talking to demographers. The demographers should be talking to their counterparts, social scientists in those countries. And the influence should be not from AID to the minister, or social scientists in the U.S. to the minister, but it should be an influence that generates an intellectual ferment that then gets translated in the Third World into appropriate programs.

**VDT:** Do you think, in other words, that it's time for developed countries to back off from saying what

family planning programs should be in LDCs?

**DEMENY:** Well, in many ways a much more standoffish attitude, which would make it absolutely clear that, "Look, either you have a problem and you have to deal with it or you don't. Well, then you have to bear the consequences." A much more relaxed and standoffish attitude on the part of the West, I think, would be conducive to effective action. It is too complex a problem to put in simple terms, but it is no accident that by far the most effective program dealing with population--not that I applaud every facet of it--came from China and was hatched at a time when there was no AID adviser there. These people realized that they had a problem and tried to find a solution for it.

I apologize for bringing this up in this facile manner, but I do feel that in this field it would be far more effective to put much more emphasis on making sure that intellectual [grant?] in the countries themselves is in much better shape than it is now. AID just doesn't understand this or positively rejects this by saying that would just lead to losing time, fuddy-duddying, and what have you. For instance, they believe it's not worth training Third World scholars in America in population studies, partly because it's too long-term, partly they don't find that cost-effective. I think it's a very misguided and shortsighted policy.

**VDT:** There are no AID-supported students in the U.S.?

**DEMENY:** The Council had the most important and influential program in this and AID withdrew its support from that program back in the early 1970s. They do very little in this field. They have some short-term technical training, but . . .

And there is very little institutional growth of research and analysis that is country-based. Well, these countries cooperate with international assistance because it brings them foreign exchange. Some of these governments are simply co-opted; they say, "Well, let's humor them." It should be a much more home-based and autochthonous process than it is now.

**VDT:** Well, all things in an ideal world. You certainly were a little skeptical of Bangladesh back in 1975, when they were just starting off, presumably full of zeal, with their population program, first five-year plan, and you didn't give them much credit at that time ["Observations on Population Policy and Population Program in Bangladesh," Population and Development Review, December 1975]. Of course, you've been proved right. They're up to 100 million, is it? Then they were only 75 million. They didn't seem to have home-grown talent to manage their program.

**DEMENY:** And Africa too. If Africa turns out to be like Pakistan where there were vigorous family planning programs 30 years ago and nothing happened. Well, I would hate to think that the same thing might happen to Africa.

**VDT:** I visited Zimbabwe two years ago and their family planning program seemed to be going well. There was a Marvellous Mhloyi.

**DEMENY:** A Population Council fellow.

**VDT:** Was she? She had been at Penn. I went to see her at the University of Zimbabwe and she is so overwhelmed because she's almost alone, everybody making demands of her.

**DEMENY:** The one research demographer in the country.

**VDT:** That's right. Of course, she's needed to teach and build up the department there and she was

going to write an article. She'd done some surveys that showed that contraceptive prevalence wasn't nearly so high as shown in the Contraceptive Prevalence Survey. In fact, Ethel Churchill and I had some correspondence with her about it and tried to encourage her to write that article for Studies in Family Planning. It didn't get written. She has no time; she's overwhelmed. So I think you can only go so fast in developing native talent.

**DEMENY:** But please don't misunderstand me. If one thinks of it as a half a billion dollar industry, nowadays, of the developed countries; the developing countries supposedly put in three times as much, although those are very fishy and elusive figures, it's hard to estimate it properly. I'm not saying that this is something that should be done away with--far from it. There's a very good case to expand these family planning programs.

What I'm bemoaning is the lack of parallel attention--the vastly smaller scale, financially speaking--to make this field a respectable area of inquiry that is not under the thumb of this operational program. They should be in different boxes; they should be separate. There are many institutional models of how this could be done. After all, there is NICHD, which has a certain way of distributing funding for research, and NIH or the National Science Foundation, for primarily domestic purposes. There should be something equivalent to that in the international field.

One way to do this on a sounder basis would be simply for AID to imitate [this] to the extent that they spend money for research--and they claim that they spend tens of millions of dollars for research. We are just applying for a \$16 million operations research contract here and there are many such offerings. To the extent that AID has a research program, they should say, "Okay, 5 percent of our money goes to research," and set up an institutional system that apportions those research funds properly. They now have total discretionary control over it; typically they do this by issuing requests for proposals or going to institutions. More and more, they shun universities totally, as a matter of fact, and just go to profit-making institutions, like Westinghouse, corporations. This is not a sound way to do it. They have a model like NSF or NIH. I don't think it's the best way to do it. I think it would be better to have some institutions of integrity, just as the U.S. government has an institute that studies meteorology in Boulder, Colorado, and has a proper physical plant for it and lots of scientists who look into what the weather is doing and what the weather does to us and what we can do about the weather. Well, they could have a similar institute that studies population, without trembling that next year they might irritate the head of USAID's population office and they will discontinue their funding. This is not the way to run respectable scientific organizations.

And the peculiar and sad thing is that there is a big research establishment that grew up in demography, partly because population became a big problem. After all, the Population Association has 2500 members, and most of them are scattered, doing their own thing, and they are supremely uninterested in this institutional aspect of the profession. Universities are comfortable institutions; they somehow have lots of tenured posts. Their nontenured posts are filled with people who hope to get tenure by writing scientific papers that nobody understands except people with Ph.D.s in demography. They are certainly not interested in opening windows, approaching the broader public with these issues. So the universities happily draw themselves up from the map in international assistance. Very few of them are now recipients of AID funds. Some of them are proud that they are not recipients.

This is just an inadequate and too brief way of saying that I see the institutional structure of this field, particularly vis-a-vis Third World population issues, as in very, very poor shape. I don't quite see future progress as exceedingly rosy or promising, either.

**VDT:** You think that some of your colleagues in demography are out for their own thing and the money is not in research unless you are willing to go along with operations research. Yet, somebody who stuck his neck out and you lit on him right away was Donald Bogue, who had made a number of

optimistic world population projections, assuming that family planning is strongly implemented. I was, of course, very much involved in the controversy when you lit into his Population Bulletin of [October] 1978, "Declining World Fertility." Donald Bogue has always been in the thick of the family planning field. I don't think you'd call it operations research that he was doing--population projections.

You're saying that demographers should communicate more widely; you're implying that some are looking today more inward. Yet, here was a demographer that went out for a lot of publicity and you lit into him [On the End of the Population Explosion, Working Paper No. 39, Center for Policy Studies, The Population Council, March 1979].

**DEMENY:** I certainly regret to have hurt or irritated Don, if I did. But I did feel that that rosy set of projections did damage by putting the public into an excessively rosy frame of mind.

**VDT:** You wrote: "spreading complacency of opinion about prospective population growth." Of course, a few years later in the early 1980s, the NAS report put us into that frame of mind. Julian Simon too.

**DEMENY:** Don's projections had to do with demographic developments. He always assumed that rapid population growth is bad for you--correctly, in my opinion. But he declared that the problem was essentially solved. And (a) it was incorrect as far as the prediction was concerned--also inconsistent with some earlier predictions of his--and (b) it came packaged with a very simple-minded explanation of why these developments are taking place, namely, sort of uncritical credit being given to better contraceptives and family planning programs, which I think is a considerable trivialization of the issue.

Bogue is not alone in this. You read Lester Brown and you learn that if only there was twice as much money, or maybe three times as much money--not half a billion dollars but a billion and a half--this problem would be solved. Now, of course, this is ridiculous. Even in this imperfect world, surely if the American taxpayers or the government could be persuaded that for another dime per person you could solve this problem, I believe that money would be found. But it's not true that the population problem is a problem because there are not enough people going around distributing pills. So, I was arguing with the things that I think provably and genuinely were wrong and harmful for sound policy-making, and also lulling the public into an excessively rosy frame of mind.

**VDT:** I think they'll be jolted out of that now. The Population Reference Bureau's World Population Data Sheet this year [1988] got quite a bit of media coverage and the theme of the news release was that the world population growth rate has not declined as rapidly as expected. You know we're trending toward the UN high variant. We always assumed that we'd be at 6.1 billion and no more in 2000; 1998 is the date for the 6 billion, according to the UN 1984 medium variant assessments. But we're not on track with that now. The growth rate has been stuck for three years. China . . .

**DEMENY:** China is the culprit there. I think 6.1 billion for 2000 is still not too bad a figure. I think the bigger deviation will come beyond the year 2000.

**VDT:** Right. You've pointed that out in your writings. Well, we could go on and on about that. Let's make a sea change and talk about your connections with PAA, which is how this whole interview project started. You've been a leading figure in PAA for some years. Can you remember the first meeting you attended?

**DEMENY:** I'm not sure. Was 1959 in Princeton?

**VDT:** No, in Providence, Rhode Island.

**DEMENY:** 1958 was in Chicago. I was in Chicago; that was my first meeting. There was a big clash there between Phil Hauser and Bill Petersen.

**VDT:** Tell me about it; I love clashes for my historical records.

**DEMENY:** I would not try to reconstruct it, but it was some kind of cause celebre. Now, I didn't go to Providence [in 1959], but from then on I was at every PAA meeting, except Atlanta in 1978, when I was in China. I was in Chicago with my daughter in December last year and we were taking a taxi down to the University of Chicago; I was chair of the nominating committee. I was pointing out to my daughter the hotel where this 1958 meeting was held.

**VDT:** Tell me about the clash between Phil Hauser and Bill Petersen.

**DEMENY:** I had been in America for about six months at that point and it would be very unfair if I tried to reconstruct it on the basis of my English knowledge at that time. I really should track it down by asking some more senior people in the field. The ideal person would be Phil Hauser. Will you be talking to him?

**VDT:** Yes, I hope to interview him, Don Bogue, and Evelyn Kitagawa in Chicago this fall. Okay, I'll ask him [but forgot to, in the Hauser interview of November 12, 1988].

**DEMENY:** A last comment on Don. I had a great fondness and liking for Don and I certainly didn't mean to be beastly. But let me say this about this field. In this field that grew from such a small size that everybody fitted in the same room, there is a remarkably high degree of reluctance among population scientists, demographers, to criticize each other. Which is not criticizing each other because it sounds like a personal thing, X criticizing Y and Y criticizing Z. But just getting at issues and dealing with them and disagreement and clashing interpretations of facts.

**VDT:** They are reluctant to clash?

**DEMENY:** Yes, it's almost nonexistent. In a field like economics, it's normal that a book comes out and that it's torn apart by a reviewer. Nobody thinks this is personal or that there's a personal animosity there. But in this field, say, Demography, which was a late creation--Don Bogue had much to do with it--never got up the gumption to launch a book review section. So in this field, it is possible to bring books out without any critical attention being given to them.

**VDT:** I never thought of that. So PDR's is really the first book review section, other than Population Studies and . . .

**DEMENY:** I was told from a very high source that PDR is known by many people in the profession as an abbreviation for "Periodical Destructive Reviews," because the field is so unaccustomed to clashing and critical examination of issues.

**VDT:** You had an excellent forum on the NAS study ["Review Symposium: National Research Council, Population Growth and Economic Development: Policy Questions," reviews by Allen C. Kelley, Julian L. Simon, Joseph E. Potter, and Herman E. Daly, Population and Development Review, September 1986].

**DEMENY:** My comments on the NAS study were immensely resented by some very eminent people. I never would have dreamt that I would have been accused of being personally beastly to them. I thought that I was discussing issues rather than people.

**VDT:** This is something I've thought with you. I'm married to a Dutchman and I know this is a European tradition.

**DEMENY:** I think so.

**VDT:** And not American. Americans take things too personally. You think that's it?

**DEMENY:** I think there is a problem here, yes. But I think it's worse in population than in most fields. Perhaps because of this clubby nature, that everybody knows everybody else, and people are perhaps too friendly with each other in personal terms and they're reluctant to be critical.

Now, I run the book review section of the PDR. You cannot imagine how difficult it is to squeeze out from well-placed professionals in this country demographers' book reviews. The typical answer is, "I never do book reviews; I make a principle of not doing book reviews."

**VDT:** Why?

**DEMENY:** There is no profit in it. It is seen as . . .

**VDT:** You can't put it on your resume and have it count for something?

**DEMENY:** Well, you should be able to put it on your resume if you write more than routine book reviews; not if you just summarize the table of contents and say, "This is a great book." Now you mentioned Wattenberg's book and that he got many very critical reviews. I must say that it comes easier to demographers--yours wasn't so critical [JvdT review of "The Birth Dearth" in Population Today, July/August, 1987]--because Wattenberg is not a member of the club. He's an outsider and people resented an outsider barging into the holy of holies. They suspect he can't calculate a net reproduction rate.

**VDT:** He did make a few mistakes which he perhaps wouldn't have made as a demographer, at least in the pre-publication galleys from which I did my review. At least one of these was corrected in the published book.

We have been saying that you tend to be a bit critical and I can read over your writings, which I have done recently, and I realize that you're saying some things that Americans would not say right out in print, or at a conference, such as you did in Bangladesh in 1975 [Bangladesh 1975 PDR article stemmed from remarks first made at a conference in that country]. That seems to be a European approach.

**DEMENY:** People were even startled with that brief commentary I made after the Mexico population conference. Have you seen that? This is a reprint of my speech in Bucharest, back in 1974.

**VDT:** I'd like that. I've got all of PDR from the beginning. It's the only journal I kept complete when I did some housecleaning a few years ago.

**DEMENY:** How kind of you.



**VDT:** Because every issue is valuable. This is PDR, June 1984 [Archives], "Population on the World Agenda, 1984: A View from Bucharest." This was a speech you made in Bucharest, in 1974?

**DEMENY:** Yes, not at the conference, but at the so-called Bucharest Tribune, which ran parallel to the conference.

**VDT:** So you like to be provocative.

**DEMENY:** Well, I was there, and people were appalled by . . .

**VDT:** What you were saying?

**DEMENY:** Well, I was arguing for taking population seriously, not diverting attention by talking about other things. I said this is a conference about population and let's keep to the business at hand. Do read it, Jean. Perhaps you'll see that my contrary nature is not a [European] tradition.

**VDT:** Well, how did you become so much of the club? Because to become president of PAA you have to be a member of the club. Of course, you had the advantage of starting at Princeton.

**DEMENY:** I was surprised about my election. I don't know how to explain it. Well, I feel myself in rapport; I feel very kindly toward all my colleagues. But I tend to be perhaps . . .

**VDT:** Prickly?

**DEMENY:** I don't see it that way, but others do. Yes.

**VDT:** Can you remember any other outstanding PAA meetings over the years, in addition to the Hauser-Petersen faceoff, which you won't tell me about?

**DEMENY:** Among the presidential addresses that I've heard--and, as I said, I was present at every single meeting except Atlanta--I would give top mark to Sam Preston's address; it was exceptionally fine ["Children and the Elderly: Divergent Paths for America's Dependents," Minneapolis 1984, published in Demography, November 1984].

**VDT:** When he said that young people were now being shortchanged; the elderly were now getting all the government money and attention?

**DEMENY:** Yes. There was a good example of a piece of demographic analysis of very great population policy import. But most products in this field, I would ask the question: Does it really matter; Would this eventually filter down to the general public; Will it move people to arrange their affairs somewhat differently? That was a good example.

**VDT:** He did pick up rapidly on that. It appeared in Scientific American within months ["Children and the Elderly in the U.S.," Scientific American, December 1984]. And I think it probably has had an impact. I think the U.S. government is looking again at children.

**DEMENY:** Yes. Such things take time to have an impact, but they have a way of influencing the state of games: When madmen speak, they have an economist looming behind their backs. Ideas have a way to move the world.

**VDT:** What do you think have been some leadings issues of PAA itself that you remember?

**DEMENY:** I've noticed that PAA has become so much more quiet. Back in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Concerned Demographers people, feminists, and all kinds of rebellious groups kept things at the boiling point and made things sometimes quite excitingly eventful. But that has largely disappeared. There used to be a time in PAA when the business meeting was an overflow audience; everybody wanted to go because things were happening there. Now, when I was at the last business meeting in New Orleans, I think there were maybe 30 people there.

**VDT:** Why was that? It's too bad.

**DEMENY:** They don't think what is being transacted is very important or worth attending.

**VDT:** And yet they flock in for the presidential address; everybody seems to make a point of attending that. They don't seem to care for PAA as an organization but they want to hear the person they voted into the presidency; make sure his or her speech is good. It's the one you're usually known for, isn't it?

**DEMENY:** I was chairman of the nominating committee this year and I note that the professionalization of the field as "demography defined as this membership in this club" bars some people who perhaps should be eminently considered for high posts in the Association, including president.

**VDT:** You mean people who are demographers . . .

**DEMENY:** This is a population association so it's really broader than demography. A good example here is Gary Becker. He is somebody the profession should hang on to, or attract in, and give an honor to, but it doesn't happen. Harvey Leibenstein, now unfortunately in very bad health, such a person should be closer to the profession's bosom than he is now.

**VDT:** I think there's a certain kind of person who does not want to be particularly involved with the organization.

**DEMENY:** Well, the organization should go after them.

**VDT:** There are some people who have not been so active or president. I can think of Parker Mauldin; he's eminent in the field and he's been on the PAA board. And then there was Christopher Tietze, who was here at the Population Council.

**DEMENY:** Both Chris and Parker ran for president.

**VDT:** That's right, and they didn't win.

**DEMENY:** That's a sad fact; there are two candidates and only one can win. So it happens to people. I don't think people run twice for president; I think they are reluctant to do so.

**VDT:** They feel the decision has been made of them and that's that?

**DEMENY:** Some people have run more than twice.

**VDT:** I think of Joe Stycos, who ran against Harriet Presser. That was agonizing, deciding who to vote for.

**DEMENY:** Similarly Paul Schultz, a very eminent person. I think even his father should have been pursued by the Population Association. Most people in the Association would say that's absurd because they think of population as being population studies.

**VDT:** And not the Theodore Schultz approach?

**DEMENY:** In the past, great figures in the profession were recruited from social sciences at large. Malthus wasn't a demographer and John Stuart Mill wasn't a demographer and Walter Willcox wasn't strictly speaking a demographer.

**VDT:** Well, at that time they didn't have demographers, for that matter, but they certainly taught demographic studies. The discipline has done a lot to define itself as a discipline. Do you regret, for instance, that the PAA still has only 2600 members? [2,952 listed in the revised 1989 Directory of Members]. That's very small compared to the economics association, for instance.

**DEMENY:** I think that's too large a number.

**VDT:** What do you want? First you say you want to broaden the club and yet you don't want it to grow too big.

**DEMENY:** We'd like to broaden the club to bring in people in neighboring disciplines who are very interested in population.

**VDT:** Like the IUSSP, for instance. At the Florence meeting [1985], the secretary announced that they were going after economists and anthropologists and so on. Of course, that's a much smaller organization; just 1600 or so still in IUSSP. Would you want to drop out some of the applied demographers?

**DEMENY:** Anybody who wants to be a PAA member should be welcome. No, I'm not complaining about the size. To begin with, for sheer economic reasons a larger membership is better than a smaller one--for journals, for instance.

**VDT:** It would get more people to subscribe to PDR, which I understand doesn't have a very large subscription list.

**DEMENY:** It has a very good subscription. We have a larger paid subscription than, for instance, Economic Development and Cultural Change, a periodical that is [also] not an association journal. Of course, if you are an association journal you have a captive audience because membership means subscription. If you're not an association journal, it's inordinately difficult to maintain a very large subscription list. We have over 2000 subscribers in North America.

**VDT:** I think of Economic Development and Cultural Change only as the famous Davis-Blake intermediate variables article, but that continues to exist?

**DEMENY:** In fact, it's considered the leading development journal in the world. The great institution of the University of Chicago is behind it and I think the University of Chicago Press probably

subsidizes it. It's a fine journal.

**VDT:** What do you think of People, which also tends to be both population and development?

**DEMENY:** It's a well edited journal and very lively and quick on the ball and with a good network of feeders. I think inevitably it has a point of view that is pre-ordained. They know where their heart is, no question of that. There is a lack of detachment and open-mindedness that I think would not be good for a scientific journal. But it's a magazine so conceived and within those terms of reference it's very, very nicely done.

**VDT:** Do you ever read anything like American Demographics?

**DEMENY:** I always go through it and I find it a little repetitive, coming back to the same themes. After all, there are just so many things that business is interested in. I wouldn't have thought that it would be able to sustain itself, but it's done very well. [Note: it ceased publication as American Demographics in 2004, at which time it merged with Advertising Age.]

**VDT:** Right. Of course, it now has big business behind it--Dow Jones. What changes have you noted in PAA over the years and have they been for the better? You have already mentioned that in the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was all the excitement of the activist groups that packed the business meetings. At your first meeting in Chicago, that was one of the first that had double sessions and now we have eight simultaneous sessions, and so on. Do you still enjoy PAA meetings?

**DEMENY:** Yes, I do. It's a very efficient way of touching base with friends and meeting them and I go to the sessions and enjoy them. Obviously, when there are 200 papers you don't expect a very large proportion of them to be outstanding or highly polished, but there's always a fair amount of interesting papers.

**VDT:** You must pick up some papers for use in PDR, like Dick Lincoln did for Family Planning Perspectives.

**DEMENY:** Too few are suitable.

**VDT:** They're too technical?

**DEMENY:** They tend to be too rough, half-baked, sort of researcher's progress.

**VDT:** You do go after great names. For instance, I know Ester Boserup quite well, my husband worked for her and her husband in Geneva, and I was delighted to see an article by her in PDR quite recently.

**DEMENY:** We've published her before; we published Mogens Boserup when he was still alive. In a way, Ester represents some difference from the core of demography and we're always pleased when we can attract such names.

**VDT:** And, of course, she was the first to say, like Julian Simon, that population growth stimulates innovation and technology.

**DEMENY:** She is not the first. I can show you 120 years before her some good expressions of that

theme.

**VDT:** My final questions were things like your plans for the future. You've already said that: You're going to be a senior scholar at the Population Council and you say you have several articles on the go.

**DEMENY:** One thing on which I'll have to put much time. I'm chairman of the Committee on Population and Policy of IUSSP and that takes a good deal of work.

**VDT:** Do you have a conference coming up?

**DEMENY:** Several conferences coming up, the first one jointly with the UN Population Division, later this month here in New York, at the UN.

**VDT:** One last question. Are you pessimistic or optimistic about future population growth trends?

**DEMENY:** Much of what we have has already happened, so we are locked in a pattern. I do think that many countries have managed to get a much larger population than they should have done or would have liked. I think stabilization at 10 billion is, in my opinion, at the very low end of the spectrum. That's easy to say because there will be nobody around to say, "You were wrong."

**VDT:** PDR recently had the article by Ansley Coale that pointed out, "Don't forget the possibility of a nuclear holocaust" ["Nuclear War and Demographers' Projections," PDR, September 1985].

**DEMENY:** You know why we published that? It was given at a conference at the United Nations and the United Nations didn't feel they could publish the article.

**VDT:** You mean it was left out of the proceedings?

**VDT:** Yes.

**VDT:** Well, good for PDR!

**DEMENY:** There was another case with IUSSP. John Aird gave a paper highly critical of the Chinese family planning program, something on which we had published many positive articles. IUSSP said, "We can't publish this or China will be offended." We published it ["Population Studies and Population Policy in China," PDR, June 1982].

**VDT:** Then PDR certainly has a role. By the way, you were very critical in your book review of Judith Banister's latest book on China [review by Susan Greenhalgh of China's Changing Population, PDR, December 1987].

**DEMENY:** Rightly so. We were on the other side of the horse there. These are very debatable issues and I think there should be airing for a wide spectrum of points of view. There is no the right thinking about it. I think these are genuinely unresolved and, in a way, nonscientific issues, opinion issues, on which facts can be brought to bear. I don't think we should say, "This is the right thing and we publish him or her but not somebody else on this."

You ask about People, I think they would have a party line on this and they wouldn't confuse their readers by putting in some things. We've published a number of items by Julian Simon, of course, and critical reviews of the World Bank's fine study of economic consequences of population

growth by people like Easterlin and Ronald Lee ["Review Symposium: World Development Report 1984," reviews by Richard A. Easterlin, Colin Clark, and Ronald Lee; comments by Kenneth E. Boulding, Garrett Hardin, Harvey Leibenstein, and Jan Tinbergen, PDR, March 1985]. I think it's important to have a forum for this.

**VDT:** Absolutely, and I hope you go on providing that forum. I think we've talked enough. It's been wonderful; I thank you very much.

**DEMENY:** I must have bored you to death.

**VDT:** No, on the contrary.

**DEMENY:** You'll have these tapes with this Hungarian accent; it may drive you crazy.

**VDT:** I'm so amazed; as I said, you finish your sentences; many people do not. I just interviewed Norman Ryder, who is another person whom I think speaks and writes eloquently. I asked him what explains that. Of course, I have some national pride in Norman, being Canadian myself, and he made the answer I expected, which was "my fine Canadian education." But he went beyond that: both his parents were English and they expected him to do a lot of reading. In your case, you mentioned your father's library. You read in English at a young age?

**DEMENY:** Not at the time I mentioned was my first exposure to demography. I learned English reading only when I was in college.

**VDT:** And French?

**DEMENY:** I had a French teacher at home.

**VDT:** Was that because French was the language of the elite?

**DEMENY:** No, that was German, I'm afraid. When I was a little boy, we had a German fraulein and I spoke a child's German. My German is now in even more terrible shape than my French. Now, English would be totally the dominant language there. Of course, I also had to study Russian and that left me without a trace. But we had to study eight years of Latin. I remember my baccalaureate; I was given a text from Tacitus and I had to study the Latin and say it in Hungarian--sight-read the Latin and say it in Hungarian. At that time, I was very good at this.

**VDT:** It's a bit like the Dutch. After all, who knows Dutch? Who knows Hungarian? They've got to learn all the other languages. You have a tremendous advantage.

**DEMENY:** It's easier for the Dutch because Dutch is so close to German or English, whereas Hungarian is related only to Finnish.

**VDT:** And who knows Finnish? Do you understand Finnish?

**DEMENY:** No, it isn't that close. It's like saying that English and Persian are closely related.

**VDT:** Have you ever lived for a time in any Third World country? You mentioned China; were you there for an extended period?

**DEMENY:** No. The only other country I've lived in for an extended period is Hungary. Otherwise, I'm afraid that's a lack in my education. If I add up the amount of time I've spent in India, it comes to a respectable number of months; it surely adds up to six or eight months.

**VDT:** Perhaps that's where you should go to set up your institute. Perhaps you'll feel that you have to set it up, to get it set up.

**DEMENY:** Yes, I agree with you, but I'd like to point out that in intellectual influences the [Third Worlders don't do that]. It comes naturally that for your knowledge, you go to Oxford or Cambridge or Princeton or Berkeley. Always in history, there were main seats of learning where the main ideas were cooked and then spread and filtered down. It should be at a strategic location and then it works. If I think of my own former country's history, they were always looking to Heidelberg and the Sorbonne and London and Oxford. Nobody resented that ever, I think, because there's no power attached to those ideas except the power of the idea. But, my God, if I think of a foreign assistance mission coming from Wilhelm in Germany to Hungary in 1880 saying that "You people have a birth rate of 44; why don't you have some of the German doctors to give you contraceptive tips and persuade your cousins to have a lower birth rate?" I think those Germans would have been put on the first train out of the country.

**VDT:** When you put it like that it indeed sounds impossible.

**DEMENY:** I think we fall into this pattern very often, in more or less subtle form, but basically this is what is happening. Or it happened before. I think now America is somewhat more reticent and I think rightly so. But before, it was routine that American ambassadors were expected to cajole the political level, their Third World counterparts, that, "Look, fellows, do this, do that." I think it's not the most effective way of doing things.

Now, some of the contraceptive technology--I'm not famed for thinking that contraceptive technology is the main way to change demographic behavior, but it's a very proper export. Just as people take over Coca Cola, cosmetics, soap, toothbrushes, transistor radios, television sets, and what have you, technological devices, tactics, or what have you have a very natural way of spreading, of responding to demand. The notion that somehow these are inferior goods that Third Worlders couldn't possibly pay for, why can't they pay for it, if it is good for them? It [contraceptive technology] should be more attractive to them, under the right circumstances, than buying soft drinks or cosmetics or items of feminine hygiene or transistor radios. These things are all over the place without any foreign aid program or anybody pushing them or operations researchers coming out to find out what your unmet needs are in soft drinks. And they [contraceptives] would be [all over the place], if the right policies were followed and there was a genuine demand on the part of the countries that need these devices.

**VDT:** You sound suspiciously like the American delegation to the Mexico conference touting a free market.

**DEMENY:** Well, it's worked elsewhere.

**VDT:** This is an unending topic and I think this is a good place to stop. [But interview resumes.]

Here we are back again. We're talking about Irene Taeuber. You knew her when she would come up to Princeton?

**DEMENY:** Why not add her to that list of influentials. I mentioned in a different context the very

strong influence that Jacob Viner of Princeton had on me. Irene Taeuber was somebody to look up to at Princeton. She was a very frequent presence at 5 Ivy Lane, the marvelous old OPR building. Irene Taeuber was doing her voluminous writings and Population Index. She was a dear, dear person.

**VDT:** The students would all have a chance to talk to her when she came?

**DEMENY:** Oh, yes, and more. Once you engaged Irene in a conversation, or once she buttonholed you, it was a never-ending conversation. Irene was a fantastic conversationalist; she would just go on and on. She had this slightly confrontational view of the world. She thought, properly, that population is a terribly important field. But if you talked to Irene, you always had the impression that one third of the KGB and one half of CIA's industry was population problems and population issues in the world. It was always great fun to talk to Irene. Did you know her?

**VDT:** Well, I had one memorable contact. I was to give my one and only paper at a professional meeting, on illegitimacy ratios in D.C., which are high because there are so many blacks. This was at an annual meeting of the D.C. Sociological Society, on a beautiful Saturday at Howard University. Irene Taeuber was the winner of the Stuart Rice Award that year, a year or two before her death [in 1974]. Everyone stayed to hear her deliver her Stuart Rice Award address and then everyone left en masse, because it was much too pretty an afternoon. So nobody to hear my paper, except Irene Taeuber, Con Taeuber, Paul Glick, and Murray Gendell all stayed; well, Murray was my coauthor. Needless to say, I did not deliver my paper, but I have a very soft spot in my heart for the Taeubers after that. That was my sole contact with her.

**DEMENY:** One other great loss to demography was the early passing of John Durand, who was a very dear person and I had many dealings with him in his capacity as head of the Population Division at the UN and also I succeeded in luring him out to Hawaii to the Population Institute. In fact, when he stayed there, not only did he work in my institute but also he was a next-door neighbor. Our neighbor's house was up for rent, so we were close neighbors with the Durands. He had some sabbatical time off; he was doing his historical demography paper there. It was a history of world population growth. Later an offshoot of that work was published in Population and Development Review, back in 1977 ["Historical Estimates of World Population: An Evaluation," PDR, September 1977].

**VDT:** John Durand was retired at the time of his death, wasn't he, living in North Carolina?

**DEMENY:** Yes.

**VDT:** We have an interview with him. Abbott Ferriss had an interview with him for the PAA oral history project in 1979.

**DEMENY:** Another person whom I lured to Hawaii was Nathan Keyfitz, a very dear friend and a marvelous person.

**VDT:** Fellow Canadian. When he's not in Vienna, he's in Indonesia. He's having a conference in Vienna in the fall.

**DEMENY:** It's in Hungary.

**VDT:** Oh, it is? Are you going?



**DEMENY:** No, I have another engagement. We published his last Indonesian article, in which he looks at Indonesia 30 years ago, when he was first there, and then recently revisited that village ["An East Javanese Village in 1953 and 1985: Observations on Development," PDR, December 1985].

**VDT:** Yes, that was interesting, what happened in that one particular village.

**DEMENY:** A very positive assessment of development and family planning.

**VDT:** Yes, they finally had turned around and accepted it, generally. He seems to be a very far-ranging person.

**DEMENY:** Yes, we need many more Nathans.

**VDT:** I think of him as a mathematical demographer, but that's just one facet of his work.

**DEMENY:** That's right; a very lively mind.

**VDT:** If I don't get to interview him, I'll have to come back and interview you about him. [See Keyfitz "self-interview" of December 31, 1988, taped in Jakarta.]

**[Interview continues.]** Here's another point. Your wife did the illustration, map, for . . .

**DEMENY:** In OPR there was a tradition that this illustration was done in-house, so to speak, and Daphne Notestein, that marvelous lady who still drives at age 91 . . .

**VDT:** No, she has just given up her driver's license, Ansley Coale told me. She could still drive, but if anything happened they would blame it on her age and she didn't want that.

**DEMENY:** Daphne Notestein was doing covers for Population Index and some maps and graphs for Princeton books. My wife inherited that post when the Notesteins were in New York and no longer associated with OPR. From 1962 to probably 1965 or 66, my wife did Population Index covers and all the maps and graphs for that book on Africa, The Demography of Tropical Africa.

**VDT:** She wasn't the only wife who worked on that; who was the other one?

**DEMENY:** Yes, I said there was this tradition and it started with Daphne Notestein and there was also Charlie Westoff's first wife, Joan Westoff.

**VDT:** Is your wife an artist?

**DEMENY:** She's a painter, yes, not practicing very actively these days, but she did this artwork for Princeton books. She enjoyed it.

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**Footnote on Demeny remark after the interview.**

Paul said that he, like many demographers it seems, had been a musician. He played the bassoon as a young man, became quite professional, and was offered a job with the orchestra in his hometown. He had taken up the bassoon and pursued it rigorously, because there was a possibility that he might not

be accepted into the university in Budapest in the troubled times that Hungary was going through at the time he was ready for university. But he was admitted to the university and he did not carry on with the bassoon.



([http://hungarytoday.hu/news/will-hungarys-population-halved-2100-](http://hungarytoday.hu/news/will-hungarys-population-halved-2100-demography-expert-pal-demeny-discusses-europes-low-birth-rate-challenges-facing-hungary-maintain-stable-population-69781)

[demography-expert-pal-demeny-discusses-europes-low-birth-rate-challenges-facing-hungary-maintain-stable-population-69781](http://hungarytoday.hu/news/will-hungarys-population-halved-2100-demography-expert-pal-demeny-discusses-europes-low-birth-rate-challenges-facing-hungary-maintain-stable-population-69781))

## **Will Hungary's Population Be Halved by 2100? Demography Expert Pál Demény Discusses Europe's Low Birth Rate, Challenges Facing Hungary, and How to Maintain a Stable Population**

**2018-01-24 | (<http://hungarytoday.hu/news/will-hungarys-population-halved-2100-demography-expert-pal-demeny-discusses-europes-low-birth-rate-challenges-facing-hungary-maintain-stable-population-69781>)**

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*Hungary Today* had the pleasure of sitting down for an interview with Dr. Pál Demény, a Hungarian demographer and economist whose research on population decline and demographic policy have been extremely [influential internationally](https://iussp.org/en/iussp-laureate-2003-paul-demeny) (<https://iussp.org/en/iussp-laureate-2003-paul-demeny>). After [fleeing Hungary](http://hungarytoday.hu/news/hungarian-review-extra-hungairam-intellectual-life-hungarian-exiles-1956) (<http://hungarytoday.hu/news/hungarian-review-extra-hungairam-intellectual-life-hungarian-exiles-1956>) following [the fall of the 1956 Revolution](http://hungarytoday.hu/news/sense-us-real-hungary-homeland-aloft-conference-hungarian-emigre-cultural-life-west-1956) (<http://hungarytoday.hu/news/sense-us-real-hungary-homeland-aloft-conference-hungarian-emigre-cultural-life-west-1956>), Dr. Demény made his way to the United States, where he would have a long and fruitful career. Now living in Budapest, the 85-year-old researcher continues to speak at lectures, [conferences](http://hungarytoday.hu/news/hungarian-pm-laments-european-demographic-decline-announces-family-supporting-measures-budapest-family-summit-61135) (<http://hungarytoday.hu/news/hungarian-pm-laments-european-demographic-decline-announces-family-supporting-measures-budapest-family-summit-61135>) and other events, in addition to having recently overseen the translation of a collection of his work into Hungarian.

Over the course of the interview Dr. Demény, a member of the Friends of Hungary Foundation, discussed his personal background and his experience as a Hungarian refugee studying at Princeton, as well as his views on issues ranging from Europe's demographic decline to a

**system of voting that would give children and the next generation greater weight in political affairs, a concept that is known to this day as “Demény voting.”**

*This interview has been edited for clarity and concision, and translated from the original Hungarian.*



**(<http://hungarytoday.hu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/IMG-3372-e1516805027681.jpg>)**

**How would you introduce yourself?**

I would begin by saying that I earned a Doctorate in Economics from Princeton in 1961, and within this I specialized in demographics and the way they relate to economics.

**When did you move to America?**

Well, I can easily answer this question, since yesterday was the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my arrival in America, with an offer to complete my PhD at Princeton in my pocket. From the very first day I was there in Princeton to study. This lasted from 1957 until 1961, when I received my doctorate.

**What was it like to arrive as a 20-something year-old to completely new surroundings? Was it frightening?**

It was very exciting [laughs]. It wasn't frightening, but it was highly interesting, especially since, even though I could read well in English, I couldn't speak it at all, since I had learned the language exclusively through books.

**How helpful were people? To what extent were you accepted?**

If you are a graduate student at Princeton, they assume that you're a smart person and don't need help. While everyone was very kind and polite, they were also all occupied by their own research. It was a great place, one unlike any other I had experienced before. Earning my PhD was hard work. My original scholarship was for the first year only, meaning that by the end of that year I had to show that I was worthy of continuing my studies at Princeton. Ultimately, I continued to receive scholarships for the rest of my studies.

At the end of my second year I began to specialize in studying population trends and the ways in which they relate to economics. At the end of my second year I began to specialize in studying population trends and the ways in which they relate to economics. I got a job as a population research assistant at the Office of Population research, which, at the time, was the best population research institute in America. My doctorate's theme was already demographics, dealing with how they related to economics.

After receiving my PhD, I received an offer to stay at the university as an Assistant Professor, while simultaneously being offered a formal position at the Office of Population Research as a researcher. I was there for 4 years. This was at the time when the use of computers started becoming more popular, and I learned programming because of this, so that by 1965 my work appeared alongside MC Coleal's, a Princeton professor, in the Princeton University Press. It was an 800-page book, with 90% of it being composed of tables, mortality models, and the age structure for stable populations.

**During your studies how connected were you to professors, and researchers you would eventually work with?**

Exceptionally well. Especially with four professors, who made lasting impressions on me, and who taught me a lot. Two of these were population specialists, Fran Notstein, the director of the institute, and Ensley Cole, the vice-director.

**You were at Princeton for 4 years after graduating?**

Yes. After those 4 years news of my work spread, and I was offered a job at the University of Michigan. This is how I ended up at Ann Arbor, U of M, as an Associate Professor. I also received the position of Deputy Director and Researcher at the local Population Research Institute, which had a good reputation. After a little while I was named a Full Professor, and I received an invitation to Berkely, as Visiting Professor, with the intention of returning to Ann Arbor as a professor. This never came to be, however, because at Berkely I received an offer to go to Hawaii, which had just become an American state, as a Professor of Economics in Honolulu. I offered to start an institute there, which they eagerly accepted, and this is how I founded the East-West Population Institute, which started with one member: me. This institute specialised in the problems of population aging in East Asian countries, as well as parts of the Southeast Asian region.

Of course, I had to recruit a research team, who came partly from East Asia (from Japan, Taiwan and the Philippines). After a few years I had created an outstanding team, having brought people from Australia as well, and the institute began to build up a good reputation. Honolulu was an interesting place, far away from Princeton, far away from Ann Arbor, and far away from Berkely as well. Having had to recruit and build up the program meant that I spent quite a bit of time visiting Asia. These were most definitely interesting years.

**There appeared a Hungarian publication that summarized your work from 1985 to 2015.**

This is what brought me to Budapest for an extended amount of time. I retired one week after my 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, but continued to work in my field. The local institute of population research kindly offered to put together a volume of my published work, which they would publish in Hungarian.



Although I started as a specialist in demographics, as time went on I utilised my speciality less and less. Nevertheless, I had a few publications in this field, including one prepared on behalf of the UN, that dealt with how to create a better statistical picture from poor or missing statistics using analytic techniques.

Getting back on topic though, I dealt more with the economic aspects of population, and especially how they could be affected by politics.

**You have experience with the ebb and flow of population across many societies, how do you see the issue that is Europe's primary challenge, demographic decline? Is there a global remedy for this sort of issue, or must it be considered in terms of a given country's cultural framework? Is there a universal solution?**

The main solutions have to take place on a country-by country basis. These global solutions don't tend to work well, due to the large cultural differences [between different countries]. There were three large international conferences (World Population Congress) in 70's, 80's, and 90's, and I participated as an expert in all three. I presented very critical lectures in all three.

The first one took place in Bucharest, the second in Mexico City, and the third one was held in Cairo. These primarily dealt with how to reduce the so-called population explosion; to find solutions for how to reduce fertility rates in places where it is very high. There aren't good overall solutions for these situations either, or at least this was the opinion I presented at these lectures. This wasn't the accepted political belief at the time; rather, the commonly held belief was that developed nations had a solution to the problem, and that this needed to be exported.

But let us return to the topic of my career in Hawaii, which lasted only 5 years. Because of the success of the institute I founded I received a promising offer to come to New York, where there existed an NGO, the Population Council. They invited me to be the Vice President, and I went back east to New York. This was in 1973.

They wanted to tempt me to come back to New York. The Council had a 'Demographic Division', and they wanted me to be the director, while being vice-president as well. I thought to myself, "If they wanted me that much then I'll be in a good position to make demands." My main wishes were to have a research team investigating population policies, instead of forming a Demographic Division, and to launch a journal, which is something that I felt was extremely necessary. There were already a few journals that dealt with population, but I felt that there needed to be a publication that tied together

academia with policy, where truly interesting things were happening in the world of demographics. They kindly met my demands, and this is how “Population and Development Review” began in 1975. Simultaneously, instead of a Demographic Division, the “Center for Policy studies” was founded.

This truly was a successful endeavour, and for 38 years I was the editor, and very quickly it earned its prestige as a first-rate journal in America. The publication is successful to this very day, and is going on its 44<sup>th</sup> year.

The other endeavour, the Center for Policy Studies, was not successful in the long run. As is often the case, the source of money for developing and maintaining an institution had an impact, meaning that we had to listen the thoughts of people who were financially supporting the institution. Here the case was that the support was pushing a direction that, on one hand did not interest me, and that on the other hand I had did not have a particularly high opinion of. After its initial successes, I spent a good decade fighting for what this institution should do to for the entire Population Council, but in the meantime, the president who had invited me there had retired, and his successor was a president who understood what it takes to receive financial backing, but did not understand much about the subject matter himself. So, I finally resigned as Vice President, and by de facto the Center dissolved, I became a distinguished scholar in the institution, and I continued as editor of the journal, a post I held until my retirement.

### **Are there any publications from this journal which are included in the current Hungarian publication?**

A good amount, but they don't make up the majority. Returning to the publication in Budapest, I received this offer to put together such a volume, and, having the chance to select what I want, made it again clear that I did not want to do expressly work with just demographics and population selection, but to focus on population policy as well. When it was published, it included my publications from 1986, and nothing of my earlier work, which dealt mainly with demographics. It proved to be a lengthier undertaking than I thought it would be originally, because translation itself is not a simple thing. The translator was very enthusiastic and competent in the field of population, but I felt that I had to be involved in the translating so that there would be no misunderstandings.

The book was published in 2015, and took up most of my time for a year and a half. My permanent residency is in America, in Long Island, but my wife and I have not been there for several years now.

There are two things come into play here: one is that I have been asked to participate in many local happenings; conferences, to give advice, to give opinions, so I was very busy after the completion of the publication. The other is that, when a person reaches his 85th birthday, his mobility is naturally not



what it used to be. This applies to me, and even more so to my wife. Air travel in particular is not a pleasant thing when you get older. By default, then we live here in Budapest, and we have a very nice living arrangement here. We live in a very pleasant neighbourhood; it's a very pleasant place. To a certain extent, we are stuck in Budapest, for now, but this is a very pleasant thing. We miss America too, and when a direct flight between Budapest and New York appears then we will likely try it out. Now my children and grandchildren visit me here quite often.



(<http://hungarytoday.hu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/IMG-3380-e1516805124356.jpg>).

**By 2100 it is predicted that Hungary's population will be practically halved, that it will drop down to 5.4 million. Can this trend be stopped, or only slowed down?**

A good question; a difficult question. I must say that in my field of population policy this has become the problem we're increasingly trying to address, partly because it has been a dominant question since the post-war decades, and growing in strength since then. Demographics is especially interested in

this problem in the developing world, where a so-called population explosion has occurred. This meant that the problem of low fertility has been quite neglected. The low level of Hungarian fertility is not a unique phenomenon, it is the case in Europe and in other developed countries, and in many places the situation is even worse than in Hungary.

I have studied the question for a long time, as well as the issue of what role population policy, in the form of state intervention, can play in the process. Population growth depends on three factors from the demographic point of view: fertility levels, the mortality rate, and the rate of immigration. When this low fertility appeared in Western Europe between the two world wars, in Hungary, they began to formulate a solution through stimulating fertility with so-called “pro-natalist” tactics. After the Second World War, there was a temporary “baby boom” that let that solution be forgotten; the consequence of this was that even after the “baby boom”, the population situation seemed safe because they were major cohorts [in demographics this is a group who experienced a common event] that were born after the war.

### **Was the ‘Ratkó era’ part of this phenomenon as well?**

They always refer to Ratkó in Hungary, but I do not like the term, partly because it refers to a rather unpleasant health minister [Anna Ratkó, Hungary’s health minister during the Stalinist dictatorship of Mátyás Rákosi]. But the terms ‘Ratkó’s kids’ and ‘Ratkó’s grandchildren’, these are all part of a general phenomenon that may have been amplified in Hungary, where abortions were strictly prohibited. But I would not attribute the majority of these cohorts to Anna Ratkó.

But returning to the topic of low fertility in Western Europe after the “baby boom”, these stimulated family friendly interventions returned, but not everywhere of course. It is somehow politically “incorrect” for the state to intervene and admit that it is a fertility intervention, and it is accepted rather as a logical component of government assistance programs, in helping mothers avoid financial burden when giving birth, and to have paid leave after birth, to have kindergartens, and family support in various forms.

The effectiveness of these policies has very bad press, and I understand the demographics analysis, and why there’s no great success that can be attributed to it. Of course, the problem here is that we can’t know what would have happened if we didn’t have these interventions at all; perhaps the fertility rate would be even lower. What would happen if they lowered the funding for these policies, or got rid of it altogether? Most likely, there would be a reaction affecting the fertility rate, namely a lowered fertility rate. When these policies become an accepted and expected system, then the government would have a very difficult time backing out of them.

The argument that the increase of these subsidies might be effective still remains. In Hungary, 4.5% of GDP is spent on family support, which is a very high percentage. Compared to Europe there are few rates this high, but one wonders, what if support was raised to 6%? It would most likely have a certain effect.

Housing presents another big problem in Hungary. It is difficult to raise two children in a 60-square-foot apartment, and three are almost unthinkable, especially if needs increase. This is the tendency; though the dominant trend is two-child families, there are more and more families with one child, and even zero-child families, even in the middle class. So a third, or fourth child, which is needed to balance out the trend of single child and zero-child families, is a very difficult problem. Family friendly programs like to concentrate on pushing for third and fourth children, but of course the first two children should also be there. The third child is difficult to bring to life when there is no first and second.

One problem with this is that we are talking about family-friendly measures, but the goal is not only to promote family fertility, but also raising the number of births. So, it's hard to say if providing subsidies only for families is the best course of action, because this is the best way to raise a child, but the number of births also depends on what is happening outside the family. From this perspective, the family is defined as a mother and a child, even if the father is not at present or recorded in the book. So, family and birth number are not exactly the same, but policies are trying to ensure that most births happen within a family.

**You have written that children should be given the right to vote as well.**

I advised that every citizen should be given the right to vote. Every citizen means those people who were born in Hungary, are for all intents and purposes Hungarian citizens, and yet have no influence on the direction of politics. Children born today, or 5, or 10 years ago, will be alive for the majority of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But those people who are around my age, or even 20 years younger than I, won't be around anymore, and their entire life perspective is a shortened life perspective, and that is reflected in their thoughts on politics and general welfare. Their main interests are ensuring their pensions. But their pensions' security also depends on how many of them are there, and the growth of the working-age population. If they try to fix this situation by increasing the number of births, those new children will enter the labor-force 20, 22, 25 years later. when these pensioners will be in a different world, so it is not surprising that they are not interested in such measures. As a result of past population trends, these pensioners control a plurality of the vote, and will eventually acquire a majority sooner or later.

This can be partially remedied by giving every child voting rights, which would be exercised by their parents, or rather by their mothers. Their mothers would vote in their stead. Is a mother capable of this? I think so, because they would be reminded, “think of your child’s future.”

On top of all this, it would add a certain distinction for having given birth. If they have given birth to 3 children then, they would count as 4 votes.

**You also mentioned the idea of tailoring pensions according to how many children people have had throughout their life.**

This policy recommendation has a greater value and more influence, although this would be a long-term thing, and wouldn’t bring immediate results to the fertility rates. The size of their pension would depend on the size of the population of the labour-force. This depends on how many children someone has nurtured. Whoever contributed more to the growth of the labour-force, has had an effect on the country’s economy, and the amount available for retirement funds. This individual who raised more children is deserving of compensation, especially looking at the money needed to raise multiple children and the sacrifices they needed to make, besides the money they put aside for retirement and savings; it’s difficult to imagine what is needed to have a large family.

**Would those who adopt children benefit from this policy as well?**

Figuring out the parameters of this is another thing on its own, but I think so, yes. In all respects, for these populace-stimulating measures, it is very important to communicate simply and what someone would receive for behaving differently than they might have planned. There should be no need to hire a lawyer who will investigate what kind of compensation an individual is eligible for and whether they are eligible for it, and so on. This is also a problem for family support systems, which often have too much fine print about who is eligible for what, and how it relates to their work, and so on. It needs to be easily communicable to have an impact.

**A year and a half ago, one of your publications appeared in English, in which you expressed skepticism at the role immigrants play in demographic issues. As a man who lived in America, where Catholics and Chinese alike were formerly considered to be “dangerous”, do you consider it a possibility that in the long run assimilation would take place?**

America's genius, in terms of assimilation, is far beyond that of Europe's genius. It is indeed a country whose historical traditions show that this was ultimately an immigrant nation, and that it has successfully assimilated the various waves of immigration.

There is an asymmetry in all this: the population problems of developing countries will not be solved by emigration, because only a small fraction of the population might conceivably leave, while the capacity of countries receiving immigrants to accept them is finite. How finite is it? Well, Merkel originally said that, if there is civil war, then the gates of Germany are open to those war-torn countries. Today she says, "Such things will not happen again."

It's good that it will not happen again, because Syria is a tiny little state. What if there were a civil war in Egypt, or Nigeria, where hundreds of millions of people live? Obviously, even if they say refugees are welcome, there are limits to this. But what these boundaries should be depends on what the population that is living in the country wants. If refugees from far away are not enthusiastically accepted, then these boundaries must be aligned for that. It is the fundamental right of every country to determine how many people they wish to permanently admit.

### **How definite of an answer can you give to the question of whether the demographic decline of Hungarian society can be stopped?**

The decline is inevitable, because the population's structure is such that it is built-in. If today the fertility rate would go up to 2.1%, then a net decrease would occur at occur at the same time, regardless. For there to be a balanced population structure in the long-term, and for it to be stable, the fertility rate must be at 2.1%. In regards to if this is doable, all I can say is that we have every reason to try to make it a reality.

Reporting by Balázs Horváth and Tom Szigeti

Translated by Nagy Edward Gergely

Photos by Tom Szigeti

## POPULATION AND THE INVISIBLE HAND\*

**Paul Demeny**

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The essence of the population problem, if there is a problem, is that individual decisions with respect to demographic acts do not add up to a recognized common good—that choices at the individual level are not congruent with the collective interest. A disjunction between the aggregate outcome of individual demographic decisions and what members of a society, if well informed about their own interests, would find to their liking is, of course, not a logical necessity. Even if there is no mechanism that assures harmony, sheer good luck may bring us a state close enough to it to make the problem not worth being exercised about. Since the late 1950s, however, there has been fairly wide agreement among students of population, especially those looking at the developing world, that luck has been an unreliable ally and is likely to remain so, that the disjunction is indeed pervasive and important, both as a description of contemporary reality and as a continuing prospect. These conclusions seem to have been borne out by increasingly accurate observation of existing demographic patterns and by assessments of the significance of these patterns for the welfare of societies affected by them. The assessments were often rather casual and exhibited an unfortunate penchant for reaching the expected conclusions a little too quickly. Nevertheless, they were recognized as persuasive and were left largely unchallenged.

For a problem to be worthy of attention, there must be a possibility of a remedy, if only partial. Further, to be acceptable, remedies must offer benefits greater than their costs, and greater by a margin that compares favorably with alternative uses of the resources expended. From the early 1960s onward, such remedies have seemed to be at hand to tackle what was recognized as the chief contemporary population problem: the problem of high fertility. Improved methods of contraception gave some promise of a technological fix. Beyond that, policy measures designed to shape fertility behavior were increasingly applied. They included measures to deliberately change people's values, manipulation of relevant economic and social incentives, and in some instances a direct command mandating conformity to standards set by the political process. In line with the dominant statist orientation of development policy in much of the less developed world, governments dissatisfied with demographic patterns for economic reasons often came to formulate aggregate population targets—such as the size of the total population, rate of growth, or overall fertility level. Once targets were set, governments sought to translate them into the requisite patterns of micro-level demographic behavior by applying a suitable mix of population policy measures.

Today these observations are, I think, still valid, but they need much more emphatic qualification than was the case just a few years ago. Since the early 1980s a substantial shift has occurred in the balance of views by knowledgeable observers concerning each of the factors mentioned: the prospective dynamics of global

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\* Presented as the Presidential Address at the Annual Meeting of the Population Association of America, San Francisco, California, April 3–5, 1986.



population change, the importance of those dynamics for human welfare, and the efficacy or acceptability of some of the population policy measures applied or contemplated. Thus far the shift has been registered primarily in the scientific and ideological domains, with little change in policies and programs. This is not surprising. If past experience in other fields is a reliable guide in this matter—and it undoubtedly is—the policy and program effects will follow shifts in positive analysis and normative thinking with a time lag.

Controversies that now envelop policy-related topics in the field of population include articulations of viewpoints and propositions that significantly differ from the earlier dominant orthodoxy. The various lines of attack on the orthodoxy converge in a newly optimistic assessment of the population problem as I defined it. In the extreme formulations, the problem is disposed of entirely. The more typical revisionist views, however, merely put the problem in its presumed deserved place: several drawers below its former niche. Divergences between individual and social interest concerning demographic behavior do occur, according to this revisionist view, but they are narrow, confined, and sporadic: on balance they do not matter very much and can sanction only the mildest and lowest-cost policy measures. Such measures, in fact, are apt to be desirable in their own right, or they might turn out to be more easily justified on grounds other than macrodemographic considerations.

This happy banishment of the population problem is not credited to persistent good luck. It appeals to a perceived systemic attribute. The best way, I think, to characterize the rationale for the new optimism is to invoke that classic metaphor of Adam Smith, the invisible hand. The revisionists believe that the invisible hand can work, indeed has been working, its magic not only in the ordinary marketplace but also in shaping population processes. In the marketplace it brings us efficiently and reliably our daily bread and butter. In matters demographic, it elicits, for all of us, patterns of behavior from our fellow men that similarly best serve our interests.

In what follows I propose to discuss the validity of this view. I will find it wanting. Interwoven with my discussion, based in good part on early formulations of the underlying issues, will be comments on the contemporary policy agenda and the debates that surround it.

It is not my intent to delve into the history of the idea of the invisible hand. A search for first appearances in scientific contexts, including the first appearance of the metaphor itself, would lead us back to obscure 17th-century authors. Humanistic and literary antecedents can be traced back to even earlier times. Nor is it my ambition to offer an exegesis of sacred Smithian and neighboring classical texts. But consideration of Smith's pristine and immensely influential formulation affords the most economical entry into discussion of the relevance of the concept of the invisible hand to population issues, including those of contemporary population policy.

In 1759, in a passage in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith spoke of men "led by an invisible hand . . . [who] without intending it, without knowing it, advance the interest of the society, and afford means to the multiplication of species" (1759/1976:304). The locus classicus, however, is in *The Wealth of Nations*. It is possible today, I understand, to get a Ph.D. in any of the social sciences without spending much time reading Smith—but not perhaps without encountering the following famous paragraph:

[E]very individual . . . neither intends to promote the public interest, nor knows how much he is promoting it. . . . [H]e intends only his own security . . . his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his

intention. Nor is it always the worse for the society that it was no part of it. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it. (Smith 1776/1937:423)

Thus Smith, with a few masterful strokes, outlines a social system characterized by spontaneous order, as distinct from an arrangement of deliberate human design. Such a spontaneous order, in F. A. Hayek's words, "is the product of the action of many," a cybernetic order, grown not made, "the outcome of a process of evolution whose results nobody foresaw or designed" (1973:37). These concepts are spelled out with great clarity in another crucial passage in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. I quote Smith's strictures on planners of his time, and for that matter on planners of all times:

The man of system . . . is apt to be very wise in his own conceit, and is often so enamoured with the supposed beauty of his own ideal plan of government, that he cannot suffer the smallest deviation from any part of it. He goes on to establish it completely and in all its parts, without any regard either to the great interests or to the strong prejudices which may oppose it: he seems to imagine that he can arrange the different members of a great society with as much ease as the hand arranges the different pieces upon a chess-board; he does not consider that . . . in the great chess-board of human society, every single piece has a principle of motion of its own, altogether different from that which the legislature might choose to impress upon it. (Smith 1759/1976:380–381)

There is an aesthetic beauty in the self-regulating order described by Smith. Like the Newtonian system that dispensed with the need to appeal to God's will to keep the planets in motion, markets coordinate a multitude of economic actors, often unknown to each other and physically distant, without conscious plan, regulation, or enforcement.

There are more weighty considerations, however, favoring the market as a coordinating economic mechanism. First is its tendency to protect the members of the society from the political hazards inherent in centralized command over the economy. Second, as the theoretical elaborations of the market system show, and as modern economic history convincingly demonstrates, given the requisite institutional frame—secure property rights and free competition—the system is apt to give us more material goods than do alternative systems: more meat, more bread, and more beer.

We can do without the planners, Smith tells us, and to solve economic problems, we need not rely on those scarce commodities of love and altruism either:

It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages. Nobody but a beggar chuses to depend chiefly upon the benevolence of his fellow-citizens. . . . [I]t is by treaty, by barter, and by purchase, that we obtain from one another the greater part of those mutual good offices which we stand in need of. (Smith 1776/1937:14–15)

The insistent hammering on this last point, or variations thereof, by the American delegation to the United Nations' International Conference on Population held in Mexico City in 1984 caused enormous irritation in and outside the conference chamber and was widely condemned as a diversionary tactic. Yet no one tried to refute the argument, possibly because its validity is now more widely recognized than was suggested by the standard rhetoric that dominates such gatherings. Nor



was the pertinence of the argument to the subject matter at hand challenged. It could not have been: to the extent that population issues are issues of material poverty, the question of how to get more meat, more bread, and, perhaps, more beer for more people obviously should command major attention in any comprehensive discussion of population policies.

But what is the outcome of the invisible hand—an uncoordinated social process based on the self-seeking actions of a multitude of independent agents—as applied to population itself? In trying to tackle this question, logical deduction is no longer possible: we are at sea. There is no direct equivalent to the pleasing claim that the market will give us “more bread”—pleasing, that is, if we keep in mind that when the consumer is sated with bread, the market easily performs the requisite transformation of bread into umbrellas, compact disk players, or second homes, in response to his sovereign wishes.

Presumably what the spontaneous social process brings us is not an unqualified “more people.” But is it the “right” number of people? The issue is not how many children couples choose for themselves: we can take it as axiomatic that they will choose what is best for them, given their circumstances. There is no escape from this assumption if we wish to avoid crass paternalism, no basis for second-guessing other people’s choices or for sitting in judgment over other people’s preferences. The issue is how each of us would like *others* to behave with respect to demographic choices for our own good, however we choose to define it. But where do we go to barter or purchase from our fellow men demographic behavior that pleases us? How can we assure, for example, that we and our children do not find ourselves living in a society that is already populous yet will double its size in the next 20 years, or in one that is in the process of precipitous demographic decline? Not that any particular population figure or trajectory is likely to have some intrinsic appeal for us. But if well informed, we might conclude that on balance either of those extreme alternatives, or for that matter milder variants of them, would exert a nefarious influence on things that do matter to us, to our children, or, altruistically, to the society in which we live and about whose welfare we care. If so, logically we would also conclude that getting our fellow citizens to modify their demographic behavior is worth some sacrifice on our part. But alas, there are no Smithian markets offering alternative macrodemographic patterns to individuals who wish to shop for them. Like the production of bread, the component of one’s welfare that may be traceable to the prevailing patterns of demographic behavior is governed by the self-interest of one’s fellow citizens. Unlike the production of bread, however, there is no flexible mechanism in this sphere by which other people’s self-interest is continually made responsive to our needs.

What we are confronting is a generalized prisoner’s dilemma. Demographic processes are the result of a very large number of uncoordinated individual decisions: the contracting and enforcement costs that would be incurred by each citizen’s arranging a mutually beneficial deal with the perhaps millions of other individual actors are obviously prohibitive. Even before that, so are the information costs that would be required for each citizen to evaluate properly his stake in the demographic patterns prevailing in the rest of the society. Even though agreed-upon modifications of individual demographic decisions could be potentially possible—those who would have to give up something they value could be compensated by those who gain, leaving everyone better off—the inability of private markets to mediate the necessary bargains bars the possibility of improvement.

The characteristics I have just noted render population processes, and most notably fertility behavior, a legitimate object of attention for collective and, in

particular, governmental action. When socially advantageous modification of demographic behavior is beyond the capacity of private markets to provide, it assumes the character of a public good that must be acquired, if at all, through the political marketplace. Demographic change becomes a matter for public concern whenever it can be plausibly assumed that such modifications are both desirable and possible.

There is a fundamental point of principle involved here. Students of population should never tire of reiterating it, much as economists need not feel embarrassed by their forever explaining the concepts of demand and supply and how these are affected by price. The force of the principle is in no way undercut by objections that dispute its practical import with reference to particular historical situations. Heeding such objections would merely short-circuit the process of thinking about and trying to design social innovations that promise an escape from the prisoner's dilemma.

We must thus bear in mind that the workings of the invisible hand are not necessarily always for the better, not necessarily toward improvement. It is easier to appreciate this proposition by contemplating processes whereby the outcomes of a spontaneous order are unqualified "bads." In population change "goods" and "bads" tend to exist together in a tightly wrapped bundle; polar cases are seldom observed. But consider the spread of a contagious disease—say AIDS—or that textbook example of pollution, the littered beach. The properties of a self-governing process are still there, but it takes a heroic mental effort to admire the aesthetic beauty of the evolving spontaneous order. The man who despoils a beach is likely to prefer a clean beach to a littered one; but his implicit utility calculus tells him, correctly, that given the expected behavior of others, the inconvenience of his not littering the beach is greater than would be the value of his particular contribution to keeping it clean.

Smith did not discuss such processes of the invisible hand. One might surmise that Scotland's beautiful beaches were never too inviting for bathers and strollers. We know that Scotsmen were then also short of plastic cups, aluminum soft-drink cans, and Sunday papers that weigh four pounds. Perhaps most of all, the ratio between beach miles and population was comfortably high; when *The Wealth of Nations* was written, Scotland's population was well below two million, and few tourists and oilmen were around. Thus opportunity, income, technology, and population size combined to make the pollution problem a remote one, not worth bothering about as a qualifier to the beneficial workings of the invisible hand.

Population, on which Smith made numerous insightful comments, was a different matter; but to Smith, excessive demographic growth was hardly a problem. Like his good friend David Hume, Smith took it for granted, erroneously, that the populousness of Europe was greater in ancient times than in his own. He was aware of the high mortality affecting the contemporary European population as a whole and the disadvantaged in particular. "It is not uncommon," he reported, "in the Highlands of Scotland for a mother who has borne twenty children not to have two alive" (1776/1937:79). Population in Europe was, in his view, growing at a snail's pace, if at all:

In Great Britain, and most other European countries [it is] not supposed to double in less than five hundred years. In the British colonies in North America, it has been found, that they double in twenty or five and twenty years. Nor in the present times is this increase principally owing to the continual importation of new inhabitants, but to the great multiplication of the species. (Smith 1776/1937:70)

The estimate of Europe's growth was too low but correctly reflected the fact that the margin of births over deaths was narrow and precarious. North America, in contrast,

was thriving and near-empty, permitting rapid growth: a happy state of affairs in anyone's estimation. "The progressive state," Smith commented, "is in reality the cheerful and the hearty state to all the different orders of the society. The stationary is dull; the declining melancholy" (1776/1937:81). The demographic-economic configurations Smith was aware of thus were not the sort to lead him to explore the implications of population growth for development. Smith's economic doctrines remain fresh and relevant to solving the problems of today's world, but his design for society's institutional structure was worked out without taking into account the possibility that the invisible hand might bring about unwanted population patterns.

It is, however, not altogether fanciful to suggest that had he been observing a demographic pattern combining an already large population base with rapid growth—say, American rates of natural increase applying to Europe's population, then barely over 100 million—he might have noted the inadequacy of barter and purchase as means to secure a happy outcome and turned instead to the third coordinating mechanism of human society, which he called "treaty." In a free society, can political arrangements be found that reconcile demographic conflicts if such conflicts arise? Smith did not ask the question, as he encountered no problem.

It took the more mournful disposition of Malthus to discern that society might run into trouble owing to humankind's procreative proclivities. Some two decades after *The Wealth of Nations* appeared, the young Malthus pronounced his "second postulatam" of the principle of population. Fertility was the result, he asserted, of the "passion between the sexes"—a passion, he added, that "will remain nearly in its present state" (1798/1966:11). This was a romantic but thoroughly erroneous theory: it implied, for instance, as Kingsley Davis has observed, that if sex and procreation could be separated—as they can be today with ease—fertility would fall to zero.

Malthus, however, soon had better ideas about fertility change. The clearest and most compelling exposition of his mature views can be found in a passage in his *Principles of Political Economy*, an 1820 tract little read by demographers, or by anyone else today. If economic progress opens up an improvement, what will be the demographic response? asked Malthus. He distinguished two possibilities. One was a rapid increase in population, "in which case, the high wages are chiefly spent in the maintenance of large and frequent families." This was the demographic outcome that imparted a dominant pessimistic coloration to Malthusian population theory. But there was a second, altogether different and happier possibility: "a decided improvement in the modes of subsistence, and the conveniences and comforts enjoyed, without a proportionate acceleration in the rate of increase."

What were the causes of these different responses? Malthus identified them as "the different habits existing among the people of different countries and at different times." The first result was linked to "all the circumstances which contribute to depress the lower classes of people, which make them unable or unwilling to reason from the past to the future and ready to acquiesce for the sake of present gratification in a very low standard of comfort and respectability." The second, felicitous result was linked to "all the circumstances which tend to elevate the lower classes of society, which make them approach the nearest to beings who 'look before and after,' and who, consequently, cannot acquiesce patiently in the thought of depriving themselves and their children of the means of being respectable, virtuous and happy."

But description is not enough. We must also ask the question: what are those circumstances and how can they be achieved? Is there, in other words, also a moral for population policy?

Earlier I referred to the Smithian prescription for rapid economic growth in less developed countries advocated by the American delegation at the Mexico City conference. The Americans also broadcast a second message there, equally controversial and ill received, a message directly bearing on population growth. Free markets and political liberty, it asserted, will bring not only more bread but also lower birth rates.

It is ironic that this thesis was regarded by those who spelled it out as an anti-Malthusian manifesto, and branded by those who disliked it as anti-Malthusian posturing. The descriptions are absurd. The thesis, in fact, is quintessential, mature Malthus, even though his original formulation lost some of its forcefulness and elegance when translated to modern idiom. I quote Malthus again:

Among the circumstances which contribute to the character first described [dissipation of economic gains through high fertility], the most efficient will be found to be despotism, oppression, and ignorance; among those which contribute to the latter character [rising standards of living through lower birth rates], civil and political liberty, and education.

Of all the causes which tend to encourage prudent habits among the lower classes of society, the most essential is unquestionably civil liberty. No people can be much accustomed to form plans for the future who do not feel assured that their industrious exertions, while fair and honourable, will be allowed to have free scope; and that the property which they either possess or may acquire, will be secured to them by a known code of just laws impartially administered. But it has been found by experience that civil liberty cannot be permanently secured without political liberty. Consequently political liberty becomes almost equally essential. (Malthus 1820:250–251)

Not until Ludwig von Mises addressed this question again, 129 years later in *Human Action* (1949:663–669), can one find a comparably clear statement of the claim that economic freedom and political liberty lead to low fertility. The reappearance of this Malthusian thesis in 1984 in Mexico City is an uncommonly convincing illustration of Keynes's point about the power of ideas.

Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back. (Keynes 1936:383)

I will not digress here to try to evaluate the specifics of Malthus's thesis; that would take a speech of Gorbachevian dimensions. Suffice it to say that those who summarily dismissed it as a delusion in Mexico City and thereafter—assuming all the time that the thesis was dreamed up by Senator James Buckley and his advisors in the summer of 1984—were certainly wrong. History's testimony suggests that there is a great deal of truth to it. But of course, history affords us no controlled experiments; in comparing situations other things are never equal. But are seemingly glaring examples that run counter to the thesis enough to destroy it?

If Malthus had meant to say, *inter alia*, that noncapitalist societies are doomed to breed themselves into a state of overpopulation, he would obviously have been wrong. For one thing, if there was a tendency toward such an outcome, the regulation of population growth might not be left to the invisible hand. Sixty years after Malthus's *Principles*, Engels, in a letter to Kautsky, considered the population problem and commented:

There is, of course, the abstract possibility that the number of people will become so great that limits will have to be set to their increase. But if at some stage communist society finds itself obliged to regulate the production of human beings, just as it has already come to

regulate the production of things, it will be precisely this society, and this society alone, which can carry this out without difficulty. (Engels 1881/1953:120)

That estimate of the ability of a communist state to regulate population was no doubt correct. Malthus's rejoinder would have been, however, the one he gave in his *Encyclopaedia Britannica* article: "Prudence cannot be enforced by laws without a great violation of natural liberty and a great risk of producing more evil than good" (1830/1953:155). This is a good enough answer to Engels and should be a good enough answer to a benevolent despot today, deciding, in the name of collective welfare, to legislate "prudence." But it also reveals a fundamental weakness in the Malthusian conception of the population problem at large.

Why was Malthus in favor of prudence to begin with? Clearly he thought that people are happier if they are comfortable and well fed, and he felt, like so many presidents and prime ministers in Asia and Africa today, that they could be more comfortable and better fed if they chose to have fewer children. But this is a paternalistic view of things, a position inconsistent with Malthus's own fundamental philosophy. The question is how do people themselves feel. Granted, we must assume that, other things equal, they prefer more comfort. But if they have to choose, might they not actually prefer more children and less comfort? Many people obviously do. In fact, any couple, certainly any woman, who ever had a wanted child has felt that way. How can one frown on such preferences and arrogate to oneself the right to set norms prescribing what people ought to feel? In 1755 Richard Cantillon set the correct example on what an economist should say about this matter, as long as people are seen as responsible for their own welfare and only their own welfare:

It is . . . a question outside my subject whether it is better to have a great multitude of Inhabitants, poor and badly provided, than a smaller number, much more at their ease: a million who consume the produce of 6 acres per head or 4 million who live on the produce of an Acre and a half. (Cantillon 1755/1931:85)

Malthus, a firm believer in the invisible hand, in effect assumed that people are full masters of their fate, acting in isolation, and that one way they can improve their material standing is by exercising prudent judgment when making choices, including choices in demographic matters. In this, his approach was somewhat like that of the average practitioner of the new home economics. In that framework of analysis, the population problem, to give an American-flavored example, can be grasped by beholding the sovereign consumer, or perhaps the sovereign consuming couple, contemplating choices. The choices come with price tags attached to them, determined in a competitive market, prices over which the consumers have no control. Our couple has to answer questions like this: Shall we have steak tonight, or fly to the Bahamas on a package tour tomorrow, or have a baby nine months hence?

As long as the consumer is properly informed, for a new home economist in a properly scientific mood, one choice is as good as any other. Malthus, in a normative mood, hoped that people would prefer steaks to children, or I should say to sex. Armed with information about opportunity costs, the home economist can make predictions about the way choices are likely to go. With recourse to more austere reasoning, so, as we just saw, did Malthus.

Inspired by his invisible mentors, Senator Buckley was right to suggest that the free market can bring developing countries steak and package tours sooner than alternative economic policies would; although he wisely did not delve too deeply into the question of how soon is soon in, say, Nigeria. He was also right in suggesting that the

success of the free market is likely to shift choices away from children, although it was even wiser of him not to inquire how soon that shift might occur and how far it would go. After all, in the 1950s did not rich and free Americans, enjoying an expanding array of market-provided consumer goods, opt for a large number of children in preference to other earthly pleasures? Remember, too, that the baby boom came to America after nearly a century and a half of steady fertility decline. Might not Nigerians, enjoying the blessings of the free market, exhibit tastes more like those of Eisenhower-era Americans than, say, those of contemporary Swedes? Indeed they might, although the World Bank tells them—a daunting piece of information—that even if they now proceed forthwith toward replacement-level fertility, reach it in a few decades, and then remain wedded to the two-child family forever after, Nigeria's population will still grow sixfold and settle down somewhere above half a billion people.

Contemplating such wayward behavior might have saddened Malthus, would surprise Senator Buckley, and almost certainly will displease successive Nigerian presidents anxious about their country's standing in the international league tables on per capita income. But such reactions would be entirely moot. Preference for children over steaks in and by itself constitutes no population problem. A population problem exists when *my* preference for children diminishes *your* access to steak. Or to use an example perhaps more apposite in the United States, a population problem exists when your preference for not having children endangers my claim for secure pension rights. We have a population problem, in other words, when externalities are attached to demographic behavior.

That is a problem the invisible hand can solve only by accident. The problem arises when the market signals that condition individual demographic acts fail to reward behavior that not only benefits the actor but also confers benefits on others and fail to exact a penalty from the actor when his behavior harms the welfare of others. Certain institutional arrangements can diminish the severity of this syndrome. That is likely to be the case when institutions are the product of a long evolution during which socioeconomic conditions changed gradually. Often, though by no means always, institutional arrangements most hospitable to the smooth operation of private markets also tend to internalize the external effects of demographic behavior. But short of good luck, the pervasive and multifarious, if typically indirect, influence demographic change exerts on all aspects of the social and economic system virtually guarantees that externalities generated by demographic behavior are present and significant in any society, particularly under conditions of rapid socioeconomic change.

Neither Smith nor, remarkably, Malthus, those two great academic scribblers whose ghosts hovered over Senator Buckley in the conference hall at Mexico City, articulated this problem.

An explanation of the possible failure of the invisible hand in demographic matters and a formulation of the population problem in terms of a flaw in the institutional structure of society were first given by W. F. Lloyd, an Oxford don, in an essay published in 1833. Lloyd, a mathematician as well as an economist, examined the motivations underlying demographic behavior in a society so constituted "as to diffuse the effects of individual acts throughout the community at large, instead of appropriating them to the individuals, by whom they are respectively committed." This was a deliberately extreme model, one in which none of the costs of demographic behavior are internalized, but a model providing great analytic insights. Lloyd commented:

Prudence is a selfish virtue; and where the consequences are to fall on the public, the prudent man determines his conduct, by the comparison, of the present pleasure with his share of the future ill, and the present sacrifice with his share of the future benefit. This share, in the multitude of a large society, becomes evanescent; and hence, in the absence of any countervailing weight, the conduct of each person is determined by the consideration of the present alone. The present good is chosen; the present evil is refused . . . [T]he effect is, that, though the reasoning faculty is in full force, and each man can clearly foresee the consequences of his actions, yet the conduct is the same as if that faculty had no existence. (Lloyd 1833/1968:20–21)

From this model Lloyd drew an inference of key significance for any consideration of matters of population policy:

[T]he simple fact of a country being overly populous . . . is not, of itself, sufficient evidence that the fault lies in the people themselves, or a proof of the absence of a prudential disposition. The fault may rest, not with them as individuals, but with the constitution of the society, of which they form part. (Lloyd 1833/1968:22–23)

Not until Garrett Hardin (1968) addressed this question again 135 years later, in his "Tragedy of the commons," do we find an equally clear formulation of the population problem.

To escape the predicament described by Lloyd, society must reform its constitution. That is a difficult task, but it is not beyond the power of human ingenuity. Robinson Crusoe has no such problem, even if we grant him a wife. On Crusoe's island, man and woman are faced with nature, not with fellow humans. They can do as they please. If the island is not of postage-stamp size, they would, however, be best served by simply heeding the Biblical injunction, originally issued to a world population of two people: be fruitful and multiply. But if Friday also shows up on the island, accompanied by Papagena, we have a society and, with it, potential constraints on reproductive freedom. Smithian barter, facilitated by face-to-face communication, will easily establish the mutually agreeable rules of behavior in the demographic domain. Unless the rules are successfully internalized into values, however, population growth will soon make informal market-based demographic controls hopelessly inefficient. And if circumstances change, internalized values themselves may become a hindrance in keeping demographic behavior in line with the best interests of the islanders. This because values tend to adjust only sluggishly.

What the great society on Crusoe's island needs—and I use the term "great society" as defined by Smith, not by President Lyndon Johnson—is a constitution: an explicit agreement embodied in law, on what the rules of the game are, including an explicit agreement on how those rules can be changed, if so desired. It would be idle to speculate about what a constitution on Crusoe's now-populous island would say about demographic behavior. To prescribe what it ought to say would be outright inadmissible: that is up to the islanders themselves. One can venture the observation, however, that if the island is small, the constitution would be foolish to enshrine the right for each family to determine the number of children they want. (I assume, of course, that the island is too far away from the rest of the world either to export its demographic surplus or to receive unilateral transfers from the outside.) No moral problem arises here: there are no stone tablets handed down from a mountaintop on which such a right is engraved. The rules are manmade—constructed by humans, acting in their own interest, using their intelligence. Morality consists of observing the rules: abiding by the law freely agreed upon. Thus it is clear that Malthus's assertion that prudence cannot be enforced by law without violating liberty is

untenable as a general proposition. Liberty has many dimensions. Some of its determinants are in conflict with each other; maximizing liberty always entails trade-offs.

One hesitates to suggest, even in retrospect, that Senator Buckley should have drawn inspiration from yet another source in addressing the Mexico City meeting. Yet the comments just made suggest that it would have been good and proper at Mexico City to have invoked a third ghost, that of James Madison. The message derived from this third ancient source is the message of the Federalist Papers: institutions that improve everyone's lot not only can be the result of the invisible-hand process of blind evolution but can also be deliberately constructed. This message would have been at least as pertinent for the subject at hand as were the ideas of Smith and Malthus.

To object that Madison had little or nothing to say about population would be missing the point. Madison's message is one of philosophy and process, not specific content or end result. One hundred ninety-nine years ago, the United States had fewer than four million inhabitants. Had the U.S. had, say, a billion people and been headed, moreover, toward a predictable near-term doubling of that size, the Federalist Papers would probably have given the question of population growth, and the question of what Americans might do about it, a great deal of attention.

This serves to underline the fact that the distinctive American and, in general, Western demographic experience colors our views on matters of population policy. It constrains our capacity to understand, to sympathize with, and to assist with good advice those sovereign states seeking constitutional-legal approaches to regulate demographic behavior. After all, we did not need such an approach or, at any rate, decided that we could afford the luxury of doing without it.

Indeed, Lloyd's observations on the association of the population problem with the constitution of society and the implications of this for structural reform sank into oblivion as soon as they were pronounced. The workings of the Smithian invisible hand generated economic growth that on the whole easily surpassed the rate of population growth. In Europe outmigration to the new continents provided a demographic safety valve, yet the year 1800 population of 145 million (excluding Russia) doubled by 1900. Today it is nearly 500 million. Population in the New World grew much faster. According to the conventional interpretation, the Malthusian devil was exorcised: population growth was accommodated at rising standards of living.

It is easy to interpret this process as man's triumph over nature. Ruefully, one can also reflect on the might-have-beens. Perhaps under different institutional arrangements regulating population growth, the opportunities offered by scientific-technological progress and by growth-enhancing economic markets could have given us a true golden age civilization. In retrospect, the process that brought us to where we are is certified as optimal in the Panglossian sense. It is the best world we have; no better world is available. Still, the impression is overwhelming that history is a story of unrealized potentials that could have been within our grasp.

I will close my discussion with some brief comments on the role of the invisible hand and the institutional setting in shaping population change in two contrasting, if stylized, situations: those of the low-fertility West and those of the still high-fertility developing world. I will also briefly note some implications of my comments for the direction that thinking on population policy ought to take.

Post-Adam Smith Western economic development long proceeded under the guidance of the invisible hand. The end of mercantilist controls and the extension of economic freedoms brought with them increasing prosperity. But even in the



economic sphere, *laissez faire* has its limits. For instance, keeping a slice of the week out of the control of the market could not be accomplished by the invisible hand: that required an institutional arrangement—an agreement that we do not work on Sundays, enforced by law. Minor qualifications to this rule—through the repeal of blue laws and by permitting creeping encroachment of the market on formerly protected domains—provide a homely illustration of the invisible hand at work and the nature of the trade-offs involved. We can now buy screwdrivers and socks on the Sabbath, hence economic freedom and, no doubt, our gross national product have increased. But something not easily measurable is lost in the texture and rhythm of life, and we end up not necessarily better off.

In the social sphere, deference to the invisible hand in the West has increased in some areas. Sumptuary laws no longer tell us how we are supposed to dress. The institution of marriage, once legally safeguarded as a commitment for life, now resembles an ordinary economic contract that can be terminated on relatively short notice. But freedom of choice, somewhat inexplicably, is still overruled with respect to the number of spouses one can legally have at any one time. The law enforces monogamy instead of leaving the matter to the invisible hand.

But in addition to the refusal of such pockets of seemingly antiquated institutions to disappear, successful encroachment by the market on other domains also turned out to be a two-way street. As invisible-hand economic processes extended their sway over larger and larger spheres of life, they also tended to generate undesirable byproducts, hence a need for corrective action through the overt hand of the state. At first such corrections were of limited scope, aiming to help special groups who were sucked into the economic machine, or squeezed out of it, against the better judgment of society. Hence legislation banning child labor or extending a safety net to catch those unable to find an economic role. In some other domains it was recognized that the invisible hand did not perform at all satisfactorily: to mitigate the ills of urban congestion, zoning laws had to be adopted; and to make smallpox immunization effective, freedom of choice had to be overruled.

Once made, however, such exceptions to the overall bias toward decentralized market processes tended to grow. Democratic politics easily turns into interest-group politics once the potentials of state action to generate uncompensated transfers of income are discovered. Thus the protective and redistributive state has emerged, extending an increasingly massive influence over large areas of economic activity and reaching into corners of life formerly in the private domain.

The significance of such developments for my topic is obvious. Capitalist development in the West ostensibly left most facets of demographic behavior to the individual and to the individual couple. Micro-level sovereignty concerning fertility decisions was explicitly elevated to the rank of a fundamental human right, protected from social control by the state. But major influences that condition individual choices are, of course, determined by forces outside individual control: how these influences change came to depend on the particular blend of the invisible-hand-driven economic system and the overlay of the overt-hand modification of that system by the modern welfare state.

There is no need for me to demonstrate the validity of this proposition. Elaborations of the theme are a staple of demographic transition theory. I will simply list four areas in which this influence has major consequences for fertility behavior, hence for population growth.

One has to do with the decreasing economic benefit and the increasing direct cost of children to parents. Declining labor force participation of children is partly inherent in the tendency of the invisible-hand-driven modern economy to require a

large and lengthy investment in human capital before entry to the labor force and partly mandated by collective decision. Growing direct costs of raising children have been counteracted, but only in part, by the collective shouldering of the costs of education, one of the most conspicuous institutional innovations of modern times.

A second area of fertility-affecting influences has to do with the rising opportunity cost of children. Removal of institutionally enforced discrimination against women gave greater sway to invisible-hand processes, which, reinforced by the weakening of the institution of marriage, in turn led to greatly increased female labor force participation rates. Motherhood may be intrinsically far more challenging and satisfying as an occupation than, say, installing hubcaps on an assembly line. One of these occupations is paid, however, and the other is not; one provides a prospect of economic security, the other does not.

A third area has to do with the socialization of old-age support, now well advanced in all Western societies. Instead of leaving it to individuals to provide for their security in old age, the redistributive state transfers funds between two collective entities: from those working to those retired. One way of providing for old age is through raising a family. The institution of the welfare state in effect severs this connection, with predictable results for fertility behavior.

A fourth area has to do with the confluence of demographic change and political institutions that affect the pattern of income redistribution by the state. In a democracy operating on the one-adult, one-vote principle, population aging tends to shift political power toward the aged with consequences that were described by Samuel Preston (1984) in a memorable address at this forum.

As a combined result of these influences, fertility levels in the West are no longer sufficient to assure the long-term replacement of the population. It is possible to take a relaxed view of this development: permitting a slow decline for some time to come may be seen, for instance, as a useful corrective for too-rapid demographic expansion in the past. Some might assume that we face a temporary aberration only: fertility trends will correct themselves in due course of their own accord. But when total fertility rates dip well below 1.5, as is the case now in a number of countries in Europe and in various subpopulations within other countries in the West, we no longer face the prospect of a mild correction but rather the eventual possibility of a precipitous demographic decline. Nor is it clear what spontaneous forces are at work that would guarantee a timely increase of fertility, back toward replacement level. In fact, some of the tendencies responsible for depressing fertility well below replacement have far from run their course.

There is, then, a possibility that fertility trends in the West will force a reexamination of existing public policies and their appropriate redesign in a pronatalist direction. That time has not yet come: current discussions of modifying social policies in which demographic considerations appear still focus on the problem of marginalized populations. There the criterion of the need for correction is poverty: an important problem by any standard, but hardly one affecting the large majority of populations of economically advanced societies. Demographic policy proper will begin when it is realized that the problem of low fertility can be traced to a structural flaw of the sort described by Lloyd, a flaw that cannot be corrected in the conventional framework of antipoverty measures. It is also unlikely to be corrected by expanding the patchwork of existing transfer programs of the welfare state that now reshuffle dollars among people who are not poor. As yet our profession has done little to take the measure of the disjunction between private interest and public good in low-fertility societies and explore possible approaches to structural-institutional reform that could provide a remedy for the problem.

Unhappily the same proposition can be made, with nearly equal cogency, concerning population policy thinking relevant to countries that we collectively describe, despite their great differences, by the awkward term "developing." Of the 3.7 billion people that live in these countries today, roughly 1.7 billion are in countries or large subnational areas in which fertility transitions more or less resembling the classical variety are under way, relying on the invisible hand in the main but, in a number of cases, assisted by public programs that subsidize access to birth control and endorse the social goal of the small family. Some one billion live in China, where an exceptionally rapid decline of fertility was achieved by the additional assist of the overt and heavy hand of the state, imposing norms of behavior mandated by its political process. In populations numbering about one billion, fertility transitions have not yet begun.

In the first of these groups, should we assume that existing trends and policies will suffice to put countries on a socially optimal demographic path or, more optimistically speaking, keep them there? Should we hope, nay advise, that China mend its ways in regard to population policy and join the first group? Can we expect that fertility decline will soon start in the third group and be rapid all the way down to replacement levels? What can students of population do to assist in bringing about better public policies affecting population growth?

Trying to answer any of these and similar questions makes sense only if one assumes that the answers matter. They of course do, if there is a population problem; if rearrangements seem possible that could benefit every member of the great society. Despite much disagreement on details, that has been the implicit assumption in the long-standing intellectual tradition of our profession. The main branch of that tradition has come on hard times lately, if one takes being ignored as a sure proof of hard times in matters of the intellect. In the recent policy-oriented report of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) on population growth and economic development (National Research Council 1986), the bibliography contains well over 200 entries. As is the case in much of the economic literature, memory falls off sharply beyond the last five years. One looks in vain in the bibliography for names like Frank Notestein, Kingsley Davis, Joseph Spengler, or Judith Blake. Or names like Kenneth Boulding, Garrett Hardin, James Meade, and Jan Tinbergen.

There are, in partial compensation, eight entries by Julian Simon in the bibliography. This is not to begrudge those entries: each of them is well deserved. But the numbers do signal a shift that gives one pause. Actually those eight citations seem to have made little mark on the report. Simon's writings represent another branch of that same long-standing intellectual tradition I referred to; and appearances to the contrary, the two branches share some common perceptions of the issues at hand. Both consider population important in human affairs, if with different signs. Thus they disagree strongly, but strong disagreement at least warrants worthwhile debate and generates excitement. To use an architectural metaphor, the mainline tradition could be likened to a great Gothic cathedral in a parlous state, with some of the flying buttresses crumbling and the towers dangerous to mount, but still a building of great concept: something to behold. The opposing branch may be likened to one of those extravagant chateaux of King Ludwig II of Bavaria: an amazing and uplifting edifice even if one worries about the maintenance expenses.

In between these two, the thinking epitomized by the NAS report gives us a construct with all the daring and charm of a Levittown house. It is distinctive chiefly in pronouncing the near irrelevance of rapid population growth to anything really important in development and development policy. The invisible hand wins here by default, with earnest gestures toward family planning programs as the sole

right manifestation of statecraft in matters concerning population. I fear, however, that if the economic analysis of the report is accepted, the endorsement of family planning programs is hollow and will not long sustain political and financial support for them.

One could not complain, of course, if the Levittown model was the one that corresponded to the underlying reality. Without being able to argue the point here, I believe this is not the case. The report asks its questions in such a way as to foreordain its conclusions. Its fundamental perspective is a narrow marginalism, fit perhaps for analyzing questions of day-to-day economics but wholly inappropriate for looking at the long-term impact of population growth in human affairs. For all practical purposes, the population today is much the same as it was yesterday and is barely different from what it will be tomorrow. By those lights, however, we can move, inch by inch, from heaven to hell—or at least from highland to swamp—without noticing it. Such travel is not to be recommended.

Placing ourselves behind a Rawlsian veil of ignorance—no reference to Rawls or like-minded people is to be found in the NAS report—we should ask and try to answer more daring questions than neoclassical economics inspires us to. What kind of society would we like to be part of? What kind of arrangements should that society have concerning demographic matters?

In the United States today, by a now-familiar reckoning, we should have lots of geniuses—say 60 times as many as this country possessed when the Constitution was written. We must find some of these people, persuade them to join the Population Association of America, and put their talents to work on the desirable demographic constitution of contemporary societies.

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# In Memoriam: Paul Demeny

1932–2024



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The Population Council mourns the loss of Paul Demeny, former Vice President of the Population Council and founding editor of [Population and Development Review](#)—a role he served from 1973 to 2012. Demeny was a renowned demographer, economist, and leading academic, with professorships at Princeton University, University of Michigan, and University of Hawaii, who left an indelible mark in his field.

Born in Nyiregyhaza, Hungary, Demeny earned his PhD in economics from Princeton University in 1961. He joined the Population Council in 1973 as Vice President and Director of the Center for Policy Studies. In 1975, Demeny founded *Population and Development Review*. To this day it remains a leading demography journal. Demeny's vision for the journal was to broaden the conventional boundaries of population studies and to publish research accessible to a wide readership. He valued intellectual quality and liveliness, and prioritized ideas as much as data. Shortly after his retirement in 2012, *Population and Development Review* published [a supplement issue](#)<sup>1</sup> in his honor in 2013.

His numerous accolades throughout his career include serving as president of the Population Association of America (PAA) in 1986, laureate of the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population in 2003, recipient of the Central Cross of the Hungarian Order of Merit in 2017, and the Hungarian Order of St. István in 2018.

We extend our deepest condolences to his loved ones.