

REVIEW

Population Policy in Great Britain. A Report by P.E.P. 1948. Published by P.E.P. (Political and Economic Planning), 16 Queen Anne's Gate, London, S.W.1. 1948. Pp. 228, 24 tables, and 9 charts. (Price 15s.)

The organization known as P.E.P. has earned for itself a sound reputation as a fact-finding body and has produced a considerable number and variety of pamphlets and books which have commanded the respect and gratitude of the social scientists and of all who are interested in the affairs of our society. No publication of P.E.P. can claim greater interest or importance than the one now being considered.

The public health, the health of the population, the wellbeing of an organized society, can be measured by the use of certain demographic yardsticks. Movements of the birthrate, deathrate, natural increase, and fertility rate, are reflections of the reactions of human beings to circumstances and conditions within their external world. This book is a comprehensive, fully documented, and simply presented account of population trends in this country associated with a fair, frank, and objective consideration of what these trends mean to us as a people and to our government. The book ends with a series of suggestions concerning the policy to be adopted and the actions to be taken if it be decided that it is desirable that the quantity and quality of the British people shall be at least maintained.

There is little that is peculiarly new in this book either in respect of factual information or of interpretation, but there is no other book of recent appearance which presents so complete an account of this particular subject, for in it are integrated and synthesized the results of the labours and ponderings of the many who in recent years have written upon it.

Emerging from the argument concerning population trends and the retreat from parenthood is the decision that the objective of a population policy in so far as this country is concerned must be to achieve a stable fertility

at a level involving an average number of about 2.5 children in each family, which means of course that a considerable number of families must include 4 or 5 children. The methods to be adopted for the achievement of this objective are then set out in detail: maternity grants, family allowances (which it is suggested should be doubled), social insurance, tax rebates, the provision of suitable houses, and other environmental health services. It is clearly recognized that the removal of the economic burdens of parentage are not in themselves sufficient to persuade people to increase the size of their families. The main proposal in this Report relates to the new Health Service, from which much is expected. It is suggested that to the Minister of Health should be given an additional portfolio of Minister of Population, and that within the National Health Service there should be an organized Family Welfare Service in which the general practitioner of medicine would be the adviser of those about to marry and the guardian of the child yet to be conceived.

There is no doubt that for the present the recommendations made in this Report are far in advance of public opinion and of the ability on the part of the profession of medicine to give effect to them. The Report is strongly to be recommended, however, to all who are directly or indirectly concerned with the maintenance and augmentation of the health of the people, especially to such as are concerned with programmes of planned migration and of the relief of manpower shortage in this country by the importation of displaced persons. It should be regarded as an argument in favour of the institution of a positive population policy and the reader should continuously attempt to refute its arguments, although not of course by the reiteration of some peculiar and precious prejudice. The open-minded, if there be such, will find it difficult to reach conclusions markedly different from those which this book presents.

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