POPULATION

Squeeze on Work Ages

At one end of age scale there is pressure from oldsters who now number 13 for every 100 between 20 and 64. At other end are nation's war and postwar babies.

➤ FOR the next 10 years or so the people of this nation who are at the main working ages, 20 to 65, will be having the squeeze put on them.

At one end they are confronted with the rapidly growing number of oldsters in our population. There are 13 people over 65 for every 100 between the ages of 20 and 64. Authorities from all over the land conferred on this problem at the recent Conference on Aging in Washington, D. C.

At the other end is coming the squeeze from the nation's war and postwar babies. Right now there are about 54 children under age 18 for every 100 persons between 20 and 64. That is half the ratio it was 100 years ago when we had 107 children under age 18 to every 100 between ages 20 and 64.

But the downward trend in ratio of children to the population at the main working ages has been reversed.

Due to the war and postwar spurt in the birth rate, the child population has increased at a more rapid rate than people at ages 20 to 64. This will continue for at least a decade even if allowance is made for a steady decline in the birth rate from its present level and at the same time the population at the older ages continues its long-term upward climb.

One way the squeeze could be at least partly eased received the attention of the delegates to the Conference on Aging. This is to make better use of many of the oldsters who ordinarily retired at age 65. During the manpower shortage of World War II, many men and women over 65 went back to jobs they had given up to younger persons. Some of them had physical handicaps, but that did not keep them from doing a job.

If the present manpower situation becomes acute, many of them may go on working or return to work regardless of being over age 65.

To keep the oldsters healthy was another of the problems engaging attention from some of the delegates. Our medical men for many years concentrated on keeping babies alive and keeping children well. More and more of them now, in research laboratories and in office and clinic, are working to keep old people healthy and active. The increasing numbers of youngsters may give the push needed to keep the older persons working for more years. And for many of them this in itself will be a health measure.

Science News Letter, August 26, 1950

SEEING IN A FOG—Wearing goggles made from ping-pong balls, research assistant Walter L. Carel, of Cornell University, is discovering what vision is like when brightness and darkness can be perceived but not the texture of surfaces. Dickens Waddell is acting as observer.

PSYCHOLOGY

Thyroid May Control Ability to Taste

➤ YOUR ability to taste may have some connection with how your thyroid, the U-shaped gland in the neck, functions.

This suggestion comes from Dr. William C. Boyd of U.S. Naval Medical Research Unit No. 3 in Cairo, Egypt. He bases it on taste tests with an anti-thyroid chemical, 1-5-vinyl-2-thiooxazolidone. The chemical is related to the more familiar anti-thyroid drugs, thiourea and thiouracil. It has only recently been isolated and occurs widely in nature, especially in turnips and cabbage.

Tests were made of the antithyroid chemical on 21 persons. They had previously been tested for ability to taste PTC, or phenylthiocarbamide. About 25% of most populations cannot taste PTC at all, while the others find it quite bitter.

The persons in Dr. Boyd's study who could taste PTC could all taste the anti-thyroid drug, while those who could not taste PTC also could not taste the anti-thyroid chemical.

PTC is a synthetic chemical. Ability to taste it is hereditary. How and why there should be in some persons a gene giving ability to taste a compound which does not occur in nature is hard to understand, Dr. Boyd points out (SCIENCE, Aug. 4). The connection with thyroid function seems to give a clue to the reasons.

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PSYCHOLOGY

Ping-pong Ball Goggles In Vision Experiment

➤ GOGGLES made from the two halves of a ping pong ball are creating an artificial world of fog for those taking part in vision experiments in the psychology laboratory at Cornell University in Ithaca, N. Y.

Looking through the ping pong goggles, the subject can see brightness or darkness but he can not perceive the texture of surfaces. It is as though he were enveloped in a fog.

Dr. James J. Gibson, professor of psychology at Cornell, is using this device to test his new theory of how we perceive depth. He believes our perception of depth and distance is due to our manner of seeing textures or surfaces of objects. The experiments are being conducted for the U. S. Air Force.

Science News Letter, August 26, 1950