

NUTRITION-ECONOMICS

From Now On: Food Race

Will growing population outstrip our food resources in the future? Application of technological advances in backward areas will be necessarily slow.

By WATSON DAVIS

Eighteenth in a series of glances forward in science.

➤ IN this year of the census taker, the experts do not have any too much curiosity about the general results of the present United States census. We know that there are about 150,000,000 men, women and children in this country.

Far more important to us, in one respect, would be an accurate count of people in other parts of the world. We know the number of people in China and even in Soviet Russia in the most general terms with errors that amount to many millions of population.

And the rate of increase for the future, the balance between life and death which will be created by changing world conditions in the next decade, constitute a gigantic question mark. In one sense the future population of the world, determining whether we shall have enough food to feed the people of the future, is a problem of the same order as atomic bombs.

For the United States, the best opinion of population experts is that in the year 2000 our population is likely to be under 200,000,000 and that if we do not reach a peak in population in the next 50 years we shall do so shortly thereafter. This is what is likely to happen if the population trends continue as they are and as we expect them to be in the future. There is also the proviso that atomic warfare will not wipe out overnight some 40,000,000 of our population as it could.

There are some unconventional statisticians who foresee a much larger population in the next 50 years, even as much as 300,000,000, but the general opinion is that with increasing population density and inevitable limitations upon food supply, our population will level off and not go on increasing at the same rate.

In the race between food and people, the problem is that of too many people, as well as too little food. Bad living conditions and the prevalence of disease often neutralize with increased death rates the higher birth rates that occur among non-industrialized populations.

Give the people more food. Save them from death through introduction to medicine and sanitation. Bring them the benefits of more advanced civilization. The population increases.

There does seem to be an eventual brake upon human reproduction that accompanies better education and better living conditions,

even though the practice of birth control is not publicly condoned or encouraged.

Under the world's systems of government, whether they be democracies or dictatorships, there seems to be a continual push for larger numbers of peoples. The dictator cries for more people to defend the homeland. The minorities in a democracy are likely to wish to grow by pure increase in numbers into majorities.

The biological urge, when it is not thwarted by semi-starvation, has a tendency to always increase the population of the earth. The next generation has a great debt to love. In terms of the whole world, some 55,000 new human beings must have breakfast every morning. The total number of people in the world is something like 2,200,000,000.

This figures out that the world's population is rising at the rate of about 200,000,000 every decade, which means more people are added to the world each decade

GEOLOGY

Silt Deposits Studied On Man-Made Lake

➤ SCIENTIFIC teamwork has provided a definite and encouraging answer to a question which has long troubled westerners—how long will man-made Lake Mead last?

Scientists from the Navy, several government bureaus, universities and private institutions studied and surveyed for two years to find out that it will take until the year 2225 and perhaps longer for Lake Mead, behind Hoover dam, to fill up with silt.

In addition, dams to be built upstream will, by catching some of the silt, extend the useful life of Lake Mead much longer.

The case history study of Lake Mead, said Secretary of the Interior Oscar L. Chapman, "exposed many uninformed estimates of Lake Mead siltation as extravagant and groundless."

One conclusion drawn by Interior officials from the study of Mead and other reservoirs was that the reservoirs would far outlive the period in which they are expected to pay for themselves.

The Navy used sounding equipment developed during the war to measure the extent of the deposits of silt on the bottom of Lake Mead. Long cores of silt from the bottom were examined by the scientists of the U. S. Geological Survey.

Science News Letter, July 29, 1950

than now exist in the United States.

Little wonder, then, that scientists and statesmen alike are as worried about the great population explosion that is occurring here on earth quite as much as they are about the atomic situation. Communism in Asia is more of a symptom than a cause when the food and people situation of that continent is considered. Terrible as it may be to well-fed Americans, the sheer inability to feed 5,000,000 to 10,000,000 Chinese in the near future, resulting in their deaths by famine, promises to have an effect upon the Asiatic political situation that could not be caused by force of arms.

For a world so compounded of people and the food they need, in the future we must look to:

A. A continuance of the race between people and resources of the world with the assurance, from history, that not for long will superfluous plenty be unused by increasing population.

B. The population problem is basic to the dilemma of war or peace in the future. Motivations and technical progress that can control the population spurt may be capable of avoiding the rush to human slaughter that is war.

C. Today's new applications of technological advances in scientific discoveries may double or quadruple the world's resources of food and energy, such as the discovery of how to industrialize photo-synthesis. Yet the application of such research progress will inevitably be slow in reaching the world's backward areas. Population promises to outrun potential plenty.

Science News Letter, July 29, 1950



UNTIL 2225—Navy divers went to the bottom of Lake Mead—the nation's biggest reservoir—to bring up samples of silt carried into the lake by the Colorado River. Experts think it will take until 2225 and perhaps longer for Lake Mead, behind Hoover Dam, to fill up with silt.