

# The US Department of State is policing the population policy lockstep

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Why do demographers and United Nations agencies avoid dealing with the problems of “demographic entrapment” now that it involves two continents? Initially, I assumed this was reluctance to address the issue of one child families. It now seems that the most important factor is the active interest of the US Department of State in keeping the dialogue closed—the policing of the population policy lockstep. Presumably this is because if the South is to restrict its population growth, the North, especially the United States, should restrict its resource consumption.

To police the lockstep is to actively hinder the resolution of all the problems in which population plays a major part. This is described as “overpowering evil,” and the individual is largely forgiven, because the evil is mostly in the system. There must now be a UN programme for a one child world, since if any community is to have one child families, all should. This has to be the major theme of the next population conference in 2004. Massive discussion (“benign uproar”) is now needed, accompanied by a progressive change from the “first wisdom” to the “second wisdom.”<sup>1</sup>

This paper is a sequel to one in which I had a socratic dialogue on Earth’s population with Lady M from Mars.<sup>2</sup> There we discussed the hardinian taboo, named after the American ecologist Garrett Hardin, who described the taboos which humans use to avoid confronting the need for population control. “Overpowering evil,” which this paper confronts, is best dealt with lightly, since “human kind cannot bear too much reality.”<sup>3</sup> Besides, evil is said to be soluble in laughter.<sup>4</sup> This paper is further elaborated on the web ([www.leeds.ac.uk/demographic-disentrapment](http://www.leeds.ac.uk/demographic-disentrapment)).

## Reluctance of UN agencies

*Lady M:* “Lockstep”? I cannot find it in the Oxford English Dictionary.

*MHK:* I first heard it from a US demographer who pointed out that there are no original thinkers on the US population scene and that academia, the foundations, and the UN agencies stick to the same policy, in which discussing demographic entrapment is taboo. Lockstep is a mode of marching in very close file in which the leg of each person moves with, and closely behind, the corresponding leg of the person ahead—with the result that if one person breaks step the whole squad falls over. The lockstep is the practical manifestation of the hardinian taboo.

*Lady M:* What matters is not academia, but the policies of your UN agencies. Logically the UN should follow academia; instead, both seem to follow the interests of the US Department of State, particularly over population and food.

*MHK:* Indeed! Despite the fact that global per capita grain production has been falling for 15 years, the United Nations Fund for Population Activities never discusses how populations are to be fed. The

## Summary points

A tight taboo prevents demographers and United Nations agencies from confronting demographic entrapment

Defections from this taboo are apt to be policed by the US Department of State; the presumed reason for this is that radical reduction in number of births in the South (one child families) would question resource consumption in the North

The major health programme of the new millennium has to be a one child world, linked to moderation in resource consumption in the North

Entrapment is merely the worst of many problems (poverty, malnutrition, etc) in which population plays a large part; to make it taboo it is to hinder the resolution of these other problems also

Food and Agriculture Organisation avoids discussing population wherever it can. The UN’s Advisory Co-ordinating Committee/Sub-Committee on Nutrition has never discussed food at the global level. As for the United Nations Development Programme, “demographic entrapment” is not even in its vocabulary.

*Lady M:* Incredible! I hear it whispered that a couple of continents are trapped, and that the major means of “disentrapment” has to be one child families. The demographic momentum of young populations is such that two child families are not small enough. Why do all your UN agencies and all your demographers keep their mouths shut and never discuss entrapment? You even had to invent the word disentrapment.

## Demography dominated

*MHK:* You should understand that demography is largely a US discipline and is likely to bend itself to US political interests. Since the second world war demography has been dominated by demographers trained in the United States. Its best universities and their departments of demography are the envy of the world. Its foundations are the richest. It is the seat of the Population Council. Two decades ago there were no demographers in China. The dominance of the “English” language also plays a large part. Chomsky observed that Britain is a colonised country, intellectually.<sup>5</sup> It is therefore a brave British demographer who stands up to his or her American colleagues. Besides, the world’s senior demographers know one another—nobody wants to step out of line.

*Lady M:* So you are out to break up the squad. So far all you have described could be ascribed to political correctness. It is hardly “policing.”

## Consent manufactured

*MHK:* I previously imagined that the reluctance to recognise entrapment was caused by the problems of one child families. When I read a paper analysing what went on at the 1994 Cairo population conference I understood what was happening.<sup>6</sup> It pointed out that “the United States, the Holy See and the women’s rights movement [predominantly from the United States] were the three most organised, best disciplined, and most effective participants at the conference”; that “historically the State Department has considered population in the light of US and global security”; and also that “once formed, the US position was advanced with determination and skill through every available channel.”

In Chomskian terms, consent was indeed being manufactured.<sup>7</sup> To dominate the political process, the ordinary methods of fixing the agenda are usually enough. These need money, a firm political will, and intense participation in the precons (preparatory conferences) leading up to a major conference like that in Cairo. They involve measures like paying the expenses of those non-governmental organisations that support your interests, but not those of organisations that don’t. More extreme measures are necessary only occasionally—as in 1994, when population politics were particularly tense. You have to understand that there are some things that the *BMJ* just cannot print. For these you are going to have to look on the web. I believe that the sanctions described there that were placed on a dis-senter like myself merit the term “policing.”

Let me give you a milder example. In 1996 the British journal *Population Studies* held a symposium celebrating its 25th anniversary. Several speakers praised the success of the demographic transition theory. I got up and said that I was concerned with its failures: the failure of birth rates to fall, resulting in populations exceeding the carrying capacities of their ecosystems. I said I was going out to Uganda the following day to lecture on “disentrapment.” The US demographer Sam Preston said, in effect: “Maurice King advises ‘let sick children die’ in severely trapped countries since one more mouth to feed is less for someone else” (he was referring to my controversial first paper<sup>8</sup>). The atmosphere was electric. The lockstep squad was being kept in step.

Why has Lester Brown stopped writing about entrapment?<sup>9</sup> What really convinces me is that, when I recount the policing of the lockstep to US nationals working in international health, they are apt to say: “Of course, what else do you expect?” Those in senior government positions maintain an embarrassed silence. The thesis that the Department of State is doing its best to keep the hardinian taboo tight is therefore more than merely plausible. Informally, in some circles, it is now banal. The Department of State is doing the policing, not the American people or Congress. Incidentally, this paper will delight many liberal Americans.

The hardinian taboo has a number of “foundations.”<sup>12</sup> However, I contend that the active policing of the lockstep is the most important one, since it prevents the dialogue opening.

*Lady M:* What I fail to understand is why the United States should be so interested in maintaining the lockstep, especially since it has funded so many population activities in the past.

## Equity extolled

*MHK:* I am sure it would like to see population growth fall. However, if the South has to restrict itself to one child families, the North should control its resource consumption. If you rate equity highly, this has meaning (see [www.leeds.ac.uk/demographic-disentrapment](http://www.leeds.ac.uk/demographic-disentrapment)). Equity has great power in international discourse. I am sure that the United States would like to see birth rates fall, but not at the expense of having its own resource consumption questioned. With 4.6% of the world’s population burning 25% of its fossil fuel, this is now an acutely sensitive issue. I believe therefore that this is why the United States is so keen to see the lockstep maintained.

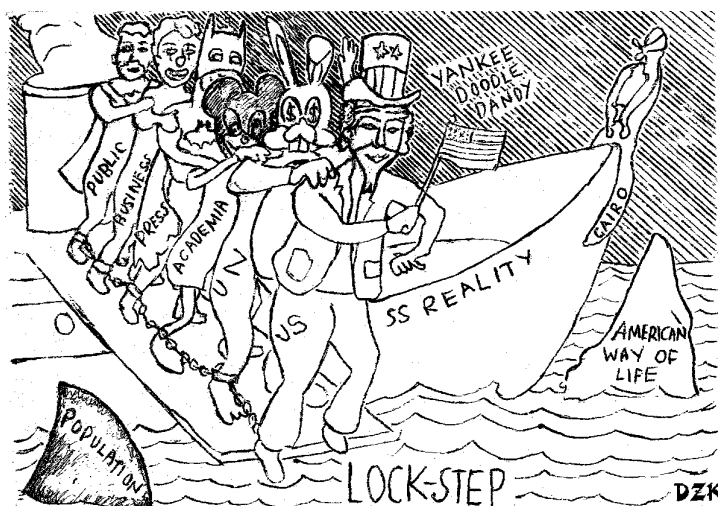
*Lady M:* If the premise of equity is accepted, just about everything in your world has to change. To start with, if any community is to be counselled to have one child families to avoid starvation and slaughter, then you all should. In UN terms, the official admission of the need for any community to have one child families is an admission of the ultimate inevitability of a UN programme for a one child world.

You have two great problems: global warming and population. It seems that some political dynamite is needed to release the present log jam in human affairs. What is missing is not merely “opening up the dialogue,” it is the means of making “one hell of a row” politically. In the jargon of disentrapment, “benign uproar”; lots of it. “Benign” in that uproar is better than starvation and slaughter.

## One hell of a row

*MHK:* Indeed. Unfortunately, the public has been dumbed down by the media.

*Lady M:* Population has its tensions that are expressed in the hardinian taboo. Global warming is a recent phenomenon, and it too has its taboo. Why don’t you link them? Oil extraction rates are expected to fall after 2010,<sup>10</sup> so there won’t be enough cheap energy for the South to develop, certainly not to the consumption levels of California. The result is that the few people who currently understand this will taboo the unhappy thought. I suggest that you do all you can to get the hardinian taboo ended, and then trust that



## Glossary

**Benign uproar:** The intense debates that are to be expected globally as the hardinian taboo lifts, entrapment is recognised, and behaviours change. Unpleasant, but better than malignant uproar.

**Cairo conference:** The 1994 conference on population and development that placed women's health and empowerment at the centre of the United Nations' population strategy and downplayed the demographic rationale of population policy. This article, however, suggests that the conference had a hidden agenda.

**Demographic entrapment:** A condition in which a population exceeds, or is shortly expected to exceed, three constraints: the carrying capacity of its ecosystem and its ability to migrate and the ability of its economy to generate sufficient exports which it can exchange for food and other essentials. This ends in malignant uproar (starvation and slaughter).

**Demographic momentum:** The pressure for population growth inherent in a young population. If all women of reproductive age in a country were instantly to confine their families to two children only, the country's population would still about double before it eventually stabilised (two child demographic momentum). In such a population, even instant one child families would not stop all population growth before the population reached its maximum and then started falling (one child demographic momentum).

**Disentrapment:** The process of getting out of the demographic trap, largely through one child families.

**First wisdom:** Confidence that science, and the UN, will develop technologies and strategies to neutralise population increase and the environmental effects of Northern lifestyles. Demographic entrapment will not occur and Malthus will have been proved wrong. In short, population increase is no cause for alarm.

**Foundations of the hardinian taboo:** A variety of factors, which in addition to the taboo, make it difficult to control population numbers. These include the position of certain religious groups in respect of family planning, aspects of the human rights movement, and the requirement that if the South is to moderate its fertility the North should moderate its resource consumption.

**Hardinian taboo:** Named by Paul Demeny, editor of *Population and Development Review*, after the controversial US ecologist Garrett Hardin, and at its most obvious over the non-recognition of demographic entrapment. The hardinian taboo is a psychological failing, supposedly inherent in our psyche, that makes us unable to control our population numbers.

**Lady M:** A mythical Martian much interested in Earth's population.

**Lockstep:** A method of marching in very close file, so that if anyone breaks step the whole squad falls over.

**Malignant uproar:** Starvation and slaughter as a consequence of demographic entrapment.

**One child world:** A UN led political "direction" rather than a tight "directive," with countries setting about it in their own way. Seen as the paramount public health programme for the new millennium.

**Overpowering evil:** The consequences of the failure to recognise entrapment—consequences not only for the trapped themselves but also for the many other grave human problems in which population plays a part, and which include global inequality, malnutrition, ecological destruction, deforestation, and street children.

**Population policy lockstep:** The closely coherent population policies currently in vogue in academia, the foundations, and the UN agencies. These are tightly bound by the hardinian taboo and deny that entrapment exists.

**Second wisdom:** A radical view that believes parts of Africa and Asia are demographically entrapped and seeks urgent solutions to the population problem—namely, through one child families. It doubts science's ability to increase grain production and tackle global warming. It also doubts the UN's ability to satisfactorily address the population issue. The second wisdom argues that if the South is to reduce birth rates, the North must reduce resource consumption.

arguments based on equity will divert some of the emotional energy that is released towards the behavioural change that is needed to stall global warming. You humans have got to realise that by burning precious fossil fuel, when you drive your cars or travel by plane, you not only heat up your world but

also deny your fellow humans the opportunity to develop. Science might provide you with a new form of clean cheap energy. Or it might not.

Your next obstacle, once the dialogue is opened and the lockstep broken, is the human rights movement, which is again largely a US phenomenon. Although it has done you wonderful service in such matters as the abolition of torture, its legalistic ramblings are now a major obfuscation in the way of disentrapment. The human rights movement has never debated the legitimate incentives and disincentives for one child families under conditions of entrapment. It now provides a dense legalistic thicket to obstruct the acceptance one child families.

To what extent do you think that the human rights movement is driven by US political objectives?

*MHK:* That is something I would dearly like to know.

## Increasing greed scientifically engineered

*Lady M:* What most troubles you about this alarming picture?

*MHK:* I am most worried by advertising. As an instrument of the market economy it seeks to scientifically manipulate the behaviour of us humans so that we continually want to consume more, and thus pollute more, in an increasingly unsustainable and inequitable way. In short, it is the scientifically engineered increase of greed. I look on the control of the media as the most urgent task facing public health, and indeed humanity, in the new millennium—"the media as disease agent."<sup>11</sup>

## Naming it for what it is

*Lady M:* What's all this about overpowering evil?

*MHK:* Population is an important component, often the critical one, in all our major human problems—poverty, malnutrition, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, global warming, street children, and increasing global inequality, to name only a few. They would be much easier to solve if our numbers were less and some communities did not grow so fast. Suppressing the discussion of entrapment and policing the lockstep is hindering the resolution of all these problems. The scale and consequences of doing this are such that it can only be thought of as overpowering evil. It is mostly the evil "in the system," since the individual is apt to argue, often wrongly, that he or she is powerless. In defence of many of those who presently enforce the lockstep, it must be said that they know not what they do.

If you still have any doubts, listen to this. Here in 1948 is George Kennan, head of the Department of State planning staff, in a document recently released under the 50 year rule: "We have 50% of the world's wealth but only 6.3% of its population ... In this situation we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment. Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will commit us to maintain this position of disparity without possible detriment to our ultimate security. To do this we will have to dispense with sentimentality and day-dreaming, and our attention will have to be concentrated everywhere on our immediate national



objectives. We had better not deceive ourselves that we can afford . . . the luxury of altruism and world benefaction . . . The day is not far off when we are going to have to deal in straight power concepts. The less we are hampered by idealistic slogans the better.<sup>12</sup> If even this does not convince you, read *Who Paid the Piper?*, which is about the way the United States manipulated Western intelligentsia during the cold war.<sup>13</sup> Its present manipulation of the lockstep is fully in line with that.

*Lady M:* By actually exposing overpowering evil for what it is, you have broken its spell. The United States dominates your United Nations system. It also dominates your world intellectually, culturally, militarily, economically, scientifically, linguistically, informatically, and medically. However, it may well be that its dominance is to be most regretted in policing the lockstep in your population policies. The whole rotten edifice of US population politics will now crash to the ground with a resounding squelch. Health is politics, and politics is health. Here you have both on a colossal scale. I would remind you, however, that you are exposing a hitherto unimaginable degree of corruption—the abuse of power for personal gain. Those who do this have to be prepared to pay the price. I will follow your cortège, tearfully.

The hardinian taboo and the enforcing of the lockstep has been an oppression. Huge creative oppor-

tunity will follow its release. Future historians are going to look on a couple of world wars as mere tribal squabbles, compared with what happened to your population during the 20th century, and what little you did about it—thanks in large measure to the activities of the US Department of State.

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### *A memorable patient* The need to know

In 1965 I started my preregistration year in the medical wards of a teaching hospital. Beds in the ward to which I was appointed were also available to the haematologists to admit patients who needed inpatient treatment. The house physician performed the usual duties for these patients, many of whom were admitted on a regular basis for chemotherapy or blood transfusion.

One such patient was a large muscular man from the docklands, physically and mentally strong. His temper was legendary, and he was estranged from his family and friends. He suffered from leukaemia and required a blood transfusion every few weeks. As was the pattern at that time, he was not told the diagnosis and clearly had no inkling about what was wrong with him. All he knew was that every few weeks he was summoned to the hospital where a young doctor asked him questions that he had been asked many times before and then attempted to set up a blood transfusion. He made no attempt to hide his resentment or restrain his anger at these procedures, particularly if the first attempt at erecting an intravenous line was unsuccessful. Successive house physicians dreaded his admission and the lash of his tongue.

Six months later I had moved to a surgical ward. One day when the ward was on duty for emergency admissions the message came through that a man was to be admitted with an ischio-rectal abscess. The name was familiar. It was the patient with leukaemia whom I had last seen in the medical ward. His condition had progressed, his health had deteriorated, and he was now suffering from an overwhelming infection. What was striking, however, was his totally different attitude on this occasion. It took a few days to discover the explanation. When he developed the abscess he had been referred to the hospital's accident and emergency department. At that time the department consisted of cubicles with wooden partitions but separated from the corridor by curtains.

While my patient was waiting in the cubicle his medical records arrived and a nurse standing outside the cubicle read aloud to a colleague the diagnosis of leukaemia. This was heard by the patient. He was shattered by the news. For a few days he was in a state of shock trying to comprehend the implications of what he now knew. After that he was a changed person, grateful for everything that was done for him, undemanding, and in all respects a pleasure to know and to work with. He made contact again with his family with whom he had not spoken for many years. His condition continued to deteriorate during that admission and he died, at peace with the world, surrounded by his family and mourned by those who knew him in the last phase of his life.

I have used this case history on many occasions in the past 30 years when teaching students on medical ethics and terminal care. It illustrates the principle of autonomy, the right of everybody to choose their own lifestyle, and the requirement for patients to have information on their illness so that they can exercise their autonomy.

Robert W Stout, *professor of geriatric medicine, Belfast*

We welcome articles up to 600 words on topics such as *A memorable patient*, *A paper that changed my practice*, *My most unfortunate mistake*, or any other piece conveying instruction, pathos, or humour. If possible the article should be supplied on a disk. Permission is needed from the patient or a relative if an identifiable patient is referred to. We also welcome contributions for "Endpieces," consisting of quotations of up to 80 words (but most are considerably shorter) from any source, ancient or modern, which have appealed to the reader.