



#



OPT NEWSLETTER

August 2009

Contents

Overview...Strategy Ideas Wanted...A Hard Act to Follow...Media Coverage... Population Day Poll...Climate Change Statement...Campaigns Officer...US Billionaires Target Population...350 Day...OPT Talks...Blog Rechristened...Food Security...Friends on Facebook...Global Humanitarian Forum... Education Pack...Not (Really) So Controversial? (1) and (2)...Back-up from Down Under...Overpopulation Overwhelms...AGM Voting...Lords Debate...Life Membership...OPTP?...Killer Quotes

Overview

Welcome to the latest OPT newsletter. This issue leads with a letter from chair Roger Martin inviting contributions from members on strategy. It's probably true to say that concern about population growth, both globally and nationally, is currently at its highest point for a generation, so arguably it's a good time for OPT to thrash out, in Roger's words, "where it wants to go, and how it intends to get there." Roger's letter is an appeal for ideas: let us have yours by mid-September, please.

OPT has a full agenda at present. The newsletter reports on three separate research projects being undertaken for OPT at the London School of Economics and on plans for an education pack for schools. A campaigns officer is to be recruited, mainly to try to get green NGOs to lift their conspiracy of silence on population. Two major developments commanding our attention over the coming months will be the inquiry by the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution into the UK's demographic challenges and the Copenhagen climate change process. OPT has contributed to the scoping phase of the former and will submit evidence later. It has also released a statement on climate change personally endorsed by most of its patrons and by other well-known figures such as James Lovelock, of Gaia fame.

Rising concern about population is taking many forms, from the decision by billionaire philanthropists to treat it more seriously to more obvious political outcomes. Conservative leader David Cameron appears to have shifted his ground, for instance, declaring last month that uncontrolled immigration in recent years had been "damaging" for Britain and criticising the new Home

Secretary Alan Johnson for remarking that he “did not lie awake” worrying about Britain's population rising to 70 million. “Well, I do,” the Tory leader said. OPT's poll for World Population Day on July 11 also found widespread public support for many of our central beliefs - not least the need for a much smaller UK population.

Sadly, this Newsletter also has to report the resignation of Rosamund McDougall from her role as policy director. Rosamund has been a key figure in OPT for the better part of a decade and our current profile owes much to her hard work, her knowledge of the subject and her skills as a communicator. An appreciation of Rosamund by former chair Val Stevens appears below. As Val says, she will be sorely missed.

Strategy Ideas Wanted

Chair Roger Martin writes: “OPT is an environmental charity, raising awareness of the impact of population growth on the environment through campaigning, education and research; and like any organisation, it needs a strategy, saying where it wants to go, and how it intends to get there. Our ultimate aim is, obviously, a sustainable human society on an ecologically sustainable planet - but that's a long way off. We need to set more achievable intermediate targets along the way.

“Our continuous background activity should be to break the ‘mad taboo’, and get population growth as widely recognised as a factor in tackling all environmental problems as is already climate change - with which it is intimately connected - so that all governments, and millions of people even brighter than us, are focused on fixing the underlying problem of too many people for our only planet to sustain.

“Our first really hard, medium-term goal is to get a population policy for the UK - aimed at stabilisation, then reduction, of our population - accepted by all major political parties by 2015. I know that some of you think we should give top priority to the global level, because the really big growth is there. We shall not neglect this. Indeed, we are increasing our work with overseas partners to get our voices heard internationally. But we prioritise the UK because here we can have some real clout, whereas globally we shall always be marginal. England is already the most densely populated country in Europe, so it's more urgent for us. We remain a major world nation and the ‘demonstration effect’ of us doing this will impress many others. Reducing the number of us rich folk with heavy eco-footprints reduces harm to the planet just as much as many more poor people with lighter eco-feet; what's more, we shall not be reviled as hypocrites, breeding on regardless while ‘telling brown people to have fewer babies’ .

“How do we get to 2015 through campaigning, education and research? The elements of a strategy are taking shape. On campaigning, we have just agreed to hire a full-time campaigns officer, whose priority targets will be the environmental NGOs and candidates for the general election. The eNGOs are a priority target because they are our natural allies (indefinite

population growth dooms all their work to failure). They all know, better than most, that we are right, but daren't say so because they are still enslaved to the 'mad taboo', whereas our remarkable YouGov poll results prove they needn't worry - 72 per cent of us think population growth causes serious environmental problems, while only 8 per cent want any more people at all in the UK. And once they start stating the facts on population, our voice will be amplified a thousand-fold.

"The new officer will doubtless be looking for eNGO members among you to help and asking all of you to lobby your parliamentary candidates. We need to help both them and politicians understand the irrefutable truths in our international statement, and the impressive endorsement of our new statement on climate change. Meanwhile, I and my colleagues will continue to write or speak to other people of influence on similar lines, as I hope you will do as individual citizens.

"By education we mean, for project purposes, people in full-time study, because we have to limit the target to be able to cope. (Everything we say or write could be called 'life-long education'). We are starting to work up an educational pack for schools: student environmental groups are the third campaigning priority, (contacts and data welcomed). On research, we now have three LSE students currently working on: the combined effect of climate change and peak oil on human sustainability at different population levels; the effects of state benefits on family size; and the cost/benefit of investing in fewer emitters, rather than lower *per capita* emissions, in climate change budgets.

"However, we want your ideas. If you can think of a discrete project that you would like to see us run (subject to funding) fitting under one of these three headings, please send it in. I give absolutely no guarantee that we will adopt them, because the buck, the budget, and still most of the work stops with the seven volunteer trustees. But we know our members are committed, intelligent and creative; and we really want to know what you think. We'll take them all seriously, select those we like, and let you know the outcome. Please send replies by the middle of September to trust administrator Julie Lewis - info@population.org - with 'strategy input' in the header. I look forward to hearing from you.

"With best wishes to you all..."

A Hard Act to Follow

Members should know that in September Rosamund McDougall will stand down from her position as one of OPT's policy directors, *writes former OPT Chair, Val Stevens*. Many OPT members will be greatly saddened by her departure because she contributed so enormously to OPT's rise in visibility and credibility over the last seven years.

When Rosamund first contacted OPT, it was completely out of the blue. Committee members Edmund Davey and Val Stevens could

barely believe that someone with so much experience of business, publishing and journalism, along with in-depth knowledge of population and environmental issues, should want to give her time freely to our little (and almost invisible at that time) organisation. Her first mission was to set up a website that would be packed with information and intellectually rigorous. With her many contacts in the City, the media and government bodies, she soon had the OPT website operating as a source of information and our own research papers, for worldwide audiences. Within a few years, sister-organisations in the US were claiming that the OPT website was regarded as the definitive source of information for the movement as a whole.

For nearly three years Rosamund was co-chair of OPT alongside Professor John Guillebaud. However, she preferred to have more of an "executive" role as policy adviser, and then as a policy director, carrying out much of the public-arena work - whether that was writing articles, presenting OPT's case in live radio and TV interviews and debates, or setting up high-level seminars. She also brought her management skills to bear in recruiting new colleagues; in preparing papers for government committees of enquiry; and in the hugely time-consuming business of submitting applications for grant-funding.

Rosamund always put in at least twice as many hours as she was paid for - after the first several years when she received no remuneration at all. The "old hands" on the OPT committee believe that she was OPT's saviour, along with the rest of us lifting OPT from obscurity to being a real force on the environmental scene. OPT owes Rosamund a huge debt of gratitude and she will be sorely missed.

Media Coverage

OPT's media "hits" total in 2009 has already overtaken the figure for the whole of 2008 - last year's total was surpassed in July. Sir David Attenborough's arrival as a patron has continued to boost international coverage - not least in Norway, where OPT has gained several members as a consequence of an item in *Dag Bladet*. Other highlights include BBC1's *The One Show*, which featured OPT trustee and Exeter GP Pippa Hayes at length, and extensive coverage of our World Population Day poll in, among others, the *Daily Mail*. Worth noting in the latter is the comment piece by the *Mail's* science editor, Michael Hanlon, which appeared the day after the news story. This was in the nature of a recantation - a confession of past error by someone who, in his own words, used to deride the population "alarmists" but who now believes that "our exploding population is the gravest threat Britain faces today". The article doesn't mention OPT: it therefore does not count as a media "hit". Yet it was prompted by our news release and the resulting coverage, uses arguments and examples available on our website and follows various contacts with OPT - notably a telephone briefing with the author by Rosamund McDougall the previous day and attendance by him at our March science conference. Has OPT had a part in

his change of mind? It seems more than likely - and given that this is the *Daily Mail*, the newspaper that Governments are said to fear (and heed) most but that itself has long been in two minds about the issue, it's movement to be pleased about. But like the proverbial iceberg, it demonstrates that much of our impact is invisible, and will always remain so. You can read the *Mail* comment piece at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-1199746/MICHAEL-HANLON-Our-exploding-population-gravest-threat-Britain-faces-today.html>.

Population Day Poll

OPT's recent YouGov poll confirmed that the British public, by and large, is thinking what we're thinking. They believe that both the world and the UK are overpopulated, want a smaller UK population, link overpopulation to a range of environmental problems and are also quite keen on smaller families. Interestingly, older people tended to have more "radical" views on some of these questions. Fieldwork for the poll took place during May, with 2,131 adults canvassed: the results were published on World Population Day, July 11, and are available via the website. Thanks to all those members who contributed regional media contacts: OPT does not routinely monitor local/regional media so any feedback on coverage (to info@optimumpopulation.org, please) would be much appreciated.

Climate Change Statement

Climate change is caused by climate *changers* - that is, people - yet getting population growth recognised as a key factor in the former, at least politically, has proved an uphill struggle. With negotiations well under way for a new climate change treaty at Copenhagen in December, OPT has issued a statement calling for non-coercive population restraint policies to be adopted by every state worldwide as part of the battle against climate change. Family planning programmes in poorer countries should qualify for climate change funding, the statement adds, while giving women control of their own fertility would also have major humanitarian benefits for the poorest states. The statement, which is available on the website at www.optimumpopulation.org/submissions/climatechange09.pdf, has been personally endorsed by OPT patrons as well as influential supporters including James Lovelock, the originator of the Gaia hypothesis, who has recently been warning that the Earth may only be able to support half a billion people as global warming takes its toll.

Speaking to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Climate Change at Westminster in June, meanwhile, OPT patron Jonathon Porritt described the refusal of climate activists to acknowledge the impact of population growth on emissions as "astonishing". Given that the whole thrust of climate debate dealt with emissions per person on our planet, he expressed himself "completely baffled" by the silence. The promotion of reproductive health was one of the most progressive forms of intervention available, he said. If China's one-child policy had succeeded in averting some 400 million potential births, even with the country's low level of emissions *per capita*, around 1.5 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide would not have been put into

the atmosphere. "That explains why Chinese politicians get a bit shirty when Western politicians claim China hasn't done enough," he told MPs.

Campaigns Officer

As mentioned in the chair's letter, OPT is seeking a campaigns officer to help accelerate awareness about population issues. The post, which will be advertised shortly, will be for a full-time, short-term (six months, extendable to a year) contract, with a proposed salary of £26,000, plus expenses. Work will be undertaken from home, largely by email and will initially consist chiefly of lobbying and networking with NGOs. If you think you might be interested, contact info@optimumpopulation.org for details.

US Billionaires Target Population

Some of America's richest philanthropists met behind closed doors in New York in May to agree which global problems they should use their money to help alleviate. Each wealthy member of the so-called "Good Club" - an initiative led by Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates, 53 - was given a 15-minute slot at the secret meeting to outline their favourite cause. Over the past 13 years, the group has jointly given away some £45 billion to worthy projects, ranging from health programmes in developing countries to underprivileged schools in the US. This year, however, one single global problem stood out above all others in everyone's mind as an urgent priority. As one source said, "a consensus emerged to back a strategy in which population growth would be tackled as a potentially disastrous environmental, social and industrial threat...This is something so nightmarish that everyone in this group agreed that it needs big-brain answers. They need to be independent of government agencies, which are unable to head off the disaster we all see looming."

The billionaire group - which includes David Rockefeller Jr., New York mayor Michael Bloomberg and media moguls Ted Turner and Oprah Winfrey - will carry on talking over the next few months with an aim of increasing the sums being directed towards tackling overpopulation. Gates already gives away more than £2 billion each year to good causes via the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. He suggested last year that charitable initiatives, such as those aimed at achieving better reproductive health care, would be capable of capping the world's population at 8.3 billion instead of the officially projected figure of 9.2 billion. Having healthier families, freed from the life-threatening dangers of malaria and extreme poverty, he said, would result in people having fewer children within half a generation.

350 Day

A new campaign on global warming, centred on the figure 350, is focused on October 24 this year. The figure 350 is the "safe" limit of carbon dioxide measured in parts per million - and already far exceeded. The organisers are calling on people around the world to stage a 350 action for October 24 at an "iconic" place in their community and upload a photo of their event to the 350.org website. They add: "We'll collect these images from around the world and, with your help, deliver them to the media and world leaders.

Together, we can show our world and its decision-makers just how big, beautiful, and unified our movement really is." For further information visit www.350.org where there are details of resources and activities already being organised. For further discussion, please email OPT member Eric Rimmer on mail@ericrimmer.com.

OPT Talks

Talks by OPT representatives recently include Rosamund McDougall addressing the All-Party Parliamentary Groups on Peak Oil and Climate Change in July, on *Population Issues and Peak Oil*. Rosamund also spoke at a Linking Environment and Farming (LEAF) event and is currently writing a (non-party-political) chapter on population for a forthcoming Tory Reform Group publication. Trustee Edmund Davey attended a conference on food security (see below) at the Royal Agricultural College and spoke at a public meeting at Woodbridge, Suffolk, in July, hosted by a local transition town group. It was, he reports, "well received, [with a] lively discussion afterwards". While there, he liaised with two OPT members who are trying to form a group locally; he was planning to meet other local members in Worcester in August.

OPT has been invited to join a panel of speakers at the Conservative Party Conference in Manchester on October 8. The Crop Protection Association is joining with *Farmers Weekly* to host a debate on tackling the global food security crisis and the event will take place on the morning (7.30am - 9.30am) of the final day of the conference prior to David Cameron's closing conference speech. Other invited speakers are: Justin King, chief executive of Sainsbury's; Government chief scientist Professor John Beddington; Nick Herbert MP, the Shadow Defra Secretary; Lord Nicholas Stern, Government adviser on climate change; and Sir Bob Geldof, musician and campaigner. The audience will consist of politicians, journalists, agriculture and food industry stakeholders and various NGO groups and campaign organisations. Patron Professor John Guillebaud is to give a talk at St. John's College, Cambridge, following an invitation from the college's student ethical affairs committee.

Blog Rechristened

Recognising that most of the postings are news reports, our blog has changed its name to the Optimum Population Trust News Watch. We've added some resources: books, education packs and videos. If you'd like us to publish your thoughts, contact us on http://www.optimumpopulation.org/blog/?page_id=722. The latest blog postings and comments are now also available on Twitter as TheOPTblog.

Food Security

Edmund Davey attended a one-day conference at the Royal Agricultural College in June with the catchy title *Transition Farms...Options for Local Agriculture and Food Production after Fossil Fuels have Run Out and Climate Change is Really Here*. He reports: "Very interesting day, though no real insight into carrying capacity, as nobody there seemed to have

thought about sustainability in the context of numbers. Positive and polite response from all I met - interest, no hostility. Many present were organic growers. I suggest the organic movement will be a vital bridge between the concerns of OPT and the public." He is preparing an article on carrying capacity for *Jackdaw*.

Facebook Friends

OPT's Facebook group now has almost 400 members. Ours is one of nearly 20 population concern groups on the popular website. Members of other social networks are encouraged to set up OPT groups and to let us know on info@optimumpopulation.org. Our other groups (Letter Writers on Google, Discussion on Yahoo) are smaller, but membership of both is at an all-time high. Details of our groups are at: http://www.optimumpopulation.org/blog/?page_id=461

Global Humanitarian Forum

OPT chair Roger Martin gave a workshop on population and demographic trends in Geneva in June and distributed 50 copies of OPT's recently published international statement: a further 100 were taken from the documents desk. (The statement, signed by population groups in the US, Canada and Australia as well as OPT, can be viewed at: <http://www.optimumpopulation.org/opt.int.statement.html>.) He succeeded in getting both the chief executive of GHF and the director-general of the World Health Organisation to agree, from the platform in the first plenary, that population growth exacerbated all environmental problems and should be treated as a problem to be addressed, rather than a "given" to be accepted. He also made some potentially useful contacts.

Education Pack

OPT is looking into producing an education pack for use in schools. If you are a teacher, or have other relevant experience, we'd like to hear your views. Please get in touch via info@optimumpopulation.org.

Not Really So Controversial?

Citing the results of OPT's population poll in an article for the Co-operative magazine *Re:Act*, patron Jonathon Porritt pointed out that half the adults canvassed had supported OPT's supposedly "highly controversial" *Stop At Two* campaign, which advocates couples limiting themselves to two children (or fewer) to reduce our impact on the environment. Which suggested, said Jonathon, that the matter was "not all that controversial, after all".

Many green activists fought shy of discussing population issues, he wrote, because they were "foolish enough to suppose that all effective family planning exercises have to be done China-style. They don't. They can be done Kerala-style, or Thailand-style or Iran-style - where equally rapid reductions in the total fertility rate have been achieved via better education, better healthcare, better access to contraception and inspired government and community leadership."

Controversy, at one level or another, was inevitable, given the subject. "Of course, you are going to get tangled up in all that gritty stuff if you do the population bit," he added. There were a lot of nasty, extremist voices out there, only too happy to use the population debate to advance their own inhumane and racist views. But they wouldn't go away simply because the rest of us stayed silent. "I believe it's part of our duty to the next generation, not just to promote this debate - but to advance the compassionate, progressive case for a full-on global campaign to put the world on a downward population trajectory just as fast as we can".

Not So Controversial? (2)

In similar vein, OPT was taken to task last year when it published a paper by US research associate Carter Dillard questioning the implicit acceptance of an unlimited right to have children. Based on an article in a Yale University legal journal, the paper, which argued that no such absolute right existed, was based on a painstakingly researched examination of legal precedent and international treaty - but was still treated as akin to heresy in some circles. So it was gratifying, during another recent "controversy" - over the birth of a baby by IVF to Britain's oldest mother, Elizabeth Adeney, aged 66, in May - to see the Church of England agreeing with OPT. "A child," said a CofE spokesman, "is a gift, not a right."

Back-up from Down Under

Sustainable Population Australia (SPA) will be representing OPT at the climate change summit in Copenhagen in December: SPA's Jenny Goldie will be at Copenhagen, along with Eric Rimmer, from OPT. Worldwide, groups in the US, Australia and Canada have been the most consistently responsive to OPT's attempts to bring together other population voices across the globe. In the US, where the majority of population activists are to be found, there are at least three organisations with more than 30,000 members. Three years ago, Bill Ryerson, president of the Population Media Center in Vermont and now a member of OPT's advisory council, began to bring groups, including OPT, together in a Washington-based summit, to create a more powerful joint voice. Their third meeting will be in October. After the US, the two most significant organisations are OPT in the UK, and SPA in Australia. Canada has a smallish group and there are organisations with similar aims in Italy, Holland, France, Norway and Switzerland.

Overpopulation Overwhelms

Not for the claustrophobic or those who can't stand crowds - a new work going on show on Earth Day, April 22, 2010 aims to bring art-lovers face to face with population issues. The purpose of the exhibit, says its creator, Dr. Gregor Harvie, is to create an "overwhelming environment" to demonstrate just how quickly the world's population is increasing and how uncertain is the possibility that we will be able to protect our futures. Visitors will enter a narrow space, dominated by a huge wall of large, abstract paintings showing dense crowds of people. "As visitors won't be able to stand back from the wall, it will be completely engulfing...it will feel like being pressed upon by a mass of humanity." The opposite wall will be covered in text,

detailing past societies which knew they faced “endgame” environmental crisis, but failed to act - prompting the question: “What makes us think we are different?” Harvie is seeking advice from OPT on the content of the historical texts and on answers to the inevitable question: “What am I supposed to do about it?” See: www.genememear.com.

AGM Voting

Voting (“guarantor”) members are able to vote on motions and elect or stand for the management committee at the AGM in November. Voting membership is open to all active members who commit to supporting OPT. For details contact info@optimumpopulation.org.

Lords Population Debate

Robin Hodgson, aka Lord Hodgson of Astley Abbots, was planning to initiate a debate in the House of Lords under the title: *To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment has been made of the implications for the United Kingdom of future world population growth?* He has been in touch with OPT in connection with background research and information, having seen our publications in the past and “found them most interesting”.

Life Membership

Life membership is now offered and is only £300. Applications to membership@optimumpopulation.org.

OPTP?

A contributor to the *Daily Times*, Lahore, Pakistan, writes: “For some really good literature and ideas, visit the website of the Optimum Population Trust, an influential think tank in the United Kingdom. The most alarming sight on that website is a digital counter ticking away at breakneck speed showing the exact pace at which the population of the world is increasing... Where are our OPTs? To start with, this think tank would have a catchy acronym, OPTP (Optimum Population Trust of Pakistan). We could do with several large digital counters on public display in each city...”

Killer Quotes

“Perhaps somewhere deep in his crypt in Bath Abbey Malthus is quietly wagging a bony finger and saying: ‘Told you so’.” (Tim Dyson, professor of population studies, LSE, in *The National Geographic*, June 2009)

“ [Women] are afraid to say that they don't want children because they're going to get shunned. But I think that's changing... I have more girlfriends who don't have kids than those that do. And honestly? We don't need any more kids. We have plenty of people on this planet.” (Hollywood star Cameron Diaz, *Cosmopolitan*.)