

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Erik C. Paul**, *Australia: Too Many People? The Population Question*. Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited. 2001. 206 pp.

From the 1970s to about the mid-1990s, environmental issues dominated public debate concerning the future of Australia's population. More recently, the population debate has expanded to encompass consideration of a much broader agenda, although environmental considerations remain of vital importance, especially in the context of mounting evidence of global warming and other threats to the sustainability of nature and human societies.

Erik Paul's book extends the new agenda even further, presenting a very wide-ranging discussion of social, economic, political and environmental concerns in conjunction with specific proposals about immigration and the growth and distribution of the population. For Paul, the answer to the question of whether Australia has too many people is a resounding 'no', provided the extra numbers live in places beyond the eastern seaboard. Towards the end of the book he places much emphasis on populating Australia's north.

Much of the book is apparently intended to explain why Paul favours sustained growth and northern development. The author's concerns include mounting social inequality in Australia, threats to quality of life, environmental degradation, depletion of resources, the impact of globalization and the characteristics of Australia's relations with Asia. An opponent of 'megacities', Paul advocates urban growth beyond the main centres where 'Cities of an optimum size are a necessary infrastructure to regional prosperity and peace'; his vision includes 'a chain of 1 to 2 million size cities' in Australia's north.

Paul presents an account of Australia as a society divided along social class and ethnic lines, and a land pillaged by a corrupt elite in pursuit of self-interest, at the expense of the general populace. The villains include company managers, wealthy farmers, politicians and academic consultants. He sees governments as repressive, concealing information about social problems and funding or encouraging sport, drugs and gambling as means of social control.

The author's notion of a 'better' society is one where population growth shifts away from the largest cities, where there is free trade with Asia and free movement of labour: 'freedom for all to move and settle where they choose'; he considers that this will bring 'peace'. Eric Paul believes Australia should, or will have to, accept larger numbers of migrants for a number of reasons, including global warming, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, nuclear accidents, epidemics and Australia's abundant underutilized lands. He claims: 'Traumatic natural occurrences such as earthquakes and volcanic eruptions will encourage people to seek safer grounds to [*sic*] places like Australia'; 'Attack by some virus killing large numbers of people would push many to flee their country and seek refuge in Australia'; 'The world's nuclear

industry is expanding and a major accident in Asia or in Europe could force millions of people to seek shelter in places like Australia'; 'Some [Asian] countries may call for the expropriation of parts of Australia on the grounds that the continent's northern half is underpopulated and "terra non utilitus"' [sic]. Also, he considers that 'As a leading democracy Australia has a moral obligation to accept all the refugees who flee their homes because they are deprived of freedom and liberty'.

Although the author's institutional affiliation is stated as Macquarie University, this is not an academic book. Much of the 'evidence' derives from newspaper clippings – especially from the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Australian Financial Review* and the *Australian*. These make up a major share of all the references in the bibliography; in contrast, academic journals receive little mention. The author's treatment of a plethora of issues is superficial, focusing on the newsworthy.

Links between the supporting 'evidence' and the policy proposals are scarcely established. The implications for population of specific issues are not explained and the content of whole chapters remains unrelated to the author's ideas concerning population growth and distribution in Australia. The question of why the newcomers would settle in the north, rather than the south, is never addressed and the economic roles of Paul's new cities are never identified.

The relevance of the subject matter might have been less opaque if Paul had developed a consistent argument from the outset and sought to sustain it, rather than leaving to readers the task of construing how he envisages that social ills might be addressed through changing the distribution of population. In the absence of such elaboration, the book implies that the problems described are largely those of 'megacities' or of Australia south of the Tropic of Capricorn. The author appears to envisage free migration from Asia, and the development of large coastal cities in the north, as an effective response to Australia's wide range of social, economic and political issues. By such means he expects to replace Australia's 'adversarial' relations with Asia with 'opportunities for people to live, love, study and work together'.

In the absence of a sustained argument, the book becomes a compendium as the text moves rapidly from one topic to the next. There is no detailed analysis of any of the issues, their causes and their implications for population. For example, Chapter 4, 'Scarcity and conflict' is a discussion of class conflict and characteristics of advantaged and disadvantaged social groups. In seventeen pages the chapter discusses the distribution of wealth, underfunding of infrastructure and services, contrasts between the city and the bush, One Nation, ethnic disadvantage, social cohesion, racism, Aboriginal communities, conflicting interests in the development of Northern Australia, political alienation, crime, ethnic gangs, motorcycle gangs, money laundering and economic rationalism.

Social inequality, unsustainable use of the environment and resources, northern development and relations with Asia are all major concerns, but they would not be resolved in Erik Paul's borderless Australia. This book will appeal to readers interested in a compendium of controversies and an unsubstantiated Utopian vision. I cannot recommend it for demographers.

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**Christine McMurray and Roy Smith**, *Diseases of Globalization: Socioeconomic Transitions and Health*. London and Stirling VA: Earthscan Publications. 2001. 200+vi pp.

The authors describe this book as an examination of 'the complex interactions between macro and micro levels of structures and processes relevant to current trends of modernisation'. The impact of political change and economic modernization of marginalized communities on health and well-being is examined in case studies of Mongolia, Uzbekistan and the Marshall Islands.

The first five chapters discuss some general issues of economic development and the determinants of health. Sometimes, the discussion does no more than restate the obvious: 'Lifestyle options on the Marshall Islands are influenced by a broad range of factors, the most important being economic issues and political control. Government spending priorities are generally determined by available finances'. The analysis is further hampered by a lack of clarity in definition: globalization, modernization, and industrialization are used interchangeably as synonyms, with little examination of their specific components or effects.

Elsewhere, the argument frequently seems simplistic: thus, the diversification of peasant farming into cash crops is attributed solely to the 'desire for cash with which to purchase consumer goods'. The place of taxes, investments in education or health, or savings to alleviate food shortages, in such decisions is ignored. Similarly, 'urbanisation is a leading cause of increased stress' is an (unreferenced) claim which is at least open to challenge. It appears to reflect a neo-Arcadian perspective, in which a life of subsistence agriculture is implicitly or explicitly lauded over the problems of modern existence. Here, 'subsistence' equates to 'self-sufficiency'. It does not reflect the realities of weather – storms, drought and floods, for example – or other natural disasters such as locusts or fish and animal diseases, which make the lives of subsistence dwellers so desperately vulnerable.

Population and health issues in Mongolia and Uzbekistan are presented in greater detail in Chapter 6. There is interesting information on health status and health indicators as well as cultural and social influences, both traditional and modern, which affect these. Less successful, however, are the attempts to disentangle the health effects of the transition to market economies in the two countries. The authors conclude that within the health sector itself, 'reductions in health expenditure led to sharp increases in the prevalence of illnesses in both countries, primarily because the capacity to cure illness was reduced, while preventive medicine continued to be under-emphasised'. While this is unexceptionable, in a book which strongly, and rightly, argues that health is too complex an issue to be left to the health sector alone, a more comprehensive assessment would have been welcome.

The remaining three substantive chapters concentrate on the Marshall Islands, offering a case study whose length is disproportionate in the book's overall structure, but which is nevertheless intrinsically fascinating. It includes a wealth of well-observed detail, providing a vivid picture of the lives and the circumstances of the islanders. It also identifies some specific effects of changing economic conditions, whose magnitude may differ considerably with local circumstances. Where public sector employment, for example, forms the largest and most lucrative part of the wage economy, cutbacks as a part of structural adjustment since 1995 have not only severely curtailed job opportunities but 'seriously eroded household security.

In typical Marshallese extended families, one or two weekly pay cheques could be supporting many people ...'.

Qualitative research (in-depth interviews and focus-group discussions) provide some insight into the reasons for some health patterns in the Islands. As in many other countries, there is a clear divide between knowledge and behaviour: the Marshallese appear to be well-informed about nutrition and healthy lifestyles but have little individual inclination to follow the prescriptions. This should not come as a surprise. Cultural and behavioural norms inhibit change while lack of demand for, as well as money to buy, less fatty and sugary foods means retailers are unwilling to import them. Slow movement and modest clothes are not only valued from custom, but an appropriate response to heat and humidity, while to walk the pot-holed and filthy alleyways, or swim in the rubbish-laden polluted lagoon would court disaster. There is little room on the crowded islands for sports facilities, little money to provide them and even less to take advantage of any which might be provided. Here, the authors' faith in primary health initiatives, bottom-up strategies, the promotion of lifestyle changes, multisectoral involvement and other WHO nostrums appears to falter. 'In terms of survival strategies it may well be that the Marshall Islands ...will have to lower their expectations of what they can achieve'.

What to do? The USA currently provides 'virtually all welfare and most material goods' and 80 per cent of the Islands' GDP. The authors claim that relationship with the USA has prevented the development of self-sufficiency based on greater use of marine resources. However, they provide little evidence that those marine resources, with their requirements of heavy investments in energy (for refrigeration and processing) and transport (the Marshalls are amongst the most isolated areas in the world) are really viable. Elsewhere, they state that 'Without substantial overseas investment and assistance it is difficult to see how the Marshall Islands could become self-sufficient'. It is somewhat difficult to envisage that the authors read what they were writing.

It is also difficult to discern a potential audience for the book. For students or a general reader, the poor overall organization and the turgid style, in particular of the earlier chapters, as well as the quite inadequate Index, limit its usefulness. For the health or development specialist, there is little that is new apart from case study details, and there is much which is questionable.

The authors undoubtedly have their hearts in the right place, but it will take a great deal more than this to bring down the forces of international capitalism.

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