

REVIEWS OF BOOKS

The Case for Compulsory Birth Control. By Edgar R. Chasteen. 1971. (Prentice Hall, Inc.)

Edgar R. Chasteen has presented an argument which will not be popular with many of his readers; it is also an argument whose gravity increases daily, in step with the world's expanding population. Although he addresses his argument primarily to the United States, its implications extend to almost all countries of the world with severe urgency, and involve questions of politics, ethics, sociology, and economics. Placing the dilemma of overpopulation in ecological, historical, and medical contexts in succeeding chapters, the author concludes that the government should enact legislation immediately requiring the sterilization of parents after the birth of their second child. "Some will call these proposals radical," writes Chasteen, "but most of us will live to see them enacted. The question is whether it will be done out of foresight or hindsight."

Several basic premises are established by the author as the foundation of his case. The necessity of stopping the rapid growth of population immediately is unmistakable and absolute. Institutions which have been established in recent years to cope with the dilemma have been ineffective, largely because of the inherent weakness in the guiding philosophy behind them: that the population explosion can be neutralized by educating the public about the dangers of giving birth to excessive numbers of children. (Education, reminds Chasteen, has had little effect on cigarette smoking and has induced few motorists to use their seat belts.) Rights, contends the author, are not temporally absolute but rather are relative to the context of the times; within the context of the second half of the Twentieth Century, with the great rapidity of population growth and the corresponding decrease of natural resources and the quality of life itself, child bearing has ceased to be a right and has become instead a privilege. Indeed, argues Chasteen, it is precisely to preserve what should be considered basic human rights — the right not to be overcrowded, the right to avoid regimentation, the right to have enough to eat and to enjoy natural beauty — that compulsory birth control must be instituted. Childbirth, writes the father of three children, has become a disease which is as great a threat to public health as the most insidious diseases which in the past required compulsory measures to be eradicated; it must be confronted accordingly.

Chasteen's book is notable inasmuch as it is doubtless among the first to assert unequivocally that the moderate "solutions" to the dilemma of rapidly increasing population simply are not working and that the only way to prevent a complete breakdown of civilization is to act decisively now. The author has taken a drastic and unpopular stand about a problem whose very existence is still denied by some. By asserting that "the king wears no clothes" his book may well serve to increase awareness and interest in the population problem if not win more supporters to his cause. What is crucial is how many people would be willing now or in the future to accept the conclusions at which Chasteen arrives. Judging from the course of events in recent years, it would seem that time is on his side.

ROBERT HAYNES
Graduate Student
University of Vermont

The Case for Compulsory Birth Control by Edgar R. Cramer, 1971 (Doubtless, Ill.)

Edgar R. Cramer has presented an argument which will not be popular with many of his readers. It is also an argument which gives serious thought to the world's exploding population. Although he addresses his argument primarily to the United States, his implications extend to almost all countries of the world with scarce arable and forest resources of timber, energy resources, and minerals. Facing the dilemma of overpopulation in ecological, historical, and medical contexts in numerous chapters, the author concludes that the government should enact legislation mandating compulsory birth control for all citizens. The book is well written and contains many interesting facts and figures. The question is whether it will be taken seriously or dismissed as a "sensational" book.

The author has presented his case for the case of population growth in a very readable and logical manner. He begins with the fact that the world's population is growing at an alarming rate and that this growth has led to a number of serious problems. He then discusses the various causes of population growth and the various methods of birth control. He argues that the government has a responsibility to act in the best interests of its citizens and that this responsibility includes the regulation of birth control. He concludes that the government should enact legislation mandating compulsory birth control for all citizens. The author's argument is well supported by facts and figures and is presented in a clear and logical manner. The book is a good read for anyone interested in the problem of population growth.

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