

OTHER NATIONS

A French Population 'Bust'?

"The French Population Debate" by Richard Tomlinson, in *The Public Interest* (Summer 1984), 20th & Northampton Sts., Easton, Pa. 18042.

Throughout the Third World, many governments are trying desperately to curb population growth. In France, however, national leaders are urging their countrymen to have bigger families.

The French are not alone in facing a population "implosion." Among the nations of noncommunist Europe, only Greece, Ireland, Portugal, and Spain can claim a birthrate equal to or exceeding the 2.1 children per adult woman needed just to keep population constant. But only the French, with a rate of 1.8, have made *dénatalité* a major public issue. Two years ago, President François Mitterand announced that boosting the birthrate would be a top priority of his administration, and he has named a cabinet member, Georgina Dufoix, to manage the government's population programs.

Mitterand's willingness to go public on what is, after all, a sensitive issue that might spark charges of racism and sexism, is actually not so unusual. The French Communist Party has long favored outlawing all forms of contraception; conservative historian Pierre Chaunu calls birth-control pills a greater threat to Western society than nuclear arms.

For the French, writes Tomlinson, a British scholar, public concern over *dénatalité* has a long tradition. They date the beginning of their decline as a world power to the 19th century, when French population growth began to level off. Between 1870 and 1940, population stagnated at 40 million. Marshal Pétain, who signed the 1940 armistice with Hitler, summed up the reasons for his country's defeat with the words, "Too few children, too few arms, and too few allies."

In 1945, General Charles de Gaulle prescribed "12 million beautiful babies in 10 years," and Paris created family subsidies to promote childbearing. Population climbed to 47 million by 1962.

Mitterand attributes the gain to French family policy and hopes to repeat its apparent success. As incentives, he has established an \$85 monthly stipend for pregnant women and parents of children under age three; families with three children receive a \$125 monthly check for two years. But *dénatalité* has long been a French affliction, and it is not likely to go away soon.

Computerizing The Soviet Union

"Technology and Freedom in the Soviet Union" by S. Frederick Starr, in *Technology Review* (May-June 1984), P.O. Box 978, Farmingdale, N.Y. 11737.

Sophisticated computers, often bought from the West, are being deployed throughout the Soviet Union. It remains to be seen, however, whether the new technology will simply allow Moscow to tighten its grip over the country, or allow Soviet citizens to win a greater mea-