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-

sure of personal freedom.

Five hundred years of Russian history offer little basis for optimism, notes Starr, president of Oberlin College. The Russians have consistently made new inventions into servants of the state. Thus, while Johann Gutenberg's printing press revolutionized the West by making possible the wide dissemination of ideas and information after the mid-15th century, the tsarist government claimed a near monopoly of Russian presses until the early 19th century, reserving the machines to publish official documents.

At first glance, Starr concedes, today's pattern appears similar. The Kremlin views computers as "the last best hope" to make the Soviet Union's creaky centralized economy work. Manufactured or imported by the state and for the state, computers have been used to render the existing administrative system, including the police, more effective.

But Starr also sees signs that things might be different this time. The Russian peasant culture that bred passive acceptance of the state's dictates is dying. In 1950, two-thirds of the Soviet population still lived in the countryside, but less than one-third of today's citizens do. "Urban life in the present-day USSR, no less than that elsewhere in the world, means large apartment complexes, individualization, fragmentation," Starr writes. Young Russians are more accustomed than were their grandparents to thinking for themselves—for example, every year 20 percent of all Russian workers now change jobs. Industrialization and new technology are largely responsible.

"The best evidence of the growth of a freer mentality . . . is the way the rising generation exploits minor technologies [photocopying machines, cassette tape recorders] for its own private ends," says Starr. To retain the allegiance of these young Russians, he believes, Kremlin leaders must avoid simply using modern technology as a Stalinist whip.

China Wrestles With Romance

"Making a Friend: Changing Patterns of Courtship in Urban China" by Gail Hershatter, in *Pacific Affairs* (Summer 1984), The University of British Columbia, 2021 West Mall, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1W5, Canada.

Many constraints were loosened as Communist China's traumatic Cultural Revolution faded a decade ago, including those on courtship. Today, reports Hershatter, a Williams College historian, the Chinese are struggling to rewrite the book of love.

China's lovelorn and lonelyhearts have no Dear Abby to hear them out, but many write to the *China Youth News* ("Dear Comrade Editor . . ."), and their problems are revealing. Before the Communist takeover in 1949, writes Hershatter, "marriage was unambiguously an alliance between families," often arranged by professional matchmakers. Later, marriage was viewed "as a simple union of revolutionary comrades." Now, things are a bit less clear-cut.

The post-Mao liberalization has not meant the dawn of a new era of