

This is Pro-Life?

by R. Willis Flowers, Entomology,
Florida A&M University

author's note: Florida A&M does not accept responsibility for the views expressed herein, which are those of the author and should not be attributed to any other member of the Florida university system.

"The Summer the Earth struck back" saw environmental problems make front page news. For the first time in almost two decades, the mainstream media are giving extensive coverage to ecological degradation. *Time* even named Earth "Planet of the Year". At the same time — and due in part to that same national media — we are on the brink of a great leap into accelerating ecocatastrophe. That increasingly probable leap is the evisceration of *Roe v. Wade* — the famous court decision that established women's right to legal abortions.

The furor over abortions in the United States may seem a distant issue to some environmentalists. Since *Roe v. Wade*, birth rates have been dropping, even in most of the Third World (though not as much as needed); public support for abortion rights remains firm; and, among the Earth First! tribe, some (e.g., Miss Ann Thropy in *EFL*, 11-86) believe that the "progressive" agenda of education, family planning, and reproductive freedom for women is by itself not a sufficient response to overpopulation. However, by the time George "A Quail is not an Animal" Bush leaves office, the availability of abortion may be much more restricted than it is today. Does it really matter? Yes, for two reasons. The first (and lesser) is that abortion prevents 1.5 million extra births in the US each year. Those 1.5 million less Americans are equivalent to up to 150 million prevented births in the Third World in terms of consumption of resources. That's more than the entire population of Brazil. Like others concerned with overpopulation, I agree it would be better if abortion were never needed. I look forward to when abortion as a medical procedure is as arcane and old-fashioned as bleeding with leeches. Until other options of family planning are widely used, freely available, and free of harassment, however, abortion will remain a necessary part of birth control.

This brings us to the second and far more important reason to support *Roe v. Wade*: abortion is not and never has been the true objective of the religious/right-wing forces intent on sandbagging *Roe v. Wade*. For them, outlawing abortion is just the thin edge of the wedge to outlaw all forms of birth control. Today the clinic, tomorrow the drugstore. Pronatalism is the real game and the abortion debate is just the opening hand. The Vatican as ringleader of the pronatalists has never hidden its desire to outlaw birth control; Protestant sects have been more coy but over the years have regularly dropped hints that they too intend to go beyond banning abortion. Since 1984 the pronatalists, using abortion as an excuse, have tried to undermine family planning efforts and, with the connivance of the Reaganauts, have had some success. If *Roe v. Wade* falls, the full well-heeled weight of the pronatalist movement will fall on the right to choose any form of birth control. In some respects, we are back where we were 20 years ago when Paul Ehrlich wrote *The Population Bomb*, facing the same battles all over again.

One reason things have slipped is that pronatalists have played a sly public relations game. Take that best-known of pronatalist slogans: "right to life." Although they use rhetoric about "choosing life," being "pro-life," etc., Pope & Falwell Inc. express no concern for all the non-human life being exterminated by excessive human activity. Indeed, there has been only scant concern for the women, families and human communities forced to cope with children beyond their abilities to care for them. "Life" includes the whole biosphere with its 30 million or more species. Only those who subscribe to a biocentric world view are entitled to call themselves a "right to life" movement. Yet, by falsely claiming to be "pro-life," pronatalists have been able to move beyond their power base of right-wing fanatics and enlist a surprising number of liberals. The Marxist concept of Useful Idiot is a fitting description for the latter.

In recent years a parade of "prowgressives" (of the Nat Hentoff ilk), "pro-life feminists" (whom other feminists have called the Feminist Fifth Column), and plain kooks with left-wing credentials (such as former California governor Jerry Brown) have seized the spotlight proclaiming their "uncomfortability" with abortion. They suspect that women may be using abortion

as — gasp! — birth control, and that women have abortions for "frivolous" reasons (though providing no evidence for this sexist charge). While the polemics of the Useful Idiots lack the underlying misogyny of the fanatic Right, and are long on syrupy phrases like "life-affirming," they demonstrate no sympathy for non-human life nor even much awareness of the simplest principles of biological reality. There is also the "conservative-pronatalist" school that wants increased breeding to fulfill their geopolitical fantasies. Ben (America-can-spawn-its-way-to-Greatness) Wattenberg has taken over Julian Simon's place as media darling of this group. Most of these recent converts loudly proclaim their devotion to freedom, tolerance and the liberal agenda even as they goose-step to the tunes called by Jerry Falwell and the Vatican autocrats. Pusillanxious lefties, Wattenbergites, and a great crowd of the ethically confused and biologically ignorant — they are the new Spawning Lobby.

Media hype has also played a significant part in the "New Civil War" (as *US News & World Report* calls the fight over reproductive freedom). Coverage of the recent "pro-life" travelling circus (soon to perform at a clinic near you) and other recent confrontations can be excused as necessary news gathering. But the media have been eggging on the Zygotes-R-Us crowd in more subtle ways. In "new technology" stories, for example, we get portrait shots of fetuses along with the tedious pontifications about how the latest gizmo has really "blurred the question of when life begins." Life began sometime in the Pre-Cambrian; there is no evidence of repeat performances. Alert Ted Koppel, Controllers of the mass media also seem fascinated by fertility — the extremes to which some people go to have children make good copy nowadays. Career women are now being urged to play Beat the Biological Clock — drop everything and have that kid before it's too late! This is not to suggest that the issues underlying some of these stories should be ignored; what's objectionable is the pronatalist spin put on almost every story relating to human reproduction, with no mention of the problems caused by too many people and by unwanted children.

To be sure, NOW, Planned Parenthood and many other liberals have been working hard to thwart a pronatalist *putsch*. However, they may have made a critical error in tactics: they have rested their entire defense of legal abortion on the issue of a woman's right to choose — "pro-choice." Granted, this is an important point — in fact, among animals that care for their young, one sex usually provides most of the care and that entails regulating the number of offspring in conformity with the resources available for rearing them properly. Humans are one of the few animals (maybe the only) where the sex that is largely uninvolved in day-to-day rearing operations exercises dictatorial power over the reproductive options of the rearing sex. At least, that was the case until recently and that's

what the pronatalists seek to restore. However, as noted already, the Spawning Lobby has trivialized the pro-choice argument with a devious campaign portraying any woman who chooses an abortion as a frivolous bimbo. They have managed to frame the issue as "freedom of choice" vs. "baby killing." This has put pro-choice advocates on the defensive, endlessly apologizing for women's aspiration for something besides the "captive breeding program" of patriarchal domesticity. Planned Parenthood could hold the moral high ground more easily by adopting a broader, more ecological advocacy. To begin, having that US baby will lower the living standards of 40-100 Third World babies. While there is no way to be precise about it, we can confidently predict that at least several of those babies will die each time a confused American teenage girl is badgered into "choosing life." Among non-humans, of course, the death toll wrought by humanist "life-affirming" posturing is much higher. While the Zygotes-R-Us gang jabbars about a "holocaust of abortion," the real holocaust is what excess human breeding is doing to the rest of life.

It may be that a hyper-sensitivity over "coerciveness" and "elitism" has led defenders of *Roe v. Wade* to avoid mentioning overpopulation and chain themselves to their pro-choice positions. Unfortunately, there is still a tendency, even by people who should know better (like the staff of *Time*) to portray overpopulation as a Third World problem and birth control as something "they" need. Perhaps the best way for Planned Parenthood and its allies to protect women's freedom of choice is to stop defending choice and start attacking the holocaust of pronatalism and the immorality of our own contributions to overpopulation. Such a stance would not be so easy to dismiss with glib smear tactics.

Ironically, aside from the threat of pronatalists, the population situation is relatively promising. Everywhere that women are given even minimal control over their lives, birth rates are falling. In Africa (where everyone is supposed to want huge families), a recent AID (US Agency for International Development) survey found that women overwhelmingly want to either take longer intervals between child bearing or stop having them altogether. Far from falling in behind the Reagan pronatalist party line exhibited at the 1984 Mexico City population conference, and despite attempts at undermining by the Reagan Administration, many countries have developed their own population control policies. At present the biggest obstacle to further progress in the battle against overpopulation is the US Spawning Lobby. Nullifying their hegemony over public policy should be a top priority for any environmental group, mainstream or radical.

We should lobby politicians against pronatalist laws as much as Zygotes-R-Us Inc. lobbies for them. The Hyde Amendment, and its numerous clones in both fed-

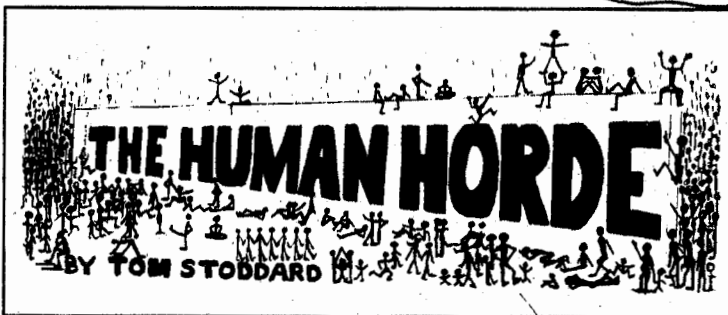
eral and state legal systems, forbids spending public funds for abortion but allows it for childbirths. The "pay the poor to have kids" legal system needs a legal abortion. It is insane to spend taxpayers' dollars to subsidize breeding. Tell your elected representatives that. Frequently.

Cowardly corporations also need attention from us. The recent international flap over the firm Roussel-Uclaf and RU 486 shows how far the pronatalists have penetrated. When a company has a socially responsible product or program and shows signs of caving in to the pronatalists, they need to hear from us that they will lose business by pandering to the Spawning Lobby. The worst of the corporate panderers are the major broadcasting companies. Everyone but the most fanatical of the pronatalists agrees that birth control is superior to abortion. Yet the broadcast media refuse to take advertisements for birth control. In their own way, ABC, NBC, and CBS are as environmentally destructive as Brazil and Maxxam. We need to harass these corporate unworthies, particularly when they have to apply for license renewals.

In the judicial arena, pronatalists are creatively finding excuses to obstruct reproductive freedom — "fetal rights," "daddy rights" and the like. It is here they are looking for their biggest score: getting the Supreme Court to backslide on *Roe v. Wade*. An ideal course for us would be to somehow intervene (maybe even at the Supreme Court level) on behalf of Earth and force judges to weigh environmental issues in their decision. If that's not possible, let's at least bring "national" issues to bear: security, economic health, resources — all adversely impacted by extra consumers.

The coming months may decide whether Earth has a chance of survival or whether it will eventually choke on human surplus. Will the Lifelong Environmentalist continue to grovel before the pronatalists (as he has since the Republican convention) or will he think back to his Langley days and recall that the National Security Council has identified overpopulation as a threat to national security?

I conclude with a short parable for the well-meaning but ecologically confused in the pronatalist ranks. The Reagan Administration has evidently convinced many that it is "pro-life" with attacks on Planned Parenthood and legal abortion. Are the Reagan people blind to the security threat of overpopulation? Not at all and they have a plan to deal with it. The plan, to be administered by the Pentagon, is called LIC — Low Intensity Conflict. LIC is now being tried in Nicaragua, Angola and El Salvador, and plans are much more encompassing. In fact, LIC will become the mainstay of US policy for dealing with Third World instability — an instability universally acknowledged to be aggravated by overpopulation. Thus, the Reagan Plan: make sure they get born, then kill 'em if necessary. It's a perfect paradigm of pronatalism — a contrived compassion that begins at conception and ends at birth.



**An estimated 10,000 extinctions of plants and animals occur every year, and 90,000,000 net new humans join Earth every year, or 1 extinction per 9000 additional humans. Today, 246,575 additional humans joined the planet.

**"Anyone who believes exponential growth can go on forever in a finite world is either a madman or an economist." — Kenneth Boulding, economist

**Sir Edmund Hillary has proposed a 5 year ban on climbing Mt. Everest to allow the peak to recover from the heaps of "rubbish and junk ... left on the mountain" by "too many expeditions." Certainly Mt. Everest deserves a rest from the human horde, but it is unlikely the projected additional half-billion humans on Earth 5 years hence will create a cleaner and gentler race. With overpopulation, time doesn't heal; it aggravates.

**Negative Population Growth, Inc (NPG), founded in 1972, has as its goal a return to a US population of 100-150 million and a world population of 2 billion. They print a newsletter, *Human Survival*, thrice yearly (16 E 42nd St, Suite 1042, NY, NY 10017; \$25/yr tax deductible dues).

**Nearly all California growth since 1975 came from legal and illegal immigration. California absorbs 26.7% of this country's legal immigrants, 39% of refugees, and an estimated one-half million illegals a year. (Californians for Population Stabilization, 9-10/89)

**By 2100, Nigeria and Pakistan will be the 3rd and 4th most populous nations on Earth, up from 9th and 10th presently. Neither promotes birth control. (NPG, summer 88)

**Legal immigrants to the US totaled

601,516 in 1987. They come primarily from nations with failed population policies. In order of highest number of immigrants they are: Mexico, Philippines, Korea, Cuba, India, China, Dominican Republic, Vietnam, Jamaica, and Iran. The US acts as a safety valve for these nations, keeping their pressure cookers from exploding, relieving the pressure on them to deal with social, economic, religious, political and birth control problems. (NPG, summer 88)

**The US Congress bowed to the religious fanatics on 13 September 1988 when it voted to deny Medicaid funding for abortions for victims of rape and incest. (California Abortion Rights Action League, 3rd quarter 88)

—Tom Stoddard