

Editorial

A small question of demographics

The death rate in Russia last year increased by 20% over that of 1992. This translates into the deaths of 360,000 individuals who should have been alive today, by any acceptable standard. Life expectancy for the average Russian male is now believed by some to be below 59 years of age.

Of course, this sharp rise in deaths has been accompanied by a similar fall in the birth rate, as well as a rise in infant mortality. Such dismal conditions are far below the average in the industrialized world, and the lowest in Russia since before 1960. Infant mortality had risen from a high 17.4 per 1,000 births in 1992, to 19.1 last year. Such a figure, of course, does not include the staggering statistic that more than 50% of children never see the light, because they are aborted.

This is the reality of the Jeffrey Sachs shock therapy remedy; and not surprisingly, Russia's National Security Council is looking at these figures with alarm. While babies and the elderly suffer most from the vicious austerity which has turned bread into a luxury, there is also a sharp rise in the rate of suicide among adults, who despair of the future.

At a conference held at the Harriman Institute in New York, not an institution known to blanch at the horrors of malthusianism, a report on this dramatic fall in the Russian population was given by Natalia Rimashevskaya, head of the Institute for Socio-Economic Studies of the Population. She stated that what she called an "unprecedented" rise in the death rate correlated with an increase in killings and suicides. According to Rimashevskaya, the average age of death for men and women is below 66. This figure is five years below the life expectancy of over 70 that had recently been achieved in Russia.

Russia itself is now a dying nation if we look at the demographics.

In 1993, some 1.4 million people were born and 2.2 million died. Some of this was masked by the fact that Russians who had been living elsewhere in the former Soviet Union migrated back to Russia, but the moral is obvious. Even with this additional population,

the net fall in population was 500,000. Many women of child-bearing age postpone having children, or decide not to give birth, "because of the poor situation in the country."

Another cause of the increase in the death rate among adults is an increase in the amount of cardiovascular disease, which no doubt correlates to poor nutrition, and perhaps also increasing alcoholism.

About 10% of world grain production takes place in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, and this has fallen by 15% since 1989. At the same time meat, milk, and egg production have fallen by 20%; milling of flour and bread production by more than 10%. All of this can be attributed to the intervention of Jeffrey Sachs and the coterie of international financiers, whom he represents as the apostle of "free trade."

At the same time that this news became known, on Feb. 14, the possibility of trade war between the United States and Japan was being mooted, due to the U.S. demand that the Japanese accept trade quotas. The irony of the situation seems to elude U.S. ideologues.

It is ludicrous for the United States government to attack the Japanese for not opening themselves to the rapacity of the free-marketeers from the West, and then to turn around and demand the Japanese government impose a quota system upon its own population in order to force them to buy American. Not only is this a clear violation of the axiomatic premises of free trade, but it also is tragic in face of the dramatic increase in productive output that is really needed from both nations. Worse still, it is criminal that the United States and Japan do not join hands to devote all of their efforts toward transforming the situation in Russia and the rest of the former Soviet bloc.

What is needed is the implementation of LaRouche's Productive Triangle program. The cost of the contrary policy—allowing free rein to the bankers, and failing to support a transformation of the Soviet economic system into a viable productive economy—can be counted in the numbers of the unborn and those who need not have died last year.