

Dead Demographers Society

Speech by Dirk J. van de Kaa on the occasion of the celebration of former EAPS Vice-President Zdeněk Pavlík's 80th birthday.
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Many of you will have seen, or may have heard of a movie called the 'Dead Poets Society'. It tells the, in the end rather tragic story of a new English teacher in an American boys school. He is afraid his students will be imbued with the virtues extolled by the school – 'tradition, honour, discipline and excellence' - and instead stimulates them to learn to seize the day by reviving a secret Dead Poets Society. He certainly does not want to teach the boys poetry in the traditional fashion with emphasis on rhythm and rhyme, or technical aspects. For, in the words of the screenplay, he argues:

'One reads poetry because [one] is a member of the human race and the human race is filled with passion! Medicine, Law, Banking-these are necessary to sustain life-but poetry, romance, love, beauty! These are what we stay alive for.'

I sense a parallel with demography here. Techniques are highly important, but what make the discipline so compelling are birth, sex, life and death. It is the succession of generations and the flow of their passions that concern us.

Now that Zdeněk Pavlík has turned eighty, and presumably is nearing the end of his working life as a demographer, I would like to pose a simple question: Could one imagine a secret student society where young Ph. D. candidates would meet and for the sake of rebellion and inspiration discuss dead demographers? And which demographers would I select for discussion in that Dead Demographers Society?

I begin by narrowing the choice down to colleagues now no longer with us but whom I, and presumably also Zdeněk, have met in person and have talked with in a professional career spanning of years or more.

Norman B. Ryder (1923-2010)

The first name that comes to mind is that of Canadian born Norman B. Ryder. His 1965 paper on *'The Cohort as a Concept in the Study of Social Change'* really is a piece of outstanding scholarship. He sketches how the succession of cohorts provides nations with the dynamism necessary for their continued development. The concept is so basic to population studies that one wonders how one may ever have done without. Norman could make biting comments and he did not pull punches. His matter of fact statement that 'all Ryder brothers volunteered' when duty called in World War II has remained in my mind ever since our first meeting in Princeton. Quite possibly this is solely, because as soon as the war was over two Canadian soldiers were for months on end billeted in my parental home. I marveled at their weapons and equipment and for several years thereafter I swam in togs made out of a piece of camouflaged tarpaulin they had given me.

Milos Macura (1916-2005)

Milos Macura, who was born in Skopje, was the first professor of demography at the University of Belgrade. He directed the Population Division of the United Nations during 1966-1972. As such he was responsible for the publication of the second edition of the famous study on *Determinants and Consequences of Population Trends*. Thus it still is an excellent source for students keen to know what influential communist theoreticians such as German Karl Marx or Czech Karl Kautsky in their time thought about population issues. Macura, further, was in charge of the substantive preparations of the first global intergovernmental population conference held in Bucharest in 1974. He had to provide the conference with a draft of the World Population Plan of Action and had to make sure that all major topics were well covered. He was both courageous and charismatic. And when, reaching up a bit, he put an arm around my shoulder suggesting that The Netherlands host a preparatory conference on population and human rights, I readily agreed. We worked in close co-operation and the conference, held in Amsterdam in 1973, was quite a success. In preparation for the Mexico conference another, for me equally memorable meeting on human rights was held in Vienna. As an outcome of these and a flurry of other international discussions and agreements on human rights and individual entitlements, the freedom of choice in demographic behaviour that individuals and couples now have presumably is greater than ever before in the history of mankind. I confess to being a bit worried about what the future may hold in that respect. Will a number of rights be rolled back? In the Dead

Demographers Society a focus on Macura would almost certainly give rise to a stimulating discussion on such issues.

Frank Wallace Notestein (1902-1983)

When I first met Frank Notestein in Princeton he already had to cope with the effects of what must have been a long life of heavy smoking. But this most elegant writer of all demographers I have ever read, still formed beautiful sentences and spoke slowly but clearly. I'm not sure I made the best possible use of that dinner meeting. I was still young, had been swept away by the power of his transition narrative, had not read all his work as closely as I have now, and probably stood in awe of this imposing man. Anyway, I did not ask him, as I would have done now, why he preferred the term 'transition' to the original '*révolution*' of the French, why he apparently believed there would be one transition only, why he was so convinced that mortality decline preceded the decline in fertility and why, already at that time, he felt so sure that the story as he told it would be universally applicable.

Of late I have expressed myself more critical about his approach than I really feel. I still marvel at the perceptiveness and logical ordering of his arguments. I seem to know sections almost by heart. Growth in the modern era, so he wrote in a speech published in 1983 'has its source in universal differences in the way in which the normative orders in all societies impinge on human fertility and mortality'. And also, 'populations ... entered the modern era with both the physiological capacity and social institutions required to elicit high rates of reproduction'. I'm almost certain, Zdeněk, that you remember sentences such as these as well as I do.

Etienne (1932-2006) and Francine van de Walle (1930-2006)

This Belgian born couple was ideally placed to build bridges between different communities in our profession. French was their mother tongue but after 1961 they lived in the US. They narrowed the continental divide, they combined the French and English speaking traditions in population questions, worked on historical as well as contemporary data, used quantitative as well as qualitative approaches and published on developing as well as developed societies. Etienne's address as outgoing president of the PAA (1992) demonstrates this multifaceted approach very well. Just as his study on the female population of France in the 19th

century, it has become rightly famous. He had a very great talent at unearthing, sometimes spicy, demographic tidbits from the popular literature of earlier periods. He contributed substantially to *The Demography of Tropical Africa* (1968), a collaborative volume that I used extensively when analyzing the first ever census of Papua New-Guinea. Francine interviewed women on post-partum sexual abstinence and attitudes towards contraception in Africa south of the Sahara and together they published on its effects on fertility. But what I particularly remember of Francine's work is her contribution to the Princeton European fertility project initiated by the famous Ansley Coale. She focused on infant mortality and to everyone's surprise found that the decline in fertility was not always preceded by a decline in mortality! An unexpected setback for the transition theory then in vogue and to which I certainly subscribed!

One fine day in 1986 the paths of Etienne and Francine crossed with those of Jacomien and myself. It was in Canberra, Australia. As our hosts were keen to see the broadcast of the wedding of Prince Andrew and Sarah Ferguson it must have been on the 23rd of July of that year. We decided to go out for dinner together. The whole of the country seemed glued to the TV so that we had the restaurant completely to ourselves. The food and wine were excellent; among much laughter our discussions became more and more animated. When the Maître D' put on some suitable music we were soon dancing around the tables. We had enjoyed ourselves so thoroughly that upon departure we agreed to share meals again on future occasions. No doubt, IUSSP or PAA-meetings would offer plenty of opportunities! As it happened, no such memorable chance encounter ever materialized again. *Carpe Diem* – seize the day – is what members of the Dead Demographers Society should certainly learn!

Hans-Joachim Hoffmann-Nowotny (1934-2004)

You were the first Vice-President of the European Association for Population Studies (EAPS) Zdeněk, and you will thus remember that in establishing the association we received the support of colleagues from all over Europe. Of these too large a number are no longer with us. Let me mention: Erland Hofsten, Jerzy Holzer, Milos Macura, Per Sevaldson, Yaropolk Guzevatyi, Vladimir Trebici, David Eversley, and Jean Bourgeois-Pichat. We have also lost other strong supporters in Rudolf Andorka, Gerard Calot, Andrei Volkov and 'our' Anton Kuijsten. Of these many colleagues I want to mention two as certain candidates for discussion in the Dead Demographers Society: William Brass and Hans-

Joachim Hoffmann-Nowotny. I have vivid memories of both of them. Hoffmann-Nowotny was born in Germany and worked as professor of sociology at the university of Zürich. Migration, integration and the family were his topics of special interest. In all books and papers he wrote, he tried to establish a theoretical frame work based on Max Weber or a similarly famous German sociologist, first and then followed that in his analysis irrespective as to whether the final conclusions were politically correct or not. He considered that the idea of a multicultural society had serious faults and would not have been surprised to hear leading European politicians, such as Cameron and Sarkozy, now say that the integration of migrants has failed. He similarly, pointed out that in the end continued individualization could lead to absurdity of ‘autistic’ families. He would always stick to his guns and in his stubbornness he sometimes reminded me of you, Zdeněk. He, similarly, was extremely loyal to his friends and would, had he been alive, no doubt have been here to celebrate your birthday with us.

William Brass (1921-1999)

Scotsman Bill Brass had a very different approach to population issues. He loved mathematics and, as a good friend once wrote me, ‘his genius lay in formulating mathematical expressions for simple demographic statistics’ such as the proportion of children surviving by age of mother. Almost singlehandedly he developed the so-called Brass techniques, a set of methods to extract standard measures of demography from incomplete and faulty data. These indirect estimation methods of mortality and fertility still are extremely useful in analyzing censuses from developing countries to date, and meant a real breakthrough in his time. They made *The Demography of Tropical Africa* a landmark in the history of our discipline. His methods are as robust as he himself was.

One fine day toward the end of the 1960’s we both attended a meeting in Papua New-Guinea that was being held in the framework of the International Biological Programme (IBP: 1964-1974). Australian Nobel Prize winner Sir MacFarlane Burnet was in attendance and numerous other high level officials crowded around him. A survey was being planned and I had suggested collecting pregnancy histories to study fertility and childhood mortality. The host of the meeting, the then Director-General of Health in the country, Dr. Roy Scragg, opposed that idea saying that he had personally collected more such histories than any one else in the room and he knew for certain that they were absolutely useless. I was about the jump up, when Bill touched me whispering ‘let

me do it, you have to work here'. He asked for the floor and then in his gruff Scottish voice with all r's rolling said: 'As regards the remarks made by Dr. Scragg. I disagree, completely and entirely'. I tried to keep a straight face and admired at his skills and authority.

Ladies and gentlemen

At this stage you may well wonder why I didn't include Zdeněk Pavlík in this brief list of demographers to be discussed in a secret society of Ph.D. students. Indeed, his insistence on describing the first demographic transition as a 'revolution' and his blunt rejection of the concept of a second demographic transition would well warrant that. These choices will, I suspect, become more difficult to understand and defend as time goes by! But the reason is very simple. As you will all easily recognize, Zdeněk does not fulfill the basic criterion for selection: he is not dead! To our great pleasure and joy he is still with us. May we long enjoy his friendship!

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