
Interview

The IMF is imposing the 'lifeboat ethic'

Garrett Hardin, one of the most vocal depopulation strategists, said in an Oct. 5 interview provided to *EIR* that the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, with the backing of parts of the U.S. government, are now carrying out his policies. Currently a professor at the University of California at Santa Barbara, Hardin is most notorious for a series of essays laying out a doctrine of global triage. Perhaps the best known of these is a 1974 piece in *Psychology Today* in which he calls for the adoption of a "lifeboat ethic." A group of 50 people representing the nations of the affluent world is in a lifeboat that has a capacity for 60. Swimming in the water outside are 100 others—the developing sector—begging to be taken aboard. Which 10 are to be chosen? Only those, says Hardin, with a chance for survival, those that have lowered birth rates and proven that they can sustain themselves. The others must fend for themselves; if they go under, so be it.

Hardin's work has been carefully studied. It has found praise, somewhat muted for popular consumption, in the writings of former Undersecretary of State George Ball in his book *Diplomacy in a Crowded World*. In 1974, Hardin and the rabid population-reduction advocate William Paddock formed a splitoff of the depopulation lobby dedicated to the promotion of forced population reduction, the Environmental Fund. The group received immediate financial support from the Mellon family interests and political support from members of the NATO-linked Atlantic Council. Former Carter National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski eagerly called its offices to put his name on one of the Fund's advertisements advocating that the U.S.-Mexican border be sealed off.

When Secretary of State Edmund Muskie held his press conference in 1980 to announce the Carter administration's support for the newly released *Global 2000* document, Garrett Hardin, an early backer of the project, was among those who stood next to him.

Below are excerpts from the interview with Hardin.

Q: What about population trends in the developing sector?

Hardin: There is a real problem here. I don't think that you have seen much change in the published mortality rates for the developing sector. . . . Let me point out a few things. When people die because of civil disorder such as what has been going on in Lebanon or Afghanistan or El Salvador, the official mortality statistics take no account of lives lost in that way. The people who are gathering the statistics don't count those 20 guys who were gunned down and buried in a mass grave. . . .

The same is true for starvation figures in the interior of some African countries. Who knows how many people are even alive there, let alone how many are dying? . . . Look at Cambodia. The mortality figures never counted all those deaths. The government never reported them, yet everybody now agrees that 2 or 3 million people were killed there, but they are *still* not reflected in the death rate. . . . They would not be reflected in a place like Iran either. . . . I can conceive of a world in which this is a major part of the death rate and if they are still not counted, then we have a fraudulent mortality and fertility rate.

Q: You talked about cutting off aid to certain countries. Well, under this administration and the IMF, aid and loans to the developing sector are being cut back.

Hardin: Well, I think that every nation will be a different history. I would say that what is now going on in El Salvador is in a broad sense the result of overpopulation. Many people, 10 years ago or even more, cited El Salvador as one of the hot spots from a population standpoint, and I think that is very relevant to what is going on now. I object to all the people who blindly look at the El Salvador thing right now as a purely political thing. . . . Whoever comes into power, with or without our help, will be powerless to do anything about the problem because population is the root problem.

Q: How would you update the lifeboat ethic?

Hardin: Many people are being won over to that point of view. The lifeboat ethic is the attitude and thinking of this present administration or at least parts of it in insisting on higher standards for loans given by the World Bank or IMF. That amounts to telling the poor countries, if your loan isn't one that by standard banking practices would be approved of, you won't get any subsidy. We are telling these countries: "We are not going to do this job for you. If you do bite the bullet, then we'll figure out what we can do for you."

They wouldn't call it that. No political leader in any country is going to get elected to office or stay in office as an explicit support of the lifeboat ethic. Instead, what

they will speak of is responsibility in international fiscal affairs or some such term. Well, that's all right. It is the same thing and it has the same effect. I think we are moving closer to this in every aspect of policy, partly because we have less free money to pass around in dubious experiments thanks to the world economic conditions. And that is true not just of the United States but of the advanced sector as a whole. . . .

Q: So people like Robert McNamara. . . .

Hardin: Well, McNamara is a mixed case. As he stayed at the World Bank he became softer and softer. When he came in there he was very tough. Now the new person, Clausen, is taking the position that McNamara did when he first came in. He is going to be real tough. The soft or partially soft loans are a thing of the past.

Q: What effect will that have on an African country that depends on these loans and on aid?

Hardin: Well, in all these really poor countries, there is this very small percentage of quite wealthy people who control things, and they milk the economies. These people will find ways to take care of themselves. So you won't hear too many complaints from the people who are dying because they are not in control of things.

Q: What about the private sector? Are they going to finally come around and force through this policy, whether they call it the lifeboat ethic or not?

Hardin: As I see it, what is happening in all these countries is that private interests from outside the country approach the countries and say we want something, say oil. And whom do they approach? The elite gets what it wants, namely money. Some of it goes into public coffers, but most of it goes into their private pockets. . . . It is in the interest of the commercial banks to go in and try to change the mores of the people to reduce population. It has to be done by people inside the country; the private sector doesn't have the power to make the kind of changes. . . .

Q: What about a country like India?

Hardin: I don't think that India will ever make it, because being a country with some 700 million people and its population still increasing as it did 20 years ago, they just don't have a chance. Mexico is an interesting problem. In William Paddock's book *Famine 1975*, Mexico was put into the category of "can take care of themselves." I would think that things look less optimistic now. This oil makes very little difference, because it is quite apparent that the oil money is going to be channeled to the rich and wealthy in Mexico. The Mexican government is officially in support of population programs, but the government won't really figure out how to bite the bullet and turn birth control into population

control. They especially won't do so as long as they can export their excess population to the United States. As Paddock and I have said, that the best thing that we could do in the long run for Mexico is to shut down the border. It wouldn't solve the problem completely, but the immediate effect would no doubt be disastrous for the Mexican political party. They will scream bloody murder if we shut down the border. Let them scream. . . .

Q: What about China?

Hardin: Now, gee, China is making it and I always bring it up as the best example because it points out the right model.

Q: Isn't there a lot of coercion there?

Hardin: Oh, sure there is a lot of internal coercion. But that is none of our business. We have no right to go around condemning people for taking care of their own business. China is making it on its own, in its own way, and that is the way others should do it. We have this damn problem of judging people on their moral actions, imposing our Western moral value judgments on everything. If we keep doing this then we are writing the prescription for disaster. No, I think the essential thing between nations, and many people might disagree with me on this, is one of hands-off. . . .

Q: The Pol Pot government, backed by the Chinese, wound up killing 3 or 4 million people [in Cambodia].

Hardin: We don't like that, and it may be that they are right and it may be that they are wrong. What we have to ask is: are we willing to intervene in Cambodia, take control of it, and I mean complete control, because you can't go in a little bit; either you take complete control or you stay out completely. This is not a matter of saying that we like what Cambodia is doing, but we are helpless to do otherwise. We can speak against it if we want, but we should confine ourselves to speaking. What I am saying is it is their right to handle things their own way. We have no business telling each little individual country what to do. We are right not to interfere with Pol Pot or anyone else, even if we disapprove of what they are doing on these matters, unless and until it comes to the point where we think that it is a long-term threat to mankind or to us. For example, I think we were right to intervene in the European conflict in World War II. I think what Hitler was doing threatened our national security. But I think that in Cambodia, it was really not affecting our national security. . . .

Q: The Catholic Church would argue with you. Its teachings are against everything that you are saying.

Hardin: The whole basis of Catholicism, which is universality, is contrary to what I am saying. This concept of a universal ideal or morals is too dangerous to follow.