

TRENDS

Creeping changes

BY RAUNO PERTTU

Some historic events occur with the suddenness of Germany's Blitzkrieg of Poland to start World War Two. Many more "historic events" creep in slowly over years and decades, and can go unnoticed by those living the history. Only through the time compression allowed by viewing the past do these creeping changes become historic events.

One of my professors in undergraduate history pointed out that the barbarian invasions of the historical Roman Empire were for the most part actually creeping changes rather than dramatic events. The population of the northern portion of the Roman Empire was declining and the growing population of "barbarians" from the north simply moved in to occupy vacated farm lands. When the cumulative change created by the progressive shift in population is viewed historically today, it was a major historic event, but occurred mostly unnoticed by those living through it.

Today, in our country, similar creeping changes are occurring that will be viewed in the future as historic events. One such event is the change in cultural demographics that is accompanying our population growth. Our population has progressively grown from about 76 million in 1900 to about 308 million today. In that growth is a progressive change that most of us recognize, but may not fully appreciate.

Our majority population of European ancestry has a birth rate that is much lower than the birth rate of minorities. Today, about 34 percent of our population is minorities, with the fastest growing minority being Asian, but the largest minority group being Hispanic. Census Bureau projections show that our country's internal birth rate is about 2.1 percent, at which rate our population, while changing in ethnicity, would remain constant. However, when legal and illegal immigration are factored in, our population is projected to continue to climb to perhaps 420 million by 2050. Americans of European ancestry will be in the minority before that date. The culture of the America of 2050 will reflect those demographic changes. Our country, despite foreign critics, is progressing on integrating new immigrants and minorities into the larger society, so I don't expect any major abrupt changes.

The same calm outlook may not hold true for Europe. Much of Europe has no internal population growth, and is locally in actual population decline. Somewhat more than 5 percent of Europe is Muslim, although the Muslim population is not evenly spread across the continent. As one might expect, 98 percent of Turkey is Muslim, based on its historical geography. Similarly, 80 percent of Albania is Muslim. Also based on historical geography, the countries of Eastern Europe and Italy have extremely low Muslim populations. Scandinavia and Iceland to the north and Spain to the south have very modest Muslim populations in the range of one percent or less.

The central European nations including the Netherlands, France and Germany have Muslim populations of more than 5 percent. Switzerland has a Muslim population of about 4.3 percent. These Muslim populations largely represent the descendent families of guest workers who moved to Europe from Africa and Asia to fill needed jobs during Europe's strong post-war economic growth. These families are disproportionately poor and less educated, and tend to have significantly more children. Unfortunately, they have not been well integrated into their new countries. The terrorist bombings in Spain and England have made many Europeans uncomfortably aware of the rise of radical Islam within this small but growing minority in their midst. Radical groups have had visible success in recruiting alienated individuals within this minority population, increasing concerns.

Projections of Muslim population growth, to even majority status, flood the internet. These projections overtly or indirectly assert that this growing Muslim population will be loyal to radical non-European Muslim leaders, and that their goal is the eventual conquest of Europe through population growth. How much reality, if any, there is behind these forecasts is unclear. However, what is clear is that the perceived threat of Islamification of Europe is becoming a large, emotionally-charged issue that could have serious consequences. The cultural and economic divide between the Muslim minorities and the larger population is being exploited by radicals.

A recurring theme is that Muslims will eventually become the majority, and long before this time, will come a powerful, perhaps intimidating force in European life. A disturbing trend reported in news stories is the radicalization of today's young European Muslim population, and the associated acceptance of violence as a tool of social change. This apparent trend is coupled with the growing anti-Muslim focus of European rightist groups and the fears of many Europeans that they will lose their cultural identity as the number of Muslims grows. In addition, cultural clashes based in part on religious differences become magnified as issues of safety in the streets and as challenges to freedom of speech and other freedoms.

I have always thought of Europe's historic bloody wars and conflicts as something in the past. The beautiful, tranquil landscapes and towns seen on vacation seem incapable of being the scenes of ugly violence. It's a bit worrisome to think that the polarization developing from the focus on Europe's small but growing Muslim population could be a very early harbinger of future violent conflicts. Let's hope that, instead, this focus leads to better integration and a happier future for this recently arrived Muslim minority.

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MY OPINION FROM BEHIND THE GREEN DOOR

Monopoly revisited

BY CHRIS BRATT

Do you worry about not having enough health care coverage, the slow fading away of your savings, not being able to keep up payments on the house mortgage, the vulnerability of your job or business, wars dragging on and the American economy not humming away like it used to? Well, you are not alone. Most of us are feeling that our nation's ongoing actions and strategies regarding these issues have resulted in failure. It often seems our whole economic and social system is becoming more vulnerable every day.

It is time to think about overhauling the game we play of accumulating wealth. Presently a corporate CEO can make an exorbitant \$10,000 per hour, plus bonus money while most of the corporation's workers are struggling to make ends meet. Let's try a new form of democratic capitalism (if that's still the economic system we want to bank on). Our nation needs to get people off of the treadmill of work, debt, consumption and the economic inequities this routine leads to. We have to give up the false ideas that we're all capable of becoming rich if we would only work a little harder or that we can go from rags to riches by simply winning the lottery.

The reality is most of us have never really had an equal chance of getting rich, given that most of the high paying jobs in the established corporation world are scarce and already filled. It's also very difficult to buy a large number of corporate stock shares when you only earn a family or minimum wage. I would say there are relatively few Americans able to make superior salaries and investments and many of those people violate the rules of the game in making their way to the top.

I may have (at least in part) a modest answer to our serious economic challenges. Almost every American (at least in my generation) knows of or has played the board game known as Monopoly. The idea of the game is to buy, rent, improve and sell properties, railroads, utilities, etc., for a profit and become the wealthiest player and the eventual winner of the game. But the interesting part of this game is that each

player is given an equal amount of money at the start of the game so every player has an equal and fair chance of making the most profit and win. No one starts the game with the unfair advantage of already having more money or property. Every Monopoly player must also follow very specific rules on how the game is to be played. These rules hold the players in check by limiting or preventing an action that would create an unfair advantage for one player.

Admittedly, Monopoly is a game and probably not the economic model we should choose. But, there is no question we need a new prototype for creating jobs and distributing our wealth more evenly and fairly. It may be difficult to distribute money and properties as easily as you do at the beginning of the Monopoly game, but we could certainly use the billions of national inheritance tax dollars we receive for investment grants in new worthwhile enterprises.

For a start, we could write and enforce some better laws for corporations to live by, have more fair taxation for poor people, offer bail-out money to people who have lost their jobs, and create jobs like we did during the Great Depression through programs like the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). For the long term, there are some European democracies that could teach us plenty about economic stability and justice.

Any reform of our inequitable economic system must address not only individual and corporate power structures, but also the quality of life issues for all working people. Things like job security, retirement, health care and sharing in the profits and the decision making must be considered.

After all this, if you still believe you're the one who will become the rich American by hard work or the lottery, I say, dream on. I hope you're smart enough to make it, but if not, at least try your luck at Monopoly and collect your \$200 for passing "Go."

If you think I'm the one who should dream on, give me a call.

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