

ceived on November 10, 1965, should have been born between June 27 and August 14 in the following year. And day-by-day records of births in New York City apparently show that in each of the first five years of the decade the numbers of births in the corresponding intervals accounted for between 13.9 and 14.1 per cent of all births in the year. As luck will have it, the same interval in 1966 accounted for 13.9 per cent of the year's total births. Comparisons of weekly averages for the first half of the sixties show that there was no significant difference between the pattern of 1966 and that of the preceding years.

Mr Udrey is realistic enough not to expect that his simple analysis will prevent all further talk of the demographic aftermath of the great blackout but that, of course, is an exceedingly passive point of view. The question he should be asking is whether power cuts could not be used deliberately, by sufficiently clever local authorities, as a means of regulating the population. For if, as it now seems, it may be possible to create among city populations the belief that there has been a massive increase in population simply by switching off the lights, may it not also be possible by switching off the lights every few days, to create among the populations of cities such as New York such a powerful conviction that the city is about to burst with people that nobody will dare bring children into the world? Is it too much to ask that Mayor John Lindsay, with all his present troubles, should be the first to try this out?

100 Years Ago



Many persons are, no doubt, under the impression that the deaf and dumb talk to each other by means of the finger alphabet; but the use of this pre-supposes a knowledge of the meaning of words and letters, which the deaf and dumb child can hardly be taught till intelligible communication has been established with it. Alphabetical speech is slow and clumsy, whereas the deaf mute speaks to his comrades as rapidly, if not as precisely, as we do by means of vocal speech. He uses a copious and expressive language of signs, indicating words and ideas by means of simple motions and gestures. This language has the advantage of being natural and universal. English, French, and German children to a great extent understand each other, and even a North American Indian would be able to talk with them all, it being a curious fact that many of the signs used by the Indian tribes are identical with those of the deaf and dumb schools of Europe; and Mr. Tylor states that a Sandwich islander and a Chinese both made themselves understood in an American deaf and dumb institution.

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OLD WORLD

ENVIRONMENT

Message for Alarmists

"THOSE prophets of doom who predict the more bizarre kinds of human catastrophe and paint rather self-righteous pictures of scientists as irresponsible villains exploiting humanity to the point of disaster could well be doing their own (and our) cause a great disservice." With these words, Mr F. E. Ireland, Chief Inspector of Alkali Works in the UK, in the annual report of his inspectorate to the government (*106th Annual Report on Alkali, &c. Works*, 1969, HMSO, 50p), launched into an outspoken and remarkable attack on the swelling tide of alarmist utterances about the environment which he believes are founded more on emotion than on fact. The attack is remarkable both for its forthright nature and because it flies in the face of a public opinion that is well and truly roused.

One of Mr Ireland's responsibilities is to see that factories conform to air pollution regulations, and he therefore has a vested interest in seeing that the environment is cleaned up. One of his chief worries is that alarming predictions about pollution will have two undesirable consequences: there will be a flood of questions from an alarmed public which will waste the inspectorate's time, and, more important, "we may lose sight of the real dangers and dissipate our resources".

Two such prophecies which Mr Ireland singles out for attack are that carbon dioxide in the atmosphere will produce a greenhouse effect, resulting in an increase in the Earth's atmospheric temperature, causing the polar ice caps to melt and flood a great many coastal towns and cities, and that the formation of a belt of dust in the atmosphere will cut out some of the Sun's radiation, causing the Earth's temperature to drop. Both these theories are dismissed as mere speculation. There is no sign, Mr Ireland suggests, that the various physical features of the earth such as weather, temperature, position of the magnetic pole and so on, which "undergo regular long-term periodicity in fluctuation", are being disturbed by man's efforts "which are puny compared with nature's".

Mr Ireland also takes to task those who believe that the elimination of industrial sulphur dioxide from the atmosphere will signal an end to the pollution problem. "It is estimated", he says, "that man's efforts cause the emission to air of 120 million tons per year of sulphur dioxide, whereas natural causes by comparison are responsible for 600 million tons per year. Moreover, it is not the only acid-forming gas in the atmosphere." Fortunately, however, most of Mr Ireland's natural processes take place a long way from heavily populated areas where the sulphur dioxide would do much damage.

One thing which Mr Ireland makes clear is that he is as concerned as the next man that the environment should be kept as clean as possible, but what he really wants to see is a clear recognition of the tasks that lie ahead. In this regard, Mr Ireland takes the opportunity to blow his department's trumpet. British pollution control policies, he says, represent a continual advance by the workings of conscience and conciliation, so that "our achievements are