

NATIONAL REVIEW

Kamala Harris's Revealing Malthusian Malapropism

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July 19, 2023

America should “reduce population” to solve global warming, according to Vice President Kamala Harris.

“When we invest in clean energy and electric vehicles and reduce population, more of our children can breathe clean air and drink clean water,” Harris said on Friday at Coppin State University in Baltimore, eliciting applause from the audience. Apparently not all lives matter to somebody in D.C.

The White House later claimed that Harris meant to say “reduce pollution,” even editing the official transcript to cross out the word “population” and add “pollution” in brackets afterwards. A slip of the tongue may be a plausible explanation given Harris’s well-documented ineeloquence. However, she may have been repeating the all-too-common belief that reducing the population would benefit the planet. Many on the political left have been quite clear that they see human beings as pollutants whose numbers they want to reduce. Those who question this alarmist and antihuman ideology are promptly labeled “population emergency deniers.”

Environmentalists have long made apocalyptic predictions about impending catastrophes resulting from “too many” people. That fear was first popularized by an Englishman named Thomas Malthus in the late 18th century, it gained steam with the rise of the modern environmental movement in the 1970s, and it remains surprisingly widespread. Celebrities ranging from singer Miley Cyrus, actor Morgan Freeman, and comedian Bill Maher to Prince Harry and failed podcaster Meghan Markle all claim to be worried about overpopulation. (Markle even received an award from the environmentalist group Population Matters for the allegedly heroic act of limiting her family to two children in the name of protecting the planet.)

The phenomenon is not limited to celebrities. Fear of overpopulation has led many activists, policy-makers, and academics to call for an urgent reduction of the number of human beings on the planet.

Yet their doomsday predictions have failed to come true again and again. Stanford University biologist Paul Ehrlich declared in April 1970 that “100 to 200 million people per year will be starving to death during the next 10 years,” predicting that increases in the human population would outstrip the food supply and trigger mass starvation. Ehrlich has consistently refused to revise his predictions when confronted with their failure, stating in 2009 that “perhaps the most

serious flaw in [his influential 1968 book *The Population Bomb*] was that it was much too optimistic about the future.” His long track record of failed predictions didn’t prevent CBS’s *60 Minutes* from presenting him as an expert while he made nearly identical doomsday forecasts this January.

“Demographers agree almost unanimously on the following grim timetable: by 1975 widespread famines will begin in India; these will spread by 1990 to include all of India, Pakistan, China and the Near East, Africa. By the year 2000, or conceivably sooner, South and Central America will exist under famine conditions,” Peter Gunter, a professor at North Texas State University, said in a 1970 issue of *The Living Wilderness*. “By the year 2000, thirty years from now, the entire world, with the exception of Western Europe, North America, and Australia, will be in famine.”

Despite this track record of failed predictions, and plenty of research to suggest that a growing population is a good and necessary thing, prominent environmentalists and their lawmaker allies, progressive Democrats, still regularly call into question whether having children is ethical. Environmentalist groups are encouraging their members to hold a “birth strike”: to refuse to have children because of its alleged ecological impact.

But voluntary measures aren’t enough for some environmentalists. Their goal is control, after all.

David Brower, the father of modern environmentalism and the first executive director of the Sierra Club, who also played a key role in founding both the League of Conservation Voters and Friends of the Earth, believed that almost all environmental problems were caused by technology’s enabling humans to pass the “natural limits on population size.” He infamously lobbied for mandatory birth control, demanding that all potential parents be “required to use contraceptive chemicals,” with the government “issuing antidotes to citizens chosen for childbearing.”

Paul Ehrlich has also repeatedly expressed support for the bizarre, dystopian idea of sterilizing the whole population through the water supply and forcing couples to apply for a government permit to receive an antidote. So maybe it should not be surprising that overpopulation hysteria has at times resulted in draconian policies in countries such as China and India and likely hundreds of millions of coerced abortions and forced sterilizations, many of which were until fairly recently funded by the U.S. government.

Leftists in the United States too often overlook or even support tyrannical population policies abroad such as government-imposed family-size limits. Back when Joe Biden was Barack Obama’s vice president, he told a Chinese audience that their country’s then-active one-child policy “has been one which I fully understand — I’m not second-guessing.” That remark went too far even for the left-leaning *Washington Post*’s editorial board, which called it a “stumble.” The White House attempted to walk back Biden’s words, with a spokesperson claiming that “the vice president believes such practices are repugnant.”

Given his own history of verbal blunders suggesting support for overpopulation hysteria, Biden can likely empathize with Harris’s recent gaffe. Hopefully, her thoughtless call to “reduce population” was merely that. But don’t count on it.