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Forced Abortion: A Cause for Celebration?

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It might have been a first in the long annals of ham-fisted socialist propaganda events: a celebration of something because it is not as big as it could be. On Jan. 6, the government of China announced the birth of its 1.3 billionth citizen. "It's a great achievement," one official said, "China's population would be 300 million more without the policy."

The official was referring to the one-child policy, perhaps the largest and most sustained government campaign against the human rights of its citizens now taking place. Since 1979, it has been the law that most Chinese couples may have only one child; each subsequent child who is conceived must be aborted.

The Chinese government felt the need to celebrate and defend the policy because the news is getting out that it is resulting in a veritable genocide against girls. Since couples know that they have only one chance to bring a baby to term, millions of them are using sonograms to identify girls and then abort them. In some regions, close to 140 boys are born for every 100 girls.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of these stories is that they elicit almost no response from the professional hand-wringers of the Western world, the editorial boards, human rights groups and international organizations, like the United Nations, that are supposed to care about such things. The "New York Times" published an editorial on China on Jan. 9, three days after the Associated Press reported that the government was "using the occasion [of the birth of its 1.3 billionth citizen] to tout its contentious one-child policy." The Times certainly knew of this milestone, since it described "today's China" as "the unfathomable ebb and flow of 1.3 billion people," but chose not to address the one-child policy. Instead, the editors took the opportunity to lament the "gap between rich and poor."

This silence merely repeats the denials, secret collusion, even admiration with which many in the West have responded to Chinese population control. There are two reasons for such responses:

First, many people still believe that population growth is destroying the planet and that drastic population control is necessary. As late as 2002, the head of the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) was caught praising the "remarkable achievements in population control" in China, achievements that had contributed to "curbing the population growth across the world."

Second, the one-child policy includes abortion on demand, and thus earns the respect of radical feminists – coercion or no coercion. In fact, one feminist advocacy group, the Center for Reproductive Rights (CRR), has criticized China for seeking to limit abortions that specifically target unborn girls, labeling a Chinese law that prohibits sex selective abortion "problematic."

These are the major reasons, but there are two minor reasons – mere excuses really – used by apologists for population control when the scope of the oppression becomes undeniable.

Some people cower behind cultural relativism, admitting that bad things happen, but asserting that Western standards cannot be imposed on Eastern nations. A member of the British Parliament who went on a fact-finding mission to China said, "The Chinese government was refreshingly open about its one child policy and although we may not agree with it, it is their decision to make." Of course no one believes this, otherwise there would be no point in building an evermore-elaborate international framework of human rights laws.

Some argue that the Chinese people do not want freedom. Another member of the British investigative team said that, "we had the opportunity to ask a number of people at random and the

desire for small families appears quite embedded." Of course, prisoners often get used to their cells too.

People who do care about these things grow frustrated that there is no popular campaign to free Chinese families, the way there is to free Tibet. In 1998, a former Chinese official testified to the US Congress about her experiences:

Once I found a woman who was nine months pregnant, but did not have a birth allowed certificate. According to the policy, she was forced to undergo an induced abortion. In the operating room, I saw the child's lips were moving and how its arms and legs were also moving. The doctor injected poison into its skull and the child died and it was thrown into the trash can. Afterwards the husband was holding his wife and crying loudly and saying, 'What kind of man am I? What kind of husband am I? I can't even protect my wife and child.

What kind of human rights community do we have that ignores, rationalizes, even secretly cheers for such actions?