SOUTH AMERICA MAY DOUBLE POPULATION IN 30 YEARS,
EQUAL THAT OF US AND CANADA, UN STUDY PREDICTS

The United Nations today predicted that South America will double its population within 30 years. By 1980, the continent is expected to have between 210 and 240 million people -- a population equal to that of the United States and Canada combined, or, in terms of Europe, to half Europe's population (without the Soviet Union). South America's population in 1950 totaled 110 million.

These figures are given in a new report on population estimates, prepared by the Population Branch of the UN Bureau of Social Affairs. The first study in this series on Central America, including Mexico, was published last year.

The new report, "The Population of South America, 1950-1980," gives population estimates for the 10 countries of South America and for British Guiana and Surinam. The continent has been divided into two regions: Temperate South America (Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay and the Falkland Islands) and Tropical South America (comprising the remainder of the continent).

"Among the countries of South America, Brazil is emerging as a veritable giant, with 100 million inhabitants in the foreseeable future," the study declares. "Only four nations exceed this immense figure at the present time -- China, India, the Soviet Union and the United States."

In the next 30 years, South America's population -- regarded as "very young," is expected to grow even more rapidly than in the previous 30 years. This rapid growth will "undoubtedly enhance the international importance of this continent," the report points out. "The terms of trade with the chief commercial nations (notably European countries and the United States) will also be affected."

Rapid Growth in Tropical Region Expected

Population is expected to grow faster in Tropical South America than in the temperate part of the continent. "Unless massive immigration occurs in the countries of the temperate zone, their share in the total population of South America will decline," because of lower birth rates, the study observes.

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All the countries of Tropical South America, as well as Paraguay, will probably at least double their populations and may reach two-and-a-half times their present size in the next 30 years. The population of Chile may, in the same period, increase by two-thirds, that of Argentina by one-half, and that of Uruguay perhaps by one-third.

Moreover, practically the entire population increase will be absorbed by areas already relatively densely settled, the UN experts predict. These areas now contain about one-third of South America's population; by 1980, they may well contain two-thirds of the total population. On the other hand, areas of very low, low and moderate population density are expected to have about the same number of inhabitants in 1980 as in 1950.

In 1950, one-half of South America was almost devoid of human beings, the report points out, while more than a third of the total population was concentrated within less than one-twentieth of the land surface. The present distribution of population, it adds, is only partly due to differences in topography, climate and soil. It is also largely the result of historical accident and of transportation difficulties hitherto found insuperable.

Persons Under 15 Years Total 40 Per Cent

Emphasizing the "very young" character of South America's population, the study notes that in all countries of the tropical region and in Paraguay, persons under 15 years of age total more than 40 per cent of the population, except in British Guiana and Surinam, where the figure is almost this high. In contrast, the number of persons aged less than 15 in the United States totals only 27.6 per cent, and in France 21.7 per cent. In all countries of South America, the percentages of aged persons are quite low.

Little change in age structures is expected while birth rates remain high, the report continues. In Brazil and other countries with a high birth rate, no marked rise in the proportion of aged persons is expected. However, Chile, Argentina, and particularly Uruguay, will show a substantial rise in the proportion of older people because of declines in the birth rate before 1930.

"The social problems now confronting many countries of Europe and North America, as a result of the 'aging' of their populations, will also make their appearance in these countries in the coming decades," the study observes. In the countries with a high birth rate, on the other hand, the continuing high proportion of children and adolescents "raises serious problems if they are to be provided with adequate education."

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Population Rose 80 Per Cent from 1920-1950

Reviewing South America's population growth from 1920-1950, the study shows that the population increased by more than four-fifths in this period, the increase for Tropical South America being 84 per cent and that for Temperate South America 81 per cent. Other world regions with comparable rates of growth were Central America (including Mexico) and Southern Africa; in both of these areas, population is estimated to have increased by 80 per cent from 1920 to 1950. In other parts of the world, population has grown less rapidly.

The UN studies of population estimates are being prepared at the request of the UN Population Commission, which called for work on population projections "paying special attention to the need for such projections for underdeveloped countries, as aids in the planning of their economic and social development programs..."

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