REVIEWS


[PP. x+550. Methuen, London, 1974. £3.75.]

This book was first published in France in 1966, and the text was translated into English in 1969. Now it becomes a university paperback. It seems surprising that such a far-reaching work, by a distinguished author well known in international circles, should have attracted so little attention in British scientific journals. The explanation may reside in the great volume of the author's total output, and in the rather daunting size of the present production; but perhaps it is to be found more in the emphasis placed by Sauvy on theory—here a highly-literate Frenchman is giving his ideas full rein. He believes that the science of population was shattered in the nineteenth century by the general explosion of knowledge, that its development since then has been piecemeal and that the pieces need putting together again. So he wants to build up a conceptual framework which, on the whole, cannot be based on statistics; figures do not play much part in the book, and tables are outnumbered by abstract diagrams. The experienced reader often wants to see factual evidence in support of statements which, plausible and felicitously expressed as they are, seem open to doubt or even challenge, but he does not often get it.

The work is divided into an economic section and a sociological section, each with about 25 chapters. Each section concludes with a masterful peroration in which one encounters such phrases as 'the uncertainty of death abets the natural tendency to social hypocrisy'. (In case the reader of this review is as puzzled by this aphorism as the reviewer himself was, it should be said that the reference is, for example, to alcohol and smoking, which if they were certain causes of death would have to be banned but which, in an atmosphere merely of heightened probability, are not forbidden.) The author is interested in animal population theory, especially that of host and predator—which he ingeniously applies to man and the resources he needs—in the economic optimum, in the prevailing political system, in the social stratification of a people, in how hard they work and what reward they get, in social security and in the interrelationships between all of these and population itself—and its various constituents. He attaches importance to the middle class as an influence for the slowing of population growth, and discusses the reasons why Communist and other absolutist régimes mostly want to see a higher birth rate. A lot of thought—and some of the research conducted under Sauvy's direction—has gone into this book, which extends many old notions in a refreshingly new way. It is enjoyable to read, but perhaps more as a work of art than a scientific guide.

P. R. COX

A Workbook in Demography. By Roland Pressat.


The purpose of a workbook is to bridge the gap between theory and practice by presenting a series of problems with their solutions worked out in detail. This commendable approach has a number of pitfalls. It is necessarily related to a particular course of theoretical training: this one was designed for the Université de Paris, and the excellent translation (by E. Grebenik and C. A. M. Sym) does not overcome some difficulties of presentation to a British reader. The arrangement (by purpose of question) and terminology (e.g. Lexis diagram) are unfamiliar and need explanation. The diagrams are well drawn but insufficiently labelled, and they do not illuminate the solutions as clearly as they might.

The author has followed the logical idea of processing one set of data fully to calculate a series of indices, but this sometimes leads to too much emphasis being placed on the data rather...
than the problem. Wide geographical coverage leads to some features being explained in terms of the known history of one people but not others, and relevant arguments are occasionally postponed and points of principle not reiterated: for example, the arbitrary treatment of the extremes of the population pyramid in the solution to the very first problem needs to be explained, and the relationship between cohorts and ages clarified. The book is concerned with the summarizing of past data: the only form of projection offered is linear extrapolation.

D. F. RENN