

FERTILITY CONTROL - CONTROL FOR WHOM ? BY WHOM ?

Social reform doesn't always result from concern for people.
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Women should be particularly aware of this, since reforms directed at them have nearly always been based not on their needs as women, but on their importance as producers, 'mothers of the race', that is providers of labour and cannon fodder. A blatant example of this occurred at the beginning of the Twentieth Century, when conscription for the Boer War revealed the poor health of most of the country's youth - puny, chronically undernourished, hopelessly unfit to fight for their Country. An enquiry into 'physical deterioration' was set up; the conditions of pregnancy, childbirth, and childbearing in England's slums were found to be horrific; and steps were actually taken to improve them. The rudimentary medical and nursing provision in poor districts was improved. Creches and hygienic milk depots were set up, and 'schools for mothers' to teach them the hygiene of maternity - how to look after themselves and their children. (This was often pretty unrealistic, though, with little relevance to poor people's budgets and living conditions). All this surge of concern did produce some improvement in the lives of ordinary women. But that was a by-product. The real impetus and aim was to provide more and fitter soldiers. Many of the children preserved from early death and ill-health reached manhood only to be mown down in the trenches during the First World War.

Now things are changing. Advancing technology constantly diminishes the need for labour; even the 'armed forces' are increasingly mechanised, requiring less cannon fodder and more technical and administrative personnel. The delicate balance between work force and resources (not to mention profits) is in danger, so women's ideal must be changed:- motherhood is no longer to be glorified.

We fear that compulsory contraception, 'package-deal' abortion and enforced sterilization are becoming as great a threat to women's freedom as pressurized child-bearing was. We consider the demands for free contraception and abortion as being a vital freedom of choice: TO HAVE OR NOT TO HAVE CHILDREN. However the issue becomes more complex with the growth of other groups and organizations pressurizing for birth control and in some cases mass and compulsory sterilization e.g. Dr. Erlich's suggestion of sterilization via chemicals in our drinking water! We could fall yet again into the trap of the State manipulating and controlling our fertility.

Urgent questions like poverty, starvation, homelessness, children being taken into care, and unemployment, cannot be solved by Population Control and suggestion such as these:-

1. Tax benefits for smaller families.
2. No child allowances or maternity benefit after the second child.
3. More Council Housing for 2, 1, or zero children families.
4. Child allowances included in the father's wage packet.

There is a belief that it is irresponsible for women to have children they cannot afford. The population 'crisis' is a handy idealistic argument for laws that punish the poor more than the rich or for doctors to pressurize women into being sterilized, especially women on welfare or immigrants. The social conditions we live in already control a woman's choice (her economic dependence on a man; bad contraceptives; the trauma of childbirth; bad and inadequate housing; the responsibility and cost of raising a child).

Social and economic problems exist because of the nature of production and distribution and not because of an increase in the population.