

The Committee can see only two directions in which abortion resulting from these tendencies can be controlled :—

(1) By the direction of birth-control knowledge through more responsible channels, where, while the methods would be more reliable, the responsibilities and privileges of motherhood, the advisability of self-discipline in certain directions, and other aspects of the matter would be discussed.

The Committee believes that it is through the agency of well-informed doctors and, to a certain extent, through clinics associated with our hospitals that this advice should be given.

It is not, however, considered that this is a matter for the State, except to a limited degree.

(2) To appeal to the womanhood of New Zealand, in so far as selfish and unworthy motives have entered into our family life, to consider the grave physical and moral dangers of race suicide which are involved.

This, it is considered, is a matter for all women's social organizations to take up seriously.

IV. Certain further measures of a more general nature came under the examination of the Committee.

The prohibition of the promiscuous advertisement of contraceptives, and of their sale to the young; the licensing of the importation of certain types of contraceptives; the restriction of the sale or distribution of contraceptives to practising chemists, doctors, hospitals, and clinics; the prohibition of the advertisement, or of the sale, except on medical prescription, of certain drugs and appliances which might be used for abortion purposes; these measures are recommended.

The specific legalization of therapeutic abortion (by doctors for health reasons) as a safeguard to doctors was fully examined, but is not recommended.

The Committee is satisfied that the present interpretation of the law is such that, where the reasons for the operation are valid, the doctor runs no risk of prosecution.

The risks of an alteration in the law are great.

Legalization of abortion for social and economic reasons were also put forward. The Committee has discussed the matter, and strongly condemns any countenance of this measure.

Though it may be conceded that legalized performance of the operation by doctors in hospitals might reduce the incidence of surreptitious abortion and deaths from septic abortion, we do not accept this as any justification of a procedure which is associated with grave moral and physical dangers.

With regard to sterilization, the Committee adopts the same view as towards the specific legalization of therapeutic abortion.

It is believed that, where the reasons for the operation are in accord with generally accepted medical opinion, there is no bar to its performance.

We see, however, tendencies in the direction of extending this operation far beyond the bounds of this accepted medical opinion.

For this reason we do not recommend any alteration in the present position.

The failure to obtain the conviction of the criminal abortionist, even in cases where the guilt seems beyond all doubt, has been discussed as a matter of serious concern, and the Committee can only bring before the public its responsibility, as represented by members of juries, for the virtual encouragement of this evil practice.

Finally, the Committee, while fully conscious of its inability to place before you a complete and certain solution of this grave problem, or one which will satisfy all shades of opinion, believes that a definite service will have been done through this investigation if full publicity is given to the facts of the situation as here revealed, and if the public conscience is awakened to the fact that, although State aid and legal prohibitions may do something to remove causes and to deter crime, the ultimate issue rests with the attitude and action of the people themselves.

Since this report was presented in 1937 it becomes important to see how far the recommendations have been implemented. The 1937 Committee stated that one of the causes for induced abortion was the economic stress to which some mothers, both married and unmarried, are exposed. They therefore recommend that certain financial assistance should be given, including increased family allowances. The recent universal family allowance provisions go a long way to satisfying this particular recommendation. The 1937 Committee's recommendation regarding extra domestic assistance to young mothers has, to some extent, been met by the recent Home Aid Service under the aegis of the National Employment Service. The recommendation with regard to obstetrical aid being available has been met by the provision of maternity benefits as administered by the Health Department, which cover all necessary ante-natal and post-natal medical care, and medical and nursing assistance in connection with childbirth in public maternity hospitals,