

THE PRIME MINISTER'S SPEECH ON THE
ABORTION BILL, 29TH DECEMBER, 1969

One of the noticeable trends in developed countries is that parents with more education have much smaller families than those with less education. This trend is also discernible in urbanised, though still under-developed, societies like Singapore. If these trends continue to their logical conclusions then the quality of the population will go down.

In all societies, there are the more intelligent and the less intelligent. Professor Richard Lynn, member of the Economic and Social Research Institute, Dublin, wrote in the "Now Scientist" of 20th March, 1969 that geneticists have come to the conclusion that intelligence is principally determined by heredity.

One of the ways of demonstrating this is through the study of identical twins reared in different families. Investigations in Britain, America and Denmark have invariably revealed a high measure of agreement between the I.Q.s of identical twins, even though they have been reared in families of different educational and cultural standards. The I.Q. classification of the levels of the various occupations was quoted by the same author as follows:-

Occupation

Mean I.Q.

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|----|-----|
| Higher professional and executive | .. | 150 |
| Lower professional and executive | .. | 130 |
| Highly skilled and clerical | | 118 |
| Skilled workers | .. | 108 |
| Semi-skilled workers | | 97 |
| Unskilled workers | .. | 86 |

It is not unlikely that many other attributes of mind and body are also inherited. But whatever the inheritance, man, more than any other living creature, depends on nurturing and training for his capacity to mature and develop. Man needs to be reared for one third of his life span in order to be productive for the next two-thirds. In highly developed societies, students are supported for 25 to 27 years until they get their Ph.D's, and then begin to repay their debt to society. His final performance is affected by diet, health and cultural, social and educational opportunities. When the less educated who are also in the lower income groups have large families, the problems they create for their children are compounded. Resources, time, attention and care, lavished on one or two children, can nurture and develop the endowments of the children to

their fullest extent, when spread and frittered over six or more in the family, prevent any child from getting the chances he could have had in a smaller family.

In urbanised Singapore, this can become an acute problem. Free pre-natal care, post-natal health and almost free medical services have reduced infant mortality to the low rates of highly developed countries. Free education and subsidised housing lead to a situation where less economically productive people in the community are reproducing themselves at rates higher than the rest. This will increase the total proportion of less productive people.

Our problem is how to devise a system of disincentives, so that the irresponsible, the social delinquents, do not believe that all they have to do is to produce their children and the government then owes them and their children sufficient food, medicine, housing, education and jobs.

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There are certain areas of activity over which control by any government is both difficult and repugnant. One such area is the choice of the number of children a father and mother decide to rear. One day the pressure of circumstances may become so acute that attitudes must change. Until such time, when moral inhibitions disappear and legislative or administrative measures can be taken to regulate the size of families, we must try to induce people to limit

their families and give their children a better chance. The quality of our population depends on raising not only the I.Q. level but also getting parents to care, nurture and educate their children and to develop all those other qualities so crucial to effective living summed up in the word "character".

Every person, genius or moron, has a right to reproduce himself. So we assume that a married pair will want to be allowed two children to replace them. This is already the average size family of the skilled industrial worker in Europe. In Singapore we still allow three for good measure. Beyond the three children, the costs of subsidised housing, socialised medicine and free education should be transferred to the parent. We have changed the priorities in public housing, by not awarding more points for more children. One day we may have to put disincentives or penalties on the other social services.

By introducing this new abortion law together with the companion voluntary sterilisation law, we are making possible the exercise of voluntary choice. But we must keep a close watch on the result of the new laws and the patterns of use which will emerge.

It is not unlikely that the people who will want to restrict their families are the better educated parents in better paid jobs. They are the people who already

understand that their children's future depends on their being able to care for their health, education and upbringing.

One of the crucial yardsticks by which we shall have to judge the results of the new abortion law combined with the voluntary sterilisation law will be whether it tends to raise or lower the total quality of our population. We must encourage those who earn less than \$200 p.m. and cannot afford to nurture and educate many children never to have more than two. Intelligent application of these laws can help reduce the distortion that has already set in. Until the less educated themselves are convinced and realise that they should concentrate their limited resources on one or two to give their children the maximum chance to climb up the education ladder, their children will always be at the bottom of economic scale.

It is unlikely that the results will be discernible before five years. Nor will the effect be felt before fifteen to twenty years. But we will regret the time lost, if we do not now take the first tentative steps towards correcting a trend which can leave our society with a large number of the physically, intellectually and culturally anaemic.