

The Early Birth Controllers of B.C.¹

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Angus McLaren's informative article, "What Has This to Do with Working Class Women?": Birth Control and the Canadian Left, 1900-1939" indicates that, before the 1930s, almost the only Canadian advocates of contraception were left wing, and that their publications were the first to discuss the idea. But he also states that, although birth control was favoured by members of socialist labour and farm organizations, concrete action did not emerge from either group. Even worse, he continues, the Left lost control of its monopoly in the 1930s to a "socially conservative neo-Malthusian movement."²

This paper will show that, in British Columbia, at least, "leftists" did more than talk and write in favour of birth control. They managed, moreover, to maintain their influence through the 1930s and even beyond. In 1923 some of them openly defied the law forbidding promotion of contraception by starting the first advocacy organization in Canada. From 1932 to 1955 others went even further by providing a birth control clinic in Vancouver. Although most of the clientele were able to pay for the service, some low-income women in the area were assisted at no charge. Yet another "leftist" worked from 1937 to 1944 in the B.C. interior to provide information and contraceptives to many more indigent mothers. As members of the CCF in the 1930s they carried the campaign into the provincial legislature. Tacit support was given by some physicians, and there was open approval of birth control by members of the Protestant clergy. Besides publicity in the socialist labour *British Columbia Federationist*, daily newspapers in Vancouver and Victoria printed birth control-related news items and, on occasion, approved the

¹ The term "birth controllers" is borrowed from the title of Peter Fryer's landmark history of the other pioneers of the movement, *The Birth Controllers* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1965). The term "birth control" was developed by Margaret Sanger and her friends in 1914. It meant "contraception" and did not include induced abortion.

² *Histoire Social/Social History* XIV:28 (Novembre/November 1981): 435-54.

idea. The *Western Women's Weekly*, sponsored by "middle class" women's organizations, also supported the birth control advocates. All in all, then, they made their pressure felt in an active, obvious and continuing way.

This, of course, is not terribly surprising, given the fact that the social climate for an identifiable birth control movement in Canada had been growing progressively more opportune. Increasing urbanization, industrialization and demand for education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century had convinced many couples that large families were no longer economic assets. High fertility, for some women at least, did, to be sure, persist between World Wars I and II. Demographer Jacques Henripin's data indicate that, in 1961, 14.5 percent of women in B.C. aged 65 and older had had six or more live-born children.³ Balakrishnan, Ebanks and Grindstaff have noted also that Canadian women with low education had higher fertility than their better educated sisters. They have observed, too, that households with few amenities had larger numbers of children than well-equipped residences.⁴ Low income and high fertility, then, were related. Still, the contours of the general picture are clear. Henripin also showed that total fertility rates per 1,000 Canadian women had been declining since 1871 and, from 1911 to 1937, those of British Columbia women were lower than the rate for all Canada.⁵

Some of the national decline in fertility rates could be attributed to abstinence within marriage, or to *coitus interruptus* (withdrawal); yet "artificial" birth control methods must have been widely used. Informed individuals who could pay for them could order fountain syringes and ingredients for home-made contraceptives such as vaginal suppositories, sponges and absorbent cotton for tampons through mail order catalogues. Alternatively, they could buy them from certain local druggists. Many of the latter also sold condoms and other commercially made contracep-

³ Jacques Henripin, *Trends and Factors of Fertility in Canada* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, Catalogue C599-541/1972, Information Canada, now Ministry of Supply and Services), Table 2.8, p. 51. The Canadian percentage for this age group was 26.7.

⁴ T. R. Balakrishnan, G. E. Ebanks and C. P. Grindstaff, "Total Fertility Rate, 1902-1971, and Fertility of Cohorts born from 1874-1938, Canada," *Patterns of Fertility in Canada, 1971* (Ottawa: Catalogue 99-759E, Statistics Canada, December 1979, Ministry of Supply and Services), Chart 1.1, p. 31; Table 1.7, p. 39; p. 248. See also Neil Collishaw, *Fertility in Canada* (Ottawa: Catalogue 99-706, Bulletin 5, 1-6, Statistics Canada, Ministry of Supply and Services, 1976), especially "Differential Fertility," 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, pp. 37-60, and "Summary and Conclusions," p. 61.

⁵ Henripin, *Trends and Factors*, Table 2.3, p. 30.

tives to trusted customers.⁶ Although undocumented, and rarely discussed openly, illegally induced abortion was known to exist. The services of clandestine skilled abortionists were available for high fees, but some women died in consequence of self-induced “miscarriages” or the efforts of unreliable “back alley” practitioners. Infanticide, child abuse and neglect were believed to be other symptoms of the “unwanted child” and, although Child Welfare Associations had been started, very few public health or welfare programs existed except for church-based charity. Poor people were usually unable to pay doctors’ fees and, except in dire emergency, expected to do without their help. Low-income people who wanted to control family size could not get information and means of contraception.

Then, too, the War of 1914-1918 had encouraged questioning of many social conditions and long-accepted traditional values. A “new morality” based on personal responsibility and “scientific” solutions to social problems was attracting increasing support among Canadian intellectuals.⁷ Havelock Ellis’s theories about human sexuality were being read and debated in many countries. Women’s organizations, such as the Vancouver Council of Women, were publicly deploring the “double standard” and prostitution.⁸ The Health League of Canada was crusading against the spread of venereal disease. Many well-meaning individuals agreed with the internationally popular eugenics movement and its campaign for “race betterment” — supporting selective breeding among humans, and segregation or sterilization of the “feeble-minded,” or both.⁹

⁶ *The Hudson’s Bay Company, Autumn and Winter Catalogue, No. 58, 1910-1911* (Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer Publishing Company, 1977), pp. 231-38. Also Mary Isabella Norton, a founder of the Women’s Political Equality League: Interview with the author, West Vancouver, 11 February 1978.

⁷ Durant Drake, *The New Morality* (New York: Macmillan, 1928) was one expression of this trend and was widely read in Canada. Also, Glenna Jamieson, Langley, B.C., letter to author about her great aunt Dr. Chone Oliver, 1 February 1983.

⁸ *Vancouver Council of Women*, Minute Books, 1921-1925, Box 4, p. 84, The University of British Columbia Library, Special Collections Division. Hereinafter, UBC Special Collections.

⁹ In the U.S.A., especially, Richard L. Dugdale’s study of criminality in the “feeble-minded,” *The Jukes*, 4th ed. (New York: Putnam, 1884, c1877) and Henry Herbert Goddard’s *The Kallikak Family* (New York: Macmillan, 1916, c1913) laid the groundwork for more than twenty-five state sterilization laws. The more conservative Eugenics Society in Britain was started in 1908 by Sir Francis Galton, a cousin of Charles Darwin. The harsher movement in the U.S.A. was well known to Canadians. Many were convinced that most social ills were the fault of the feeble-minded, and pressure in Canada mounted in 1925 for provincial laws to prevent them from reproducing themselves. The Legislative Assembly of British Columbia appointed a Royal Commission on Mental Hygiene, ostensibly to recommend solu-

Another trend favourable to birth control in Canada was the development of international activity in the field. By the 1920s the birth control movements in the United States of America and Britain were well known in Canada through the newspapers and through the circulation of Margaret Sanger's *Birth Control Review* and Marie Stopes's *Birth Control News*. Communication was relatively easy, and Canadian birth control advocates could find friendly interest and encouragement from both countries.¹⁰

Some social reformers saw immediate benefit in such a preventive program at birth control. To many, it seemed the only solution to poverty. But the medical profession, professional social workers and government officials in the 1920s and 1930s were able to avoid the responsibility of providing such services to all who wanted them by pointing to the Criminal Code of Canada. Since 1892, section 207 on obscenity had forbidden such activity. Unless an accused could prove that the "offence" was "for the public good," conviction could mean a two-year jail sentence.¹¹ Yet widespread use of contraception had discredited the law.

tions to overcrowding in the provincial mental hospital. Its 1927 report noted that some inmates were mentally ill but could be treated. It urged the transfer of mental deficients (including "idiots and imbeciles") to other quarters, segregation under a colony system of those who could be trained to be self-supporting, and permanent institutional care for the remainder. If procreation could transmit disabilities to offspring, those to be released from care should first be sterilized. Safeguards against administrative abuse would be, first, the recommendation of the superintendent, and approval by a board of control. Consent of the patient, spouse, parent/guardian or the minister of the department was also required. *Report of the Royal Commission on Mental Hygiene* (Province of British Columbia, Victoria, B.C., 1927), pp. 6-8.

Alberta passed a sterilization law in 1928, and B.C. followed suit in 1933. (Both laws were repealed in the 1970s). In the 1930s and 1940s Dr. W. L. Hutton, Medical Officer of Health, Brantford, Ontario, led a pressure group urging a sterilization law in Ontario, but failed. (Birth Controller A. R. Kaufman was active for a few years in Hutton's Eugenics Society of Canada, but softened his views.) An attempt to secure a sterilization law in Manitoba also failed.

¹⁰ Mary F. Bishop, "History of the birth control movement in Canada, its opposition, and government responses, 1920-1980" not yet completed.

¹¹ Canada, *Hansard* (Canadian Parliamentary Proceedings, Ottawa, 1892), pp. 2458-59. Also *Journal of the House of Commons, Dominion of Canada* (Ottawa, 1890-1892), Reel 301. Under the heading, "Offenses Tending to Corrupt Morals," section 207 of the Criminal Code made illegal the making or distribution of "obscene matter" of various types, "any indecent show" or "advertising of any means . . . of preventing conception or of causing abortion or miscarriage, . . . means for restoring sexual virility or curing venereal disease or diseases of the generative organs." The phrase, "preventing conception or" was finally removed in 1969 but, with minor changes, the section is retained today as #159. *The Criminal Code, RSC 1970, Chapter 34, as amended in 1971* (Agincourt, Ontario: Carswell, 1971), pp. 60-61.

Like their counterparts in the U.S.A. and Britain, Canadian birth controllers could agree that contraception — available only to the rich, they stressed — should be offered to all who wanted it, as a human right, a voluntary choice and a free government service. To them, birth control was not a panacea, but it could enhance maternal and child health. In helping to limit family size, it could ease, for some couples at least, the burden of poverty. They found such phrases as “democratization of contraception,” “children by choice — not by chance,” and “the wanted child” to be as useful in Canada as in Britain and the U.S.A. The “public good” must be served, and they actively set about serving it.

McLaren’s suggestion that, in the 1930s in Canada, the “left” lost its monopoly to a “socially conservative neo-Malthusian movement” should also be modified. A few Canadian birth controllers did see the Asian multitudes as a security threat and were agreed that the Chinese and Japanese should control their fertility. But they did not support Malthusian socio-economic theories and were neither “Malthusians” nor “neo-Malthusians.”¹² Some Canadian birth controllers were also in favour of eugenic sterilization. However, they dropped the idea in the 1930s for the concept of “race betterment” became associated with Nazi atrocities.¹³ Most advocates of birth control were inspired by maternal and child health needs, by the social gospel and/or by feminist motives. Across Canada birth controllers covered the political spectrum from socialism and social democracy on the left to small “c” conservatism on the right. But if identification with any one party did not occur in the country at large, this was much less clearly the case in British Columbia.

As early as 1919, contraception in British Columbia was identified with such prominent left wing figures as J. S. Wordsworth, noted later as the founder of the CCF movement.¹⁴ Deploring the “law and custom about birth control,” Wordsworth assured a Vancouver audience that “in the new social order the prospective mother should be allowed to say whether she wished her child to be brought into the world or not.”

¹² Rosanna Ledbetter, *A History of the Malthusian League, 1877-1927* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1976), p. 241.

¹³ See n. 9. In fact, in 1939 and 1942, respectively, the British and U.S.A. organizations changed their names from “Birth control” to The Family Planning Association and Planned Parenthood Federation of America in order to build a more positive public image. Beryl Suttters, *Be Brave and Angry* (London: International Planned Parenthood Federation, 1973), pp. 1-4; also n. 24, and Audrey Leathard, *The Fight for Family Planning* (London: Macmillan, 1980), pp. 67-68.

¹⁴ The CCF movement was a moderate socialism based on religious and moral grounds. Walter D. Young, *The Anatomy of a Party, The National CCF, 1932-1961* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), pp. 303-17.

Women should not, he continued, wait for the new order, but ought rather to press for birth control right away.¹⁵ Although birth control did not become a CCF objective, its early B.C. advocates were almost all CCF members, with four becoming active politicians.

The group as a whole was a varied one. Alexander Maitland Stephen, known to his friends as "A.M.," was a poet, a playwright and elementary school teacher. J. Lyle Telford was a Vancouver physician. Dorothy Steeves and Laura Jamieson were lower mainland feminists with experience respectively in the law and the juvenile court system. Laura Clements Vaughan-Northam was a Vancouver nurse, while Frances Moren had established herself as a social worker and lecturer on economics. Vivian Dowding, finally, was a Kamloops mother of three with a mission to help low-income women in the B.C. interior to avoid unplanned pregnancies.

Born in 1882 in Hanover, Ontario, Stephen moved to B.C. in 1901. He articulated for a year with an uncle who practised law in Victoria, spent a year in the Klondike goldfields and worked as a cow-puncher. Finally, he obtained a degree in architecture from the University of Chicago in 1913. After service overseas in World War I, he returned to Vancouver where he taught literature and history in Tennyson Elementary School. He contributed a regular poetry column in the *Western Women's Weekly* and occasional articles on social issues in both the *Weekly* and the *British Columbia Federationist*. He also produced several novels and books of plays and poetry, and was recognized for his ideas on school organization and curriculum. About 1930, however, his employment by the Vancouver Board of Education was terminated.¹⁶ A member first of the Socialist Party of British Columbia, he joined the newly organized Cooperative Commonwealth Federation in 1933. His sympathies with communism brought him expulsion from the CCF but, in the end, he is reported to have been disillusioned by Stalin's non-aggression pact with Hitler.¹⁷

Stephen's interest in "sex education" was first apparent in an article in 1918 in the *Western Women's Weekly*. There he deplored the "insane and morbid attitude that forbade discussion of these problems." Hygiene

¹⁵ *The British Columbia Federationist* (hereinafter the *Federationist*), 21 March 1919, p. 3.

¹⁶ *Vancouver Daily Province*, 2 July 1942, p. 22.

¹⁷ Barry Mather, *Pertinent Portraits, CCF, 1934* (Vancouver, B.C.: Boag Foundation, 1977), pp. 40-41; Dorothy Steeves, *The Compassionate Rebel*, a biography of E. E. Winch (North Vancouver: J. J. Douglas, 1977), p. 33.

and anatomy were essential in the school curriculum. Knowledge of "sexual hygiene" should be required as a qualification for marriage. Women were rebelling against the "double standard." To be hoped for was the sort of "sane, fearless, and healthier sex relations that can only exist among a free and enlightened people."¹⁸ In 1919, as retiring president, he addressed the second annual meeting of the Child Welfare Association on education and eugenics. "There is more to it than social disease," he said. "If men and women could mate along natural lines . . . obeying nothing but the law of love, you will have perfect men and women, and not till then."¹⁹

Stephen developed some of these themes in a letter to Margaret Sanger's *Birth Control Review*. He urged a "new morality," and birth control as a means of improving the quality of life. He was not against Christian morality, he said, but he did oppose "priestly teachings that sex is vile. . . . We can bring an end to prostitution and venereal disease by the birth control movement. Your deadliest opponents are ignorance and inertia of those . . . still living in the dark ages of medieval priestcraft and superstition."²⁰

It seems certain that this letter played a part in the establishment of a branch in Vancouver of Sanger's American Birth Control League. In *My Fight for Birth Control*, Sanger recalled that, in the early 1920s — she did not specify a date — "I had already been to Canada and Alaska, leaving nucleus organizations behind me."²¹ She did visit Vancouver twice in July 1923, on her way to and from Alaska. Thanks probably to Stephen, she spoke to a hastily organized but "receptive" meeting on 3 July. Next, Stephen wrote a tribute to her for the *Western Women's Weekly*; an advertisement of a lecture she would give appeared in the *Vancouver Daily Province*; and on 23 July she spoke in Hamilton Hall on "Birth Control: The Pivot of Civilization."²² Amplifying still further the case for "sex education," she argued that "we have kept sex in the gutter too long, causing widespread ignorance and fear of discussing it. Instead, sex should be sacred and beautiful." She described the history

¹⁸ *Western Women's Weekly* 2:1 (14 December 1918): 12, Reel 1, The University of British Columbia, Microform Division.

¹⁹ A. M. Stephen papers, Add MSS 56, City Archives, Vancouver, B.C.

²⁰ *Birth Control Review* 7:1 (1 January 1923): 50-51.

²¹ Margaret Sanger, *My Fight for Birth Control* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, Inc., 1931), p. 205.

²² *Western Women's Weekly* 6:24 (1923): 4, Reel 3, UBC Library, Microform Division; *The Daily Province*, 23 July 1923, p. 8.

of the birth control movement, claiming that it was now a world-wide cause, and that, eventually, only wanted children would be born.²³ In his report of her speech in the *Federationist*, Stephen noted that industry favoured high fertility to be able to maintain low wages and that workers were kept in slavery by the press, church and state. He deplored the conspiracy of silence concerning the fundamental facts of life and sex.²⁴

The *Birth Control Review* confirms that the “nucleus” organization Sanger left behind in Canada was started by Stephen and a committee of women and that the new “Birth Control League of Canada” had a growing membership.²⁵ There is little doubt that it was the first such organization in Canada.²⁶ It met frequently in the Vancouver Women’s Building at 752 Thurlow Street, and reports of its activities continued until the end of 1925 in the *Review*.

Those activities were varied. First, the League attempted to interest other organizations in the movement. Representatives were invited to a meeting in which the objectives would be explained by a local doctor. The League hoped also for endorsement of its campaign to change section 207 of the Criminal Code of Canada so that contraception would be legalized.²⁷ In pursuit of this objective, the League wrote to the Minister of Justice in Ottawa to request amendment and asked various Members of Parliament to lend their support. No answer from the Minister of Justice was reported, but J. S. Woodsworth replied. He favoured birth control, he said. But it was not the time to press for the change. The Vancouver group should first create public demand.

The League also held “fortnightly meetings of a semi-public nature” and heard Dr. W. H. Curry, a dentist with socialist labour sympathies,

²³ *The Vancouver Sun*, 24 July 1923, p. 2.

²⁴ *Federationist*, 27 July 1923, p. 2.

²⁵ *Birth Control Review* 7:9 (September 1923): 221. Stephen was listed as president; Mrs. Ethel B. Summers as first vice-president; Mrs. Dr. [sic] W. H. Curry, second vice-president; and Mrs. Jean Scott-Drummond as secretary-treasurer. By March 1924 Mrs. L. E. Kean had become recording secretary. I have been unable to trace any of these women and know only that Mrs. Curry was the wife of a left-leaning dentist. Mrs. Scott-Drummond’s name appears in the *Vancouver Women’s Building Diary*, 1926 and 1937. Library Collection, City Archives, Vancouver, B.C.

²⁶ The second was a short-lived group started in Toronto by Dr. O. G. J. Withrow. *Toronto Daily Star*, 9 May 1925, p. 17.

²⁷ Correspondence, Vancouver Council of Women, Box 1, Folder 2, UBC Library, Special Collections. The doctor was identified as Dr. S. Petersky. A Dr. Samuel Petusky practised medicine in Vancouver at that time. He died in 1934. Registrar, B.C. College of Physicians and Surgeons, Vancouver, B.C. letter to author, 8 March 1979.

describe how birth control could help solve economic problems. Another talk on the "Ethics of Birth Control" was given by Stephen himself. "Mrs. Douglas [*sic*] Jamieson, prominent as a social reform organizer, spoke of over-population and resulting wars of expansion, insisting that world peace would be impossible until all nations had adopted birth control."²⁸ Books by Sanger, Havelock Ellis and other authors on contraception and sexuality were discussed. In 1924 the Vancouver branch reported study of the "fundamental principles" of birth control and that "social service workers" in Winnipeg "and points east" had inquired how to form a League.²⁹

Another report by Stephen was sent to the Sixth International Neo-Malthusian and Birth Control Conference in New York in March 1925. He expressed regret on being unable to attend and noted that the "little band of pioneers" had had a brief period when "our work was prejudiced by indiscreet management. The public was estranged by misunderstanding," he continued. "But the League is now reorganized and enjoying respectful opposition. In all except the extreme western provinces the theology of the Middle Ages is still in force. . . . All progressive ideas in Canada are born in the West at the present time." He promised law reform and a new era of freedom concerning birth control. A national conference would soon be held.³⁰

Although Stephen had high hopes for such a meeting and kept reassuring Mrs. Sanger that a conference was possible, nothing came of the idea.³¹ Editorials signed by "A.M.S." and unsigned articles about birth control continued, however, to appear in the *Federationist* in 1925. Its readers were kept informed on a variety of birth control matters. Birth control advocacy by Lord Dawson of Penn, physician to King George V, before the British National Commission on Population was reported. Dr. J. J. Heagerty of the federal Department of Health was roundly reproved

²⁸ *Birth Control Review* 8:1 (January 1924): 72. More likely Mrs. John Jamieson, later juvenile court judge in Burnaby, B.C., and known, still later, as Laura Jamieson, MLA, British Columbia.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ "Activity in Canada by A. M. Stephen, President of Canadian Birth Control League," *International Aspects of Birth Control: 6th International Neo-Malthusian and Birth Control Conference*, Margaret Sanger, ed. vol. 1 (New York: The American Birth Control League Inc., 1925), pp. 133-35. This was the first joint meeting of Neo-Malthusians and Birth Controllers and honoured many early advocates. The next development was the International Federation of Birth Control Leagues, later the London-based Birth Control International Information Centre, and, eventually, the International Planned Parenthood Federation. "Neo-Malthusianism" disappeared in the 1930s. See also n. 66.

³¹ *Birth Control Review* 8:11 (November 1924): 318.

in its pages for accusing women of shirking their reproductive duties. It also carried favourable book reviews of E. M. East's *Mankind at the Crossroads* — a study of population and birth control — and of Marie Stopes's *Contraception (Birth Control), Its History, Theory and Practice*.³²

Little was heard, however, of the Birth Control League of Canada; and after December 1925 it faded from sight. There are no references to it in the *Birth Control Review*, and there are no traces of it in manuscript collections of Sanger's papers. Nor is there reference to it in the Stephen memorabilia presented after his death in 1942 by his widow, Irene, to the Vancouver City Archives and to the University of British Columbia Special Collections Division. References to Stephen in the Angus MacInnis papers, in the 1977 writings of Barry Mather and those of Dorothy Steeves do not include his birth control work. Nor is there any mention of it in notices about his death.³³ Interviewed in 1978, his widow stated that the organization never existed.³⁴ Yet, to set against all this, we have Stephen's own words: "The Canadian Birth Control League dates from the last visit of Mrs. Sanger to Vancouver, B.C."³⁵

In any case, after about seven years another socialist in British Columbia took up the birth control "cause." Dr. J. Lyle Telford was born in Vellens, Wentworth County, Ontario, in 1889 or 1890. From 1906 to 1908 he worked in eastern logging camps. In 1913 he graduated from McGill University in medicine and set up practice in Vancouver. Ultimately he joined the Federated Labour Party and, from 1931 to 1935, produced a newspaper, *The Challenge*, "on behalf of the Vancouver Citizens' Civil Rights Committee." In addition, he lectured on socialism over Lower Mainland radio stations. He opposed cigarette smoking and alcoholic liquor, campaigned against gambling and prostitution and advocated equal rights for women — both inside and outside the home.

Like Stephen, he joined the newly formed CCF party in 1933. He became president of the provincial wing and, in 1935-36, toured the province organizing branches. In 1937 he was elected to the provincial legislature as the member for Vancouver East. In 1939 he was elected

³² *Federationist*, 16 May 1924, p. 2; 11 July 1924, p. 11; 30 January 1925, p. 4; 27 February 1925, p. 4.

³³ See, for example, *The Vancouver Daily Province*, 2 July 1942, p. 22.

³⁴ Mrs. Irene Stephen-Manthey, San Francisco, Calif., interpolated comments in letter to Mrs. Manthey from author, 29 November 1978. Also telephone conversation with author, 29 January 1979.

³⁵ "Activity in Canada by A. M. Stephen. . . ." see n. 30.

also as mayor of Vancouver. When other party members disapproved of his holding dual responsibilities as MLA and as mayor, Telford resigned his seat and ran in the next provincial election in the same constituency as an independent candidate. He was defeated, however, and returned to his medical practice in 1940 after another defeat for the mayoralty. After World War II he became active in the Canadian-Soviet Friendship Council and, in 1953, in collaboration with his third wife, Mabel, revived *The Challenge*. Three years later he suffered a massive stroke and, in 1960, died.³⁶

Telford's interest in issues relating to human sexuality was first evident when, in March 1928, at the invitation of the Social Science Club at the University of British Columbia, he gave a talk on the merits of "companionate marriage." The year before, Judge Ben Lindsey, famous as the American pioneer of juvenile courts, had collaborated with Wainwright Evans in producing *The Companionate Marriage*. Here he argued that a marriage would be strengthened if the couple used birth control for the first two years. If they found themselves to be incompatible, they could divorce without serious emotional damage to themselves, and there would be no children to suffer. Lindsey believed also that companionate marriage would end the "hypocrisy of collusive divorce" — a widespread practice — and help "the poor and socially unfit who need it most."³⁷

What Telford actually said to the students is not known, but public reaction to his espousal of Lindsey's theory was instantaneous — if off the mark. Readers of *The Vancouver Sun* were scandalized by word of the lecture, and one even suggested that Telford should be "sterilized." An editorial in that newspaper called Telford's lecture "companionate hokum" and "sex madness." It was the result of the teachings of "over-sexed philosophers" intending to promote sexual freedom. "To a normal man and woman sex is the smallest factor in love and marriage. It is only exploited by the abnormal." Two days later the *Sun* returned to the attack, calling companionate marriage "social poison which gratifies the erotic impulse, and gives a poor start in marriage." One reader asserted in a letter to the editor that Telford's speech was "unworthy of Canada"!

³⁶ For additional information about Telford, see Mather, *Pertinent Portraits*, pp. 44-45; Telford, J. Lyle, J. S. Matthews, Collector — 19; News Clippings File, City Archives, Vancouver, B.C.; Telford, J. Lyle, vf #188, UBC Library, Special Collections; and Mabel Telford, *Strings for a Broken Lute* (London, England: Psychic Press, 1972), *passim*.

³⁷ Ben B. Lindsey and Wainwright Evans, *The Companionate Marriage* (New York: Boni Liveright, 1927), *passim*.

As taxpayers, some irate parents complained that the university had ever permitted Telford to speak.

In Telford's defence, Reverend J. Buchanan Tonkin, a Unitarian minister, also wrote to the editor; and a UBC student assured the *Sun* that he had heard the lecture and found it to be "scientific and educative — not demoralizing."³⁸ The *Vancouver Daily Province* was more restrained in its comments than the *Sun* and praised the students for their subsequent decision to control the visits of outside speakers. After a flurry of investigations on campus, President Klinck, on behalf of the faculty, stated that, while the subject might be deplored, the principle of free speech must be maintained. The student council had approved the talk, he said, and it was its right to do so. The meeting in question had been well-behaved.³⁹

As the Depression deepened, so did Telford's concern as a physician about the effect of charity on family nutrition and health. He argued that, in fairness to parents and to children already born, it was essential that all working class people should have scientific knowledge of contraception. Such knowledge had been within reach of the upper classes for many years, he said, "and we see no reason why they should have a monopoly of that privilege. . . . Women rebel against larger families than they can feed and clothe. Many of them resort to desperate measures, and not a few endanger their lives."⁴⁰ In June of 1931 *The Challenge* observed that Russia and Japan had contraceptive programs,⁴¹ while the February 1932 issue nodded in the direction of eugenics by pleading for the sterilization of "lunatics" to prevent them from "reproducing their kind."⁴²

Notwithstanding such references, and even though he was a member of Marie Stopes's Society for Constructive Birth Control and Racial Progress in Britain, it was Telford's interest in conventional birth control which remained in the forefront. The May 1932 issue of Stopes's *Birth Control News* was, in consequence, able to report that he had founded a clinic in Vancouver where women could obtain "simple, hygienic,

³⁸ *The Vancouver Sun*, for example, 13 March, p. 6; 15 March, p. 6; 17 March, p. 6; 21 March, p. 6; 24 March, p. 6; 3 April, p. 6, 1928.

³⁹ *The Vancouver Sun*, 24 March 1928, p. 1; *Vancouver Daily Province*, 23 March, p. 6.

⁴⁰ *The Challenge*, March 1931, pp. 1, 4. Angus MacInnis papers. UBC Library, Special Collections.

⁴¹ *The Challenge*, June 1931, p. 4.

⁴² *The Challenge*, February 1932, p. 2.

absolutely harmless contraceptives." It was intended to serve married people only, or couples about to be married, and it was approved by several medical men and certain unidentified women's organizations. It had nothing to do with abortion, and poor women could get help if they presented their "Relief" cards. A Birth Control Association of Vancouver had also been formed to educate public opinion about the scientific principles of contraception. Readers were assured that the organization and clinic would provide a worthwhile public service. The new leader of the Birth Control Association was not identified, but A. M. Stephen was reported to have lectured to a "capacity audience" on the history of the birth control movement and its aims. Mrs. R. P. Steeves and Mrs. Laura Jamieson had also spoken in support of the program.⁴³

From 1 April 1932, the Vancouver Birth Control Clinic was located in the prestigious Marine Building and was listed in the 1932 edition of the Vancouver telephone directory. It was conducted by a nurse, Laura Clements, who had been instructed in fitting diaphragms by Dr. Telford. Frances Moren, "an experienced social worker and writer on social economics," assisted her.⁴⁴

A four-page leaflet discussing birth control, a one-page letter describing methods available and prices, and a copy of the relevant section of the Criminal Code of Canada were distributed to inquirers and clients. The leaflet, entitled *The Case for Birth Control*, stated that motherhood must be voluntary. Ignorance of sex and contraception, it continued, were often factors in marriage breakdown. Birth control was a necessity in times of unemployment. The Bible did not forbid it; and it was widely practised among "the more intelligent and more richly endowed members of society. . . . As long as birth control knowledge is withheld, abortions will continue." The ideal device had not been developed, but two methods were simple, hygienic and relatively effective if correctly used. The better was the "pessary" (diaphragm) used with contraceptive jelly; but if the user could not arrange to be fitted, a condom with contraceptive jelly was quite adequate. The letter explained that Trojan and Knabob condoms at three for .50 or Ramses condoms at three for \$1.00 were available. *Vagell* contraceptive jelly at \$2.00 per large tube, with

⁴³ *Birth Control News* 11 (September 1932): 82. This news bulletin was published by Marie Stopes, an early leader of the British movement.

⁴⁴ Marine Building Rental Office records, 355 Burrard Street, Vancouver, B.C., show that, as of 1 April 1932, Laura Clements and Frances Moren rented Suite 1030-31. From 1 October 1932 to 19 May 1934, the clinic was located in Suite 1621-22. The clinic was opened a few weeks after the clinic of the Hamilton Birth Control Society and, hence, was the second birth control clinic in Canada.

nozzle for insertion, could be obtained. The clinic itself would supply them "C.O.D. postpaid" together with full instructions for their use, on receipt of the enclosed questionnaire completed. It would also be glad to answer questions. As door-to-door peddling of unreliable birth control methods was common in the area at the time, the letter also stated, firmly, that the clinic had no agents. On the third handout the pertinent section of the Criminal Code was printed without comment.⁴⁵

There are no records of patient load, but in October 1932 *The Challenge* carried an article by "one of the founders" of the clinic stating that the clinic would welcome financial support "as the nurse in charge should be better compensated." Even though, the article continued, some charges were levied, much of the work was done on a voluntary basis and so had to be limited. This was the best that could be done in the circumstances.⁴⁶ The following summer *The Vancouver Sun* reported that the clinic had given more than \$600 worth of free services in 1932.⁴⁷

Thanks almost certainly to some well-publicized cases of illegal abortion, opinion in favour of birth control developed still further in this period. An editorial in *The Vancouver Sun* deplored the fact that so many women were driven to "such extremes, not by criminal intent, but by ignorance of scientific methods and the stupidity of our laws. . . . We lay down an unalterable law that women must bear children whether they want to or not. Then we shudder in pious horror when, in natural revolt and understandable desperation, they sneak off to some charlatan for an illegal operation." Urging the liberalization of the law concerning birth control and some government assistance for the existing services, the editorial claimed that illegal abortion could thus be prevented. As if to tempt the authorities to lay charges against them, the editorial was signed, "Robert Cromie, Owner and Publisher, and Herbert Sallans, Editor."⁴⁸

Growing support was evident, too, when Laura Clements (now Mrs. Bernard Vaughan) was invited to Kamloops by a group of Kamloops women. A public meeting was held in the Caledonian Hall and was so crowded that many people had to be turned away. Vaughan spoke on the aims of the birth control movement, and some of the women present were fitted with diaphragms. All agreed that a clinic should be opened

⁴⁵ 8.2 *Can. I.I.I.* 1932-1958, The Family Planning Association (London, England), David Owen Centre for Population Growth Studies, Cardiff, Wales.

⁴⁶ *The Challenge*, October 1932, p. 1.

⁴⁷ *The Vancouver Sun*, 11 July 1933, p. 4.

⁴⁸ *The Vancouver Sun*, 28 August 1933, p. 4.

in Kamloops, though it would be another forty years before this actually happened.⁴⁹

After the first year or so, Vaughan ran the clinic in Vancouver alone.⁵⁰ Then, after her marriage, she moved it to the Vaughans' own house at 1050 Gilford Street. In 1941 she moved it once again — this time to 409 Dunsmuir. It remained open at this central location from 1941 to the spring of 1955, when Bernard Vaughan died. Laura decided to close down the service. She destroyed her records of twenty-three years and moved to California.⁵¹

A nurse employed at the Dunsmuir Street location recalls that patients were referred by four doctors, including Dr. Telford. The clinic was especially popular when armed forces personnel were returning to Canada from World War II and many marriages were taking place. The women clients were always nervous at their first visits, but Vaughan soon put them at ease. After a preliminary chat, she would explain how to use the diaphragm. Then she would fit each patient, and send her home with a new diaphragm to practise inserting it. The patient would return in a week with the device in place. If it was correctly inserted, she would pay the \$5.00 fee for instruction and fitting. An extra amount was charged for the diaphragm and jelly. If further instruction was needed, it was given. Vaughan also recommended a book on birth control.

Although there was always a small worry, the nurse remembers, that opponents of birth control would try to stop the service, the police never did attempt to interfere with it. Vaughan's only problem in those years on Dunsmuir was with a woman across the hall, who was an "impostor." She seemed to know little about contraception, and the Birth Control Clinic staff suspected that she was an abortionist.⁵²

Not all of the birth controllers in B.C. were locally based. Vivian Dowding, one of the most active in the province, worked for the Ontario-centred Parents' Information Bureau (PIB). Its sponsor, A. R. Kaufman, a philanthropist in Kitchener, had experimented with birth control clinics

⁴⁹ *The Kamloops Sentinel*, 5 July 1933, p. 3. Margaret Sanger papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., *Contraception*, # 233.

⁵⁰ Mrs. Laura Vaughan-Northam, interpolated replies in letters to her from author, 1 December 1982; 19 January 1983; also telephone conversation with author, 28 December 1983.

⁵¹ Mrs. Vaughan-Northam lived first in Ojai, Calif., then in San Diego, and in 1983 moved to Loma Linda, Calif.

⁵² Miss Anna Greig, Burnaby, B.C., telephone conversation with author, 3 May 1983. Miss Greig left the Dunsmuir clinic to take a nursing appointment in Kelowna, B.C.

in Windsor and Toronto, but had abandoned that idea because, in his view, as a means of service delivery it was not cost-effective. Instead he had developed a combined home visiting/mail order service for simple contraceptives. It was especially designed to reach low-income women across Canada who wanted help, and served a much larger clientele than a static clinic could have satisfied. Through employing graduate nurses as organizers in different regions and hiring local married women in various communities to do the field work, Kaufman eventually had a staff of seventy-five. Though a few were assigned to Quebec and the Maritime provinces, it appears that most worked from Ontario to the west coast. These women were approved by local physicians, and took referrals from them as well as by word of mouth from satisfied clients. Kaufman had contacts also with interested doctors and small volunteer groups in such centres as Hamilton, Winnipeg, Calgary and Vancouver, which he assisted with his own workers and, occasionally, with contraceptive supplies.⁵³

Vivian Dowding worked for Kaufman in the interior of B.C. from 1937 to 1944 and, occasionally, in the Vancouver area from 1956 to 1965.⁵⁴ Though a staunch advocate of democratic socialism, her reasons for taking the job were personal. Before she was married, her mother had told her how to avoid pregnancy by douching. But the method had not "worked" for her, and she had had three children in three years. She had obtained a leaflet describing birth control from Margaret Sanger's clinical research bureau in New York. She had written also to Reverend A. H. Tyrer of Toronto, who was circulating reliable information through

⁵³ Before he started his birth control work in 1930, Kaufman obtained expert legal opinion that, as his program would serve the "public good," he and his staff were safe from arrest. To reassure all Parents' Information Bureau personnel he circulated among them and to other advocates in Canada copies of section 207 of the Criminal Code of Canada. The service functioned smoothly until 1936 when one of his "social workers" was arrested in Eastview (now Vanier, Ontario). He did not, as was rumoured, hire Dorothea Palmer to challenge the law — he had no reason to do so. But when the feminist Palmer ventured from Ottawa into predominantly French Catholic Eastview and was charged under section 207, Kaufman hired the best legal defence and won her acquittal. Had she been convicted, his whole program would have been jeopardized.

It should be noted also that Kaufman's business was manufacturing rubber footwear. He did experiment briefly making diaphragms but abandoned the idea. He had contraceptive jelly and foam powder manufactured under the PIB label, but these were sold at break-even prices. Condoms and diaphragms were bought from established firms. Mary F. Bishop, "A. R. Kaufman, Father of Birth Control in Canada" (unpublished MS in possession of the author, 1980); Dorothea Palmer, interview with author, Ottawa, 25 August 1978.

⁵⁴ Vivian Dowding, interview with author, Vancouver, 1 November 1978.

the Protestant clergy.⁵⁵ She had attended Vaughan's Kamloops lecture and had acquired a diaphragm for her own use. Having solved her own problem, she felt that she should help other women who wanted to avoid annual pregnancies. Tyrer recommended her to Kaufman, and she was hired to travel north from Kamloops to the Prince George area, south-east to Trail, and west to the Fraser Valley.

Dowding would work from her home base during the summers, driving her own car over precipitous roads into logging and mining camps to reach women who wanted her help. Alternatively, she might stop in a community such as Chilliwack for several weeks. She would call first on local doctors and take referrals to low-income women with large families. She responded to word-of-mouth contacts. Occasionally, without such preliminaries, she would stop at a house with a diaper-laden clothesline where, she recalled, she was always welcomed.

Women who wanted birth control information would fill out printed applications, and Dowding would mail them to Kitchener with a description of the family circumstances. The PIB would usually send free initial supplies — foam powder and sponge, along with three condoms. The women could also request tubes of contraceptive jelly and applicators. If they could afford it, they would pay a nominal charge. Much of the service was given free, however, at PIB expense. The PIB also provided interested doctors with equipment for fitting diaphragms and, if necessary, paid them fees for fitting low-income women who had been recommended by PIB workers.

Occasionally obstacles were encountered but, according to Dowding, were easily resolved. For example, a Trail, B.C., postmaster, believing that the PIB packages of contraceptives were illegal, would not tell the addressees that their orders had arrived. Dowding reported the problem to Kitchener. Kaufman had just won the acquittal of Dorothea Palmer, charged in Ontario with distributing birth control information, and so his lawyer had no trouble arranging the release of the little packages.⁵⁶ On another occasion in Mission, B.C., a doctor on whom Dowding had called threatened to send for the police. She went to the police station, herself, to explain her work, and was told to carry on as usual.

After the Dowdings moved to Vancouver in 1944 Vivian Dowding did

⁵⁵ Tyrer's birth control information services were financed for a time by Kaufman. He wrote several of the PIB leaflets, and the families were friends for many years. Muriel Tyrer, interview with author, West Vancouver, 29 January 1979, and subsequent conversations.

⁵⁶ See n. 53.

very little work for the PIB. She returned to it in 1956, however, and worked until 1965, arranging sterilizations, mainly for men, but also for women. The PIB paid for the needy cases, as before.⁵⁷

In addition to these private efforts to advance the birth control cause, some public figures were enthusiastic advocates. In the mid-1930s the most vocal and persistent political person was Dorothy Gretchen Steeves, by then an articulate and forceful member of the CCF. Born in Holland, she had obtained a law degree from the University of Leyden, married Captain R. P. Steeves during World War I, and emigrated to Canada. Her support for contraception was based mainly on her strong feminist and human rights concerns.⁵⁸

One of her first public addresses advocating freedom for women from "forced homemaking and child bearing" was given before members and wives of the Gyro Club of Vancouver in the dining room of Spencer's department store. The industrial revolution had started the transition in women's roles, she declared, and they were now trying to enter the labour force in larger numbers. But job scarcity was an obstacle.⁵⁹ A few weeks later, speaking to a CCF-sponsored meeting in Victoria, she promised that under socialism women would have equal rights. Then they would decide for themselves whether to be homemakers or to have careers outside the home.⁶⁰ On another occasion she spoke strongly for clinics which could bring birth control services to all who wanted them.⁶¹ As MLA for North Vancouver her next move was in the provincial legislature, where she urged that birth control services be given through public health departments. "The fact that every married woman has to become a mother, regardless of her health, is a crime, despite what church and welfare organizations might have to say about it," she said. "The present position is that birth control is a class privilege." Women without money were at the mercy of drugs and quack treatment, she continued. The government should recognize facts and provide free advice and services through its health programs.⁶²

In December 1937 Steeves began to advocate that public health nurses in rural areas be allowed to help women with birth control. Not-

⁵⁷ Vivian Dowding, interview with author, Vancouver, 1 November 1978.

⁵⁸ Mildred Osterhout Fahrni, interview with author, Vancouver, 15 January and 15 May 1981.

⁵⁹ *Victoria Times*, 24 March 1935, p. 7.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 25 April 1935, p. 9.

⁶¹ *The Vancouver Sun*, 13 February 1936, p. 1.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 17 March 1936, p. 1.

ing that Sir James Barr, President of the British Medical Association, had said that “the low tenth of the earning classes were producing half the next generation” and that many women were in mental hospitals because they feared pregnancy, she argued that birth control was a social necessity. In England the movement enjoyed royal patronage, while Holland had had clinics for forty years! With all of this Lyle Telford, also present, heartily agreed. Stressing that birth control could prevent illegal abortion, he observed that, although birth control information was available at the Vancouver General Hospital, the hospital authorities decided who should have it and who to refuse. “We haven’t,” he insisted, “the right to refuse anyone.”⁶³

After preliminary planning by Florence Steacy, one of Kaufman’s western organizers, Edith How-Martyn, representing the Birth Control International Information Centre in London, England, visited Victoria, Vancouver and Kelowna in the summer of 1936. She was on her way home from a trip with Margaret Sanger to South Asia, China and Japan, and stopped in Winnipeg and Toronto as well. Her object was to lecture to “social workers,” to promote information about birth control and also — here a Malthusian note was sounded — to warn of the danger of Asian population growth. (A former member of the Malthusian League in Britain, How-Martyn was in fact concerned by Japanese expansion into Manchuria and the extension of its hegemony in other parts of East Asia.) Besides lecturing with a pelvic model to show the use of the diaphragm, she called on local medical and welfare authorities. In Kelowna she visited the Women’s Institute.⁶⁴ Laura Jamieson, then a juvenile court judge in Burnaby and an advocate of birth control, presided at one of her Vancouver meetings.⁶⁵

Enough information about the early birth controllers of B.C. is, then, available to be sure that, in the 1920s and 1930s some, at least, of the “left” not only perceived a need and advocated solutions, but provided services. In spite of the law, but without serious opposition, A. M. Stephen, Lyle Telford, Dorothy Steeves and Laura Jamieson pioneered

⁶³ *Victoria Times*, 3 December 1937, p. 6; also *Vancouver Daily Province*, 3 December 1937, p. 11.

⁶⁴ Edith How-Martyn Papers, 16 and 17 June 1936, and Florence Steacy to Edith How-Martyn, 15 September 1936, Eileen Palmer private collection, London, England. See also *The Vancouver Sun*, 24 July 1936, p. 4; *News Herald*, 24 July 1936, p. 3.

⁶⁵ As an MLA 1939-1945 and later as alderman in Vancouver, Laura Jamieson’s main objectives were such social services as homes for working girls, child protection and nursery schools, but she maintained her support of birth control throughout these years. Grace McInnis, conversation with author, Vancouver, 7 July 1983.

the idea in the public domain, while Telford, Laura Vaughan, Frances Moren and Vivian Dowding provided practical assistance to low- and middle-income women. They also moved forward the idea of law reform and government-funded birth control information and services by promoting public discussion of the subject. More people in the province learned of "scientific" birth control methods and how to obtain and use them. Far from simply talking about birth control, these men and women had a practical influence in making both knowledge and use of its techniques more widely available. In that sense they did what left-wing reformers were generally disposed to do. Not only did they debate and theorize but they organized, planned and acted.

That the early birth controllers of B.C. failed to build a permanent movement may be explained by the fact that their socialist politics isolated them from other potential supporters. Then, too, the Vancouver clinic became a privately run venture, dependent on referrals by private physicians. Their failure can also be attributed to the competition in British Columbia of philanthropist A. R. Kaufman's Parents' Information Bureau and its home visiting and mail order services. His closely controlled roster of regional organizers and local "social workers" served thousands. Kaufman would help the other providers but would not join them.⁶⁶ Also a factor was the increasing involvement of the birth control advocates in CCF party work. Continuity was broken also by World War II. Despite, however, their failure to build a strong and productive movement and despite the fact that unplanned pregnancies continued,⁶⁷ they did manage to show what an organized effort in the direction of planned parenthood might accomplish. In that sense their contribution remained a major one and deserves, for that reason alone, to be remembered.

⁶⁶ Mary F. Bishop, "A. R. Kaufman. . . ." n. 53.

⁶⁷ Note, for example, one woman's experience: "... It's a true horror story and I'm thankful daily that my children will never have to undergo the fear and terror of [illegal] abortion, thanks to modern birth control methods. I can only hope common sense will prevail so that a woman or girl can have a safe abortion if necessary. . . . I had my abortions for purely financial reasons as we were desperately hard up. I was continually denied tubal ligation because my health was not threatened by future pregnancies and my husband would not hear of vasectomy. What fools some women are. . . .

"I was married in October, 1934, at 18 years. Born — a son . . . 1935. Born — a son . . . 1936. Abortions by a woman masseuse-abortionist May, 1937; March, 1938; July, 1939. Abortion — self-induced — 1945. Born — a son, 1948. Born — a daughter . . . 1953. Abortion — 1953 by my compassionate doctor. Born — a son . . . 1955. Born — a son . . . 1958.

"After five repair operations — bladder, uterus, hernias, etc. I went to . . . against the advice of my Catholic doctor, and had a hysterectomy . . . in 1959. I

cannot forgive the churches, politicians, and male-dominated medical profession for what they have done to, and neglected to do for women.

"The contraceptive I first used was very primitive — a home made recipe consisting of coco butter and Lysol! I'm sure it was effective *when* I used it, but it burned. The next was a diaphragm cap and . . . jelly, but the cap would not stay in place, and the money for the jelly wasn't there until I saw a tiny ad in the *Free Press Prairie Farmer* from the Parents' Information Bureau, and wrote them for information. I was then able to get a new cap and jelly at a fraction of the cost. The name of the abortionist in Vancouver was ———. I found her quite by accident when my sister-in-law offered to take me to her abortionist. . . . It was a frightening experience, but the surroundings were very clean . . . and the woman was intelligent, understanding and unassuming. As it turned out she was efficient too, with follow-up care which I needed only once at my own house. She charged according to ability to pay, which was \$50.00, which in these times seems a bargain, but we had to borrow the money from a brother who had a steady job (1937). It is truly a sad thing that birth control and abortion is such an emotional, political, and religious issue. I believe that not having control over our own bodies has been the root cause of women being locked in as second class citizens. We still have a long way to go. . . ." Writer's identity confidential. This is a combination of two letters dated 24 February and 15 April 1983, from a woman in the Okanagan region to the author.