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## CURRENT SCIENCE—50 YEARS AGO

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### Lord Dawson's Bill.

THE debate on the motion of Lord Dawson for the second reading of the Bill, which he moved on the 13th February, to restrict the sale, display and advertisement of contraceptives, produced in the House of Lords quite a number of interesting speeches, which together with a critical examination of them by Dr Marie Stopes, are published in the March number of *The Birth Control News*. The Bill passed the second reading by a large majority and was referred to a Committee of the Whole House.

It may be remembered that the law in relation to birth control varies widely in the Western countries. In Great Britain contraception is legalised, due probably to the realisation of the widespread practice of methods for spacing births or avoiding children and also to the recognition of the change in public opinion and withdrawal of opposition by the Church and the medical profession. In 1930 the Ministry of Health in its Memorandum 153 M. C. W. authorised local Public Health Authorities and private agencies to establish clinics for the dissemination of free Birth Control information to married women; in Russia and Mexico, the governments are actively interested in the propagation of contraceptive methods among all married people. Since 1920 France, alarmed at the shrinkage in her population, has set her face against birth control literature; Ireland and America have banned all practical information concerning contraception. Many of

the smaller European states and also Australia and Canada prohibit the sale of contraceptive literature and apparatus; but in South Africa, Germany, India, China and Japan there are already birth control clinics and advisory centres.

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Almost all advocates of birth control start on the assumption that women have a natural aversion to child bearing, and even in cases where no pathological conditions are indicated, they point out that frequent pregnancy must inevitably undermine the physical health and domestic happiness of the individual. Lord Dawson in describing the large families of the early forties of last century, such as the Gladstones and the Lyttletons, makes no reference to the injurious effects which a numerous family is reported to produce. It seems to us that if a mother suffers after moderate child bearing, ordinarily it must be due to want of sufficient food, clothing, accommodation and medical advice; and provided that all these things are procurable by every person in a requisite measure, so as to preserve his and her health on a reasonably high standard, can it be proved that moderate child bearing in such circumstances, produces the grave consequences which the birth control methods seek to prevent? According to Lord Ponsonby, what the majority of people require is suitable work, adequate wages, a cheap and sufficient supply of wholesome food and clothing, decent housing accommodation and free medical advice. It is one of the strange ironies of the present age that decent men and women are unable to obtain the reasonable comforts of life which their capacity to serve the body politic ought to procure.

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A more significant population problem than the quantity of mankind, is the quality of individual members. In order that a nation may become prosperous, happy, efficient and peace-loving, a sound contribution to general intelligence and moral stability has to be made by all the grades and classes of society. The mere limitation of the family which may perhaps secure for the children a better average of education and a more decent start in life, does not ensure that all the children born under the contraceptive auspices will

possess the best qualities. It is doubtful whether even the creation of a Ministry of Marriages, such as Charles Whibley cynically suggests, assisted by a Secretariat of bright-eyed young Mendelians, could, by selective breeding, produce and fix the desirable type of individuals, for "men and women are not peas" and they must have their own personal inclinations which are beyond the range of experimental marriages. Heredity is a supremely fruitful field but its mechanism still baffles human ingenuity. The very essence of

strength and beauty of humankind is individuality, which is divergence and the ambition to fix the type, even were it possible, must be undesirable. Neither birth control methods nor all the tender faith in the efficacy of legislature will suffice to improve mankind; we shall have to rely on education, public opinion and the precepts of religion for its betterment, however true it may be, that the son profits little by the intellectual and moral acquisitions of the father and has to begin it all over again from the very commencement.

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## ANNOUNCEMENT

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### UNESCO RESEARCH GRANTS IN EXPERIMENTAL AND APPLIED PHYSICS

Starting in 1984, UNESCO is making available grants to scientists in developing countries of Asia for research in experimental and applied physics. These grants are primarily intended to give recognition to selected research projects, especially those expected to contribute to national or regional development goals. The results of this research will be published and widely circulated among research institutions worldwide.

Each grant will consist of a direct financial contribution of up to US \$2500, or the equivalent in the form of equipment, parts or supplies, provided through UNESCO or a cooperating scientific institution.

All Asian physicists are eligible for the award provided that all or a substantial portion of the research project is carried out in a developing country of Asia.

Selection of the awards will be made by UNESCO in cooperation with the Asian Physical Society (APSO), but membership of APSO is not a precondition for the award. The International Union of Pure and Applied Physics (IUPAP), the European Physical Society (EPS) and the American Physical Society (APS) will provide advisory services.

Application should be made by the physicist responsible for the project by writing to one of the following addresses:

Prof. LiChun, Peking University Department of Physics, Beijing, People's Republic of China.

Prof. R. Srinivasan, Indian Institute of Technology, Department of Physics, Madras 600 036, India.

Prof. B. C. Tan, University of Malaya, Department of Physics, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

UNESCO, Physics Research Grants, Science Sector, SC/SER 7 Place de Fontenoy, Paris, France.

The application must include a project document covering the following: description of research to be undertaken and anticipated results; impact of research on national or regional development; professional background of physicists involved; available facilities in support of the project; overall funds required for project execution and sources of financing; proposed use of UNESCO Research Grant.

There is no formal deadline for applications. Selection committee meetings will normally take place once a year in the autumn and announcement of the awards will be made at that time.