

ENCOURAGE BIRTH CONTROL

December 27, 1954

Should our Party and our public health and propaganda departments encourage or oppose birth control? Some people oppose it, and some of them have written articles against it. Now we must reaffirm one point, which is that the Party favours birth control. Why does the Party favour it and not oppose it? Lenin explained the reasons for this. After victory in the revolution the economy of the Soviet Union had to be restored and developed; life was very hard, particularly the life of the proletariat. It was impossible to have more children. Since the economy was not developed, difficulties could not be surmounted in the absence of birth control. It was only later, when the Soviet Union succeeded in its socialist construction, that it began to praise “heroic mothers” and encourage more births. More births were encouraged especially after the end of the Second World War, since the population had been reduced and much uncultivated land was waiting to be utilized. Then it was advantageous to increase the population. Why did the Soviet Union first control births and later encourage births? Because the situation had changed. Should China praise “heroic mothers” and encourage more births? No. We should not, and I don’t think we should do it in future either; probably we can never do so. In the days when we were in northern Shaanxi we raised the slogan “Both people and livestock should prosper.” As far as I know, at that time the infant mortality rate in northern Shaanxi was very high, 50 per cent of the newborns dying. Because people demanded that this situation change, we raised

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the slogan "Both people and livestock should prosper." We certainly did not encourage more births. What we did was to try to reduce the infant mortality rate. Also, because some people did not endorse new methods of midwifery, we had to publicize such methods. Even in those days, however, the slogan was not spread among the cadres. That was when we were in the countryside. Now we are in the cities and things here are completely different. We have six hundred million people, and each year many more are born than die. Each year more than twenty million people are born across the country, an increase of more than ten million people after deaths are taken into account. It is not likely that China will suffer population scarcity because of family planning. Today there are six hundred million people. Is it possible that later there will be fewer and fewer? I don't think it is possible. The population all over the world is increasing, China's most rapidly, with an annual average increase of 2 per cent. If we do not introduce birth control, the increase will be even more rapid. Are there any difficulties because of the increase in population? There are many difficulties, and they cannot be remedied all at once. For instance, there are not enough grain, cloth and pharmaceuticals in Beijing. In this respect the state shoulders a huge burden, and many individuals also have difficulties. In short, more births create more difficulties. Parents, families and children all will suffer, and so will society and the state. Clothing, food, medicines, schools and so on are all insufficient, and they cannot be provided all at once. Therefore, we should encourage birth control and not oppose it. None of the reasons for opposing it can hold water. It is wrong to say that birth control is inhumane. Some say birth control will create a bad impression, but this is beside the point.

How do we publicize birth control? It is not necessary now to do so openly through the newspapers, but we can use word of mouth. First we should issue instructions within the Party⁶⁵ and publish them in the Party journal, so as to unify thinking within the Party and help cadres arrive at an identical understanding. The Ministry of Public Health can produce pamphlets on birth control techniques in the form of general knowledge of public health, and these need not be published in the newspapers either. The Medicinal Corporation's contraceptive pharmaceuticals and instruments will find a ready sale, so they need not be advertized. However, it is necessary to explain the reasons clearly to medical personnel working in public health departments and hospitals so as to clarify their thinking.

The Ministry of Public Health should have specific regulations on such matters as abortion and sterilization. Tubal ligation is now performed only on those who have given birth to six children at least. The limit is too liberal. Especially for people with diseases, it is best to have no children. There are also difficult births; it is said that in Shanghai a woman who gave birth to three children by Caesarian section wanted a tubal ligation, but the doctor refused to do it. Actually, ligation should be given to such people before the third birth.

The supply of contraceptive pharmaceuticals and instruments should not be viewed as a commercial question; this is a necessity and a question of policy. Commercial and production departments should do their best to satisfy demand. State control is necessary. It is also necessary to place orders with private factories. There are difficulties in expanding production, but they can be overcome. This business will not lose money, but it should not earn too much. If we cannot produce enough, imports are allowed; imports can be made from the Soviet Union and the people's democracies; imports are also allowed from capitalist countries, and even buying from Hong Kong is not prohibited. Now people in the countryside are complaining; they do not know how to practise birth control, nor do they know if childbirth is avoidable. There is a lot of infanticide, especially among poor peasants. From this we can see that the peasants as well are demanding birth control. Comrades engaged in women's work should adopt appropriate measures and tell them how to control birth. Of course, we should not carry out a propaganda and mobilization movement for birth control in the countryside now.

Following today's discussion you can draft a report and, after submitting it to and obtaining the approval of the Central Committee, publish it in the Party journal. Comrade Lin Feng⁶⁶ should be responsible for the drafting of the report, and Comrades Xu Yunbei of the Ministry of Public Health,⁶⁷ Gong Yinbing of the Ministry of Light Industry,⁶⁸ Wang Lei of the Ministry of Commerce,⁶⁹ Fan Changjiang of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee,⁷⁰ and Kang Keqing of the Women's Federation⁷¹ should participate. The day-to-day work should be the responsibility of the Ministry of Public Health.