

'A man who owns three abortion clinics and has no medical qualifications is the central figure in a consortium that is aiming to set up a private health service' (*Times*, July 13). It should come as no surprise that men engaged in this kind of savagery should also be involved in subverting the National Health Service. In spite of the ceaseless pressure of propaganda to try to make us believe that socialists and revolutionaries are the ones who love violence and the sound of breaking glass, the fact remains as it was stated by James Connolly sixty years ago: 'One great source of the strength of the ruling class has even been their willingness to kill . . . the small value they have ever set on human life is in marked contrast to the reluctance of all revolutionists to shed blood'. That men prepared to countenance violence should be associated with the attack on the Health Service is entirely appropriate since what they want in its place is the violent competitive society in which anyone with money can bully his way into a position of privilege.

When students, with or without long hair, protest publicly against this or that piece of violence or injustice it is common for the conservative press to point out that students are living on public funds. Their education, we are reminded, is paid for by the work of ordinary men and women; they are living off our money and so should behave in a more docile manner. It is a curious thing that this reaction seems to cease on graduation day. The consultants and others who are currently threatening to withdraw their labour (holding the country to ransom, as we say when the miners do it) all got their training at our expense. Several thousand pounds of our money has been invested in these men who now claim the private 'right' to neglect us in order to grub some more money out of the rich—and to do it even in the buildings and with the equipment we have provided for them. The more highly paid doctors are exhibiting a combination of high-minded talk and ruthless self-interest worthy of the clergy. Of course, everybody realises that the Health Service is in need of reform and of more money (especially as the last conservative government cut its funds by £111m.) but this is just the time when it most needs our support against subversion by greedy and wealthy men.

Because the Christian tradition places a unique value on the individual human person there has grown up a rather woolly one-sided personalism which always values the immediate face-to-face relationship above what is thought of as the 'impersonal' social organisation. Of course, what is frequently wrong with social organisations is not that they are impersonal but that they are unjust, but there remains this inarticulate feeling amongst many Christians which is not an explicit belief and is perhaps the more powerful for that. For this reason Christians, especially those who are suspicious of hard-headed

theological thinking, are perhaps more vulnerable than most to the sentimental nonsense being put about in favour of 'freedom of choice' and 'family responsibility' in medicine—the idea that it is more humane for the family to take care of its members rather than to 'delegate' this responsibility to 'the state'.

This foolishness is refreshingly and opportunely dealt with in the latest of the excellent issues of *Comment* published by the Catholic Institute of International Relations.¹ It deals with World Population and its message is that while techniques of birth control are necessary they are not of the slightest use if people do not want to use them. All the government propaganda designed to persuade the illiterate peasantry that they should limit their families simply falls flat on its face. The reason why poor people in India do not use the latest free devices with which they are provided is not that they are stupid and ignorant, it is because they are intelligent enough to see that they need fairly large families. 'Without old age pensions or state benefits in time of sickness, children are a necessity for security and protection. Our Western viewpoint has assumed that children are a burden on the family budget and hence a liability. . . . In fact a child is an asset'. The way to curb the population explosion is not to invent more ingenious contraceptives, but to change the situation in which the family is the source of security and welfare. We have to move from the state of affairs in which the family is a refuge from the injustice of society to one in which the society itself is more just—to move, in fact, in exactly the opposite direction from the proponents of 'free enterprise' in medicine, in education and indeed in the economy as a whole.

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¹Available from CIIR, 41 Holland Park, London, W.11 3RP. 20 copies 50p.