

## Book Reviews

This is a meticulously-researched and fluently-written monograph. It analyses exploitation, sexuality, and feminism without being ponderous, dogmatic, or heavy-handed. It achieves the demands of rigorous scholarship while reconstructing a fascinating facet of Victorian life.

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AUDREY LEATHARD, *The fight for family planning*, London, Macmillan, 1980, 8vo, pp. xviii, 293, illus., £15.00.

“The subject is obscene: no lady would dream of alluding to it in mixed society”, George Bernard Shaw told Marie Stopes after she had lost her libel action against Dr. Halliday Sutherland in the House of Lords. Fifty years later, in 1974, free birth control for all became available under the National Health Service.

Dr. Leathard sets out to document the changes which led from the attitudes of 1924 to the legislation of 1974, with particular reference to the contribution of the Family Planning Association. She contends that this was lessened by various internal factors: the FPA was originally a campaigning body but its energies became siphoned off into the provision of clinics and a pragmatic approach to the problems of birth control; during the 1930s it came increasingly to desire respectability and to shy away from controversial issues (epitomized by the change of name from National Birth Control Association) and it concentrated on propagating facilities for women only and providing one of the less popular forms of contraception. On the positive side, however, the FPA's achievements included the improvement of contraceptive technology, by its testing of the various products available (ignored by the British Pharmacopoeia) and the issue of an Approved List of the best. It also developed education in birth control methods.

The FPA's work was performed by numbers of dedicated individuals and much of its history consisted of small steps: the gradual spread of clinics and local government co-operation, the slow introduction of birth control education into medical schools, the evolution of public opinion. These are discussed in detail. It seems from this book that nearly all the really dramatic events described did not directly involve the FPA, which tended to work away discreetly in the background, following rather than leading public opinion, and eschewing controversy. It therefore lacked the more noticeable impact of a flamboyant individual campaigner such as Marie Stopes or a more militant body such as the Abortion Law Reform Association.

This book is thorough and well researched from primary sources and oral interviews with individuals involved: it is a pity that more of these first-hand experiences of family planners (of which there are a few tantalizing snippets) are not included. Maybe these would provide the basis for another book? This is not perhaps a book for the general reader, but is a useful and informative study, coherently bringing together a mass of detailed information.

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