

Speaking out against the servile state

Dr Halliday Sutherland's fight against negative eugenics

In 1911, Dr. Halliday Sutherland was at the forefront of the fight against tuberculosis (TB), a disease that killed and disabled 220,000 people in Britain each year.

TB was a disease of poverty, affecting the poor around three times more than the wealthy. At the time, doctors and scientists thought the disease (or a susceptibility to it) was caused by heredity, not infection.

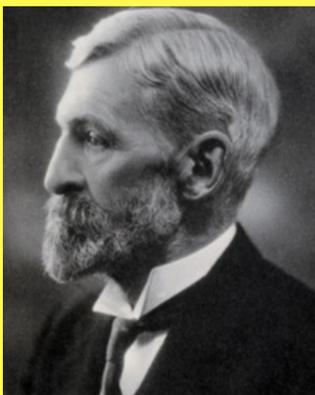
HEREDITARY OR INFECTIVE?

If a disease was hereditary, the only way to prevent it was to ensure that the defective genes were not passed on. As the professor of eugenics at London University, Karl Pearson, put it:

“ The bulk of the tuberculous belong to stocks which we want *ab initio* to discourage. Everything which tends to check the multiplication of the unfit, to emphasize that the fertility of the physically and mentally healthy, will *pro tanto* aid Nature's method of reducing the phthisical death-rate. ”

In 1911, Sutherland formed the view that TB was infective, not hereditary. His views, published in the British Medical Journal in 1912, were at odds with the medical establishment.

BARR

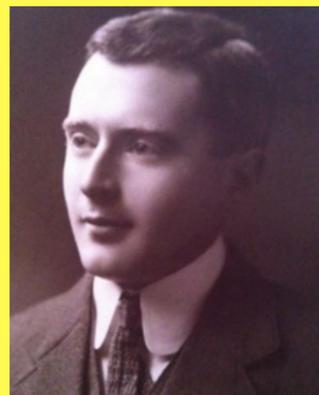


The Wellcome Institute, London

Sir James Barr, President of the British Medical Association.

“ Until we have some restriction in the marriage of undesirables the elimination of the tubercle bacillus is not worth aiming at. It forms a rough, but on the whole very serviceable check, on the survival and propagation of the unfit...if to-morrow the tubercle bacillus were non-existent, it would be nothing short of a national calamity. We are not yet ready for its disappearance. ”

SUTHERLAND



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Dr Halliday Sutherland, Medical Officer of the St Marylebone Dispensary for the Prevention of Tuberculosis.

“ There are some self-styled eugenists...who declaim that the prevention of disease is not in itself a good thing. They say the efficiency of the State is based upon what they call 'the survival of the fittest'...I don't know what they mean. I do know that in preventing disease you are not preserving the weak, but conserving the strong. ”

THE MOTHERS' CLINIC



In 1921, Dr Marie Stopes opened the first birth-control clinic in the British Empire in a poor part of London. There, women could obtain advice on contraception free-of-charge and could purchase contraceptive devices at cost.

She established the *Society for Constructive Birth Control and Racial Progress* to support the clinic. She explained that she undertook her work to achieve a:



"Racial" cervical cap used at the Mothers' Clinic

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"...reduction of the birth rate at the wrong part and increase of the the birth rate at the right end of the social scale...Statistics show that every year the birth rate from the worst end of our



"Prorace" cervical cap used at the Mothers' Clinic

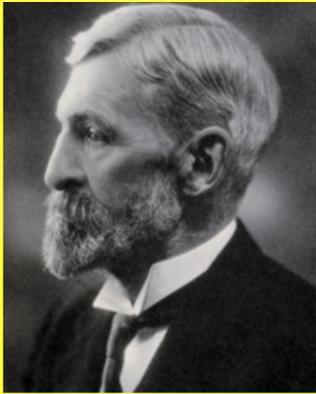
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of our community is increasing in proportion to the birth rate at the better end, and it was in order to try to right that grave social danger that I embarked upon this work."

That same year, Stopes lobbied MPs and the Prime Minister for the compulsory sterilization of people she described as "wastrels, the diseased...the miserable...the criminal" the "degenerate, feeble minded and unbalanced" and "parasites".

FOR & AGAINST

BARR



The Wellcome Institute, London.

Stopes' Clinic was the check that Barr had sought, and he congratulated her:

“ You and your husband have inaugurated a great movement which I hope will eventually get rid of our C3 population and exterminate poverty. The only way to raise an A1 population is to breed them ”

"A1" and "C3" were terms used by army recruitment offices to describe the best and the worst recruits. C3 designated those unfit to serve in the army on the grounds of physical or mental incapacity.

SUTHERLAND



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Stopes' campaign would enslave the poor, and he opposed her in his 1922 book, *Birth Control*.

“ If children are to be denied to the poor as a privilege of the rich, then it would be easy to exploit the women of the poorer classes...The English poor have already lost even the meaning of the word "property," and if the birth controllers had their way the meaning of the word "home" would soon follow...this policy on the poor points unmistakably to the Servile State. ”

Stopes sued Sutherland for libel over remarks he wrote in his book *Birth Control*. Barr, by then Vice-President of the *Society for Constructive Birth Control and Racial Progress*, testified for Stopes in the trial. Sutherland won the case in 1924.