

The Idea of a Working Group to Plan a Program of Scientific Development
in Fertility Control

There is general recognition that in areas suffering from population redundancy, the motives for limiting fertility are weak, but nonetheless present. In this situation, the best possible means of fertility limitation would be a tremendous advantage. The methods currently in use in industrial societies seem largely unsuited to peasant-agricultural communities.

Thinking along this line, the Conservation Foundation some time ago decided, in connection with its program of inquiry in the field of population, to give some attention to the possibility of developing new methods of fertility control through the application of biological and medical science. The first step in the pursuit of this interest was to have a survey made by Dr. Paul S. Henshaw, recently of the United States Public Health Service. This survey had the sole purpose of finding out the present state of knowledge in this field, and what the best scientific leads for further research appear to be. This was a rather hasty survey which needs to be deepened, but we were surprised at both the amount of basic research relevant to fertility control and the interest shown by the scientists concerned in possible application of this knowledge to fertility control.

After the survey, the Foundation was tentatively preparing a proposal for developmental planning in this field of applied science. At this time Dr. Lee Szilard and Dr. Harrison Brown appeared in New York with a plan for long-range scientific development in the field of fertility control. It appeared to us that some elements of this plan, which was in verbal form, had merit, and it was decided to revise our previously planned proposal in the light of it. Es-

essentially, the idea in both cases was the preparation of a blueprint detailing plans for the marshalling scientific resources for the purpose of developing new methods of fertility control. Our proposal did not go beyond this stage of planning.

It was proposed to take advantage of the interest and readiness of several available persons representing different fields of interest and varied backgrounds, to form a planning group which would do essentially the following;

- 1) go further into the nature of the most promising scientific leads;
- 2) inquire into the individuals, laboratories, and institutes, where research of the kind required would best be carried on;
- 3) study the optimum conditions of clinical field testing;
- 4) undertake to assess possible activities and divisions of labor of cooperating groups in both research and clinical and field testing; and
- 5) study the possibility of establishing an institute for the study of fertility, or at least a "nerve-center" for pushing the kind of scientific development called for.

The working group would attempt to write up its findings in the form of a complete proposal for a long-range program of scientific development in this field, together with supporting documents and expressions of views from outstanding scientists in the fields relevant to the purpose of the inquiry.

Manner in Which the Group Would Function

In a sense, the group would function as a "Royal Commission," conducting hearings and taking evidence from experts. It was proposed that the working group sit together to hear the views of distinguished scientists and to hold discussions with them. The reactions of experts would in this way help integrally in the formation of the plans. In some cases, one or more members of

the working group would try to assess the desirability and willingness of certain scientists to work in the future program as directors, associates, research workers, etc. A good part of the groups' working time would be spent in attempting to reach agreement and to put in final written form the best plans as it saw them in the light of its inquiry and the expert testimony gathered.

It must be borne in mind that the sole function of the working group was to prepare the blueprint for the marshalling of scientific resources. There was no implication that this group would itself be involved in the actual execution of the plans. It was conceived merely as the group which gets the essential step of planning done.

Personnel

In choosing personnel for the working group, we felt that it was necessary to get people who are sufficiently motivated to spend many long hours at the work, and who have some background and experience that is relevant. It was also considered wise not to have the group too large for effective work or too small for diversity in range of opinions. By July 31, the following individuals had agreed to serve as members of the group: Professor Harrison Brown, Dr. Samuel Reynolds, Professor Leo Szilard, and Dr. Clair Folsome, Professor Kingsley Davis, Dr. Paul S. Henshaw, and Mr. Robert G. Snider. It was also planned to have associated with the group a panel of five experts engaged in research on biological and medical aspects of fertility. These associates would be kept informed of all activities, would sit in meetings whenever they could spare the time, and would, along with the working group, take responsibility for the final report. The membership of the panel of

associates, it was hoped, would be as follows:

Frederick L. Hisaw, Professor of Zoology, Harvard University

Garyl P. Haskins, Director of Haskins Laboratories, New York

G. Evelyn Hutchinson, Professor of Biology, Yale University

A biochemist

An Immunologist

A nutritionist

It was visualized that the costs would be solely those incurred by the working group in its operation during the two or three months necessary. Money would be used primarily to pay travel, stenographic costs, possibly a salary for a scientific secretary. It would not be used to pay any fees or other remuneration to the group itself.

Discussion About the Plan

In working out the details and deciding on the feasibility of the plan, The Conservation Foundation sought the best advice possible. Among others with whom the plan was discussed were the people mentioned above, Dr. George W. Corner, Director of the Carnegie Embryological Laboratory and Dr. Abel Wolman of Johns Hopkins University, and Dr. Warren Weaver of The Rockefeller Foundation. The response in general was that this was a task that needed to be done and that the group to be charged with the responsibility of doing it was appropriate.

Staff discussions at the Conservation Foundation reached the opinion that the Foundation's interest in the project was primarily that of a stimulating or initiating body. The Foundation, it was felt, should not be committed to any substantial part in the execution of the program once that program had been planned.

Preliminary Thinking on Long-Range Program

Out of the investigations of this preliminary group we might expect to get a blueprint for a program involving the "nerve-center" referred to above, which might take the form of some type of moderately staffed institute, together with an operating organization directed by qualified professionals and public leaders who would attempt to relate the work at the nerve-center to the large mass of investigations being carried out at established centers. Most of the funds eventually allotted for the execution of the program would presumably be used to support research in whatever places it could best be conducted. A board, or commission, consisting of the outstanding scientists in the relevant fields, would attempt to direct support toward the central problem of control of human fertility. It would also provide the necessary guidance for field tests in some regions where the social climate for such testing is combined with the urgent need for fertility control, and would correlate research work and field testing with clinical investigations. In large measure the program would depend upon existing institutions rather than setting up new or duplicating facilities. But it would be such as to offer the best hope of getting the development of physiologic controls accomplished in the shortest possible time. The world's need for such a development seems to us to be extremely urgent.

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Final Report on the Program

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