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Original Paper

An Examination of the Reasons for the Failure of The Mental Defectives Amendment Bill 1928 in New Zealand

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Abstract

The eugenics movement emerged in various countries from the late 1800s to the 1940s, and the Mental Defectives Amendment Bill 1928 was the high point in the history of the eugenics movement in New Zealand, the first and last time that the highest goal of the eugenics movement in New Zealand was included in the provisions of the bill, the sterilization, but the sterilization provision was ultimately forced to withdraw due to the contradictions of various parties, resulting in the ultimate failure of the Amendment Bill 1928. However, the sterilization provision was eventually withdrawn due to conflicts between different parties, leading to the failure of the Amendment Bill 1928. This paper analyzes the reasons for the failure of the Amendment Bill 1928, in order to get a glimpse of the basic map and direction of New Zealand's social history at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Keywords

New Zealand, the Mental Defectives Amendment Bill 1928, eugenics movement

1. Introduction

At the beginning of the twentieth century, New Zealand's traditional social order was disintegrating, social disadvantage groups were expanding, and New Zealand's racial concerns were growing. Eugenics became one of the solutions to New Zealand's racial problems, and the New Zealand Eugenics Movement emerged, with the promotion of sterilization legislation as its overriding goal. Against this backdrop, the Mental Defectives Amendment bill of 1928 came into being. The core of the bill was the eugenic sterilization and marriage restrictions in sections 21 and 25 of the bill, which marked the peak of the eugenics movement in New Zealand. The Mental Defectives Amendment bill of 1928 was both an anti-liberal response to over-liberalism and a challenge to traditional social mores,

which inevitably gave rise to heated debates among all parties, leading to the last-minute withdrawal of the sterilization provisions by the ruling party, and the failure of the Amendment Bill 1928, which profoundly affected the development of the eugenics movement in New Zealand.

Currently, academics have focused on the process and main content of the Mental Defectives Amendment bill 1928, but have not analyzed the reasons for its failure. In view of this, this paper is intended to make a preliminary examination of the reasons for the failure of the Amendment Bill 1928, and to analyze in depth the intricate forces behind the bill, so as to get a glimpse of the basic pattern and direction of the development of New Zealand's social history.

2. Partisan Conflicts: Opposition Pressure on the Ruling Party

New Zealand's modern politics started late but developed rapidly, with the Liberal Party, New Zealand's first modern political party, emerging among the middle class in the early 1880s, followed by the Reform Party, the Independence Party, and the Labor Party, which constituted the basic map of party politics in New Zealand at the beginning of the twentieth century. The main reason for the failure of the Amendment Bill 1928 was that the parties had different political philosophies and agendas and were at loggerheads with each other.

New Zealand entered the "Great Liberal Era" when the Liberals won the election in 1891. However, the Reform Party emerged quietly in the 20th century as people lost confidence in the Liberal government due to the long period of social crisis in New Zealand. 1905 saw the founding of the Reform Party by William Massey, who adopted a populist style and pragmatically incorporated the popular policies of the Liberals, rapidly expanding the party's base, and officially came to power in 1912, ending the Liberal era. In 1912, he came to power, ending the era of the Liberal Party. Although the Reform Party took a series of measures to alleviate the economic crisis after coming to power, New Zealand's economy remained weak for a long time throughout the 1920s, and the social atmosphere became increasingly low. Older people who had lived through New Zealand's golden age became more and more worried about the moral decline and racial degradation of the young people, and they called the 1920s the "Aspirin Age" of New Zealand. The Reform Party was always worried about racial degradation in New Zealand. Therefore, they embraced the theory of eugenics and tried to control the reproduction of the mentally deficient through the state power to ensure racial purity, prevent the decline of national quality and enhance national efficiency. Many of the Reform Party executives were personally involved in the eugenics movement and pushed for the Amendment Bill 1928. For example, Gordon Coates, then Prime Minister of New Zealand and whip of the Reform Party, regarded the Amendment Bill 1928 as a government measure and asked all party members to support it. However, once introduced, the bill was fiercely attacked by the opposition parties, most notably the left-wing Labor Party, which virtually dominated the parliamentary debate.

New Zealand had a large number of trade union organizations and an active trade union movement, but there had never been a unified political party, and in 1916, with the hardening of the Reform Party government against the trade union movement and the international situation, the United New Zealand Labour Party and the Social Democratic Party formally merged to form the Labour Party. The NZLP centered its development on the urban working class and became the second largest opposition party in Parliament in 1922. The Labour Party rejects the underlying philosophy of New Zealand eugenics-that genetic factors are responsible for the increase in the number of mentally handicapped people. It argues that the root causes of the mentally handicapped are socio-economic and that class differences and economic issues should be addressed. Peter Fraser, a Labor MP, attacked sterilization measures as "short-cut attempts to deal with deep-rooted social evils". He delved into the arguments provided by the Reform Party, pointing out that ".... sterilization is not based upon scientific or proved fact, but is simply the outcome of uninstructed propaganda carried on by people whose doctrines are mainly charlatanism". Holland, the Labour opposition leader, even quoted directly from a study by a doctor at the University of Edinburgh - namely that it would take 34,746 years to reduce the number of mentally defective people from 1 in 1,000 to 1 in a million by sterilizing them. In the face of Holland's skepticism, Reform health minister Alexander Young remains convinced that "how slow the process may be, it is better than allowing pure streams to be polluted". But the Labor Party did not accept Alexander Young's argument, the Liberals and Independents challenged it, and even the Reform Party disagreed with it, so that the parliamentary debate on the Amendment Bill 1928 continued for many years without agreement.

The Reform Party government had to face not only strong opposition within Parliament, but also the upcoming election season outside of Parliament. In 1928, former Liberal Prime Minister Joseph Ward returned to politics, taking in some former Liberals, the businessmen's wing of the Reform Party to form the Coalition Party, which was supported by the Labor Party, and, upholding traditional Liberal ideals, was under strong pressure in the In the 1928 general election, it gained momentum and put great pressure on the Reform Party government. New Zealand's political tradition was completely transplanted from the West, emphasizing civic and constitutional checks and balances on state power, and liberalism was deeply rooted in the people. The prevailing view in society at the time was that safeguarding the individual from unnecessary state interference was paramount, and that the state should first adopt policies in the interests of the individual. At the same time, New Zealand's prudent legal and political framework was an important cornerstone of resistance to anti-liberalism, and the sound democratic and liberal political system had a strong countervailing power to suppress eugenics. The Reform Party's attempts to safeguard the public interest through state intervention in the individual were seen by the opposition as a challenge to liberalism, with Ward repeatedly and publicly criticizing Coates' sterilization clause as a violation of individual rights and a breach of the core of liberalism.

Under pressure from both opposition parties inside and outside Parliament, the Reform Party government, fearing that passing the controversial bill during the election season would alienate key voters, chose at the last minute to withdraw the bill's sterilization provisions.

3. Religious Conflicts: Protestant-Catholic Conflict

As the French statesman and scholar André Siegfried said when he visited New Zealand in 1904, "no tradition is so strong as the religious tradition", and although New Zealand was striving to develop its own identity, it remained faithful to the Old World in religious matters. Protestantism is widespread in New Zealand, but the influence of Roman Catholicism cannot be underestimated. The New Zealand public has long experienced little religious tension between the two, but this does not mean that the religious environment in New Zealand has been unruffled. At the beginning of the 20th century, Protestant-Catholic tensions punctuated New Zealand's seemingly calm religious landscape and had a profound effect on the Amendment Bill 1928.

Since the first ship sailed to New Zealand in 1848, many Scottish immigrants have traveled across the ocean to New Zealand to take root in places such as Otago and spread rapidly, and Protestant denominations such as the Presbyterian Church have entered New Zealand with them. New Zealand has always had a high percentage of Protestant believers compared to other Anglo immigrant countries (e.g., Canada, the United States, and Australia), and has been very active in Protestantism, believing that God ordained its outward expansion of its colonies and the development of a Christian nation. The Presbyterian Church of New Zealand has made predestination of salvation an important doctrine, believing that the salvation of an individual is predestined by God and has nothing to do with the efforts of the individual. Under the influence of Protestantism, Protestants tend to weaken or even limit the "defective" who are unable to reach the level of God's elect. Coupled with the fact that Protestantism had long been actively engaged with science, theories such as eugenic sterilization were more readily accepted and supported by Protestants. Therefore, Protestantism has become one of the main promoters of the eugenics movement in New Zealand. New Zealand Protestants are found in all walks of life, especially in the media. Many of the editors of both the small country papers and the influential metropolitan dailies were staunch Protestants, publishing articles and editorials on eugenics, as well as a large number of books and radio broadcasts, and actively importing eugenic views into society, which played a positive role in the introduction of the 1928 Amendment Act.

However, unlike the Protestant Church, the Catholic Church was keen to save all "God's children" and was firmly opposed to any interference in the reproductive process, and the Catholic Church played an important role in the anti-eugenics movement. With a small Irish population among the early immigrants to New Zealand, the spread of Catholicism was slow, but the Catholic Church gradually took root in the lower class of New Zealand by virtue of its doctrine and organization, and its influence in society continued to grow. 1928 Amendment bill intensified the Catholic Church's concern over the declining fertility rate and the moral crisis in the society, and at the same time aggravated the doctrinal

contradiction between the Catholic Church and Protestantism, so they stood firmly in support of the opposition party and demanded that Parliament withdraw the sterilization provision. Demanded that Parliament withdraw the sterilization clause. The New Zealand Tablet, an organ of the New Zealand Catholic Church, repeatedly published editorials condemning the sterilization provisions in the 1928 bill from a moral point of view, criticizing the government for punishing the "moral innocents", and considering these provisions to be the symbol of the "Moral School" and even the symbol of the "Moral School". The government was criticized for punishing "moral innocents" and considered these clauses to be a sign of "moral schools", even equating sterilization with "murder". Archbishop Redwood went so far as to state that eugenics challenged traditional Catholic morality and that there was a fundamental difference between the two. He argued that "The root of the difference between Catholic teaching and modern eugenics is that the Church makes bodily and mental culture subservient to morality, while modern eugenics makes morality subservient to bodily and mental culture". In a press statement, he further articulated the Catholic Church's opposition to the sterilization clause and called attention to four main issues: first, the Church's heightened concern for the rights of the individual; second, the lack of trust in legislators and policymakers; and third and fourth, the fear that sterilization would "open the door to immoral legislation" and even evolve into a coercive measure. Thirdly and fourthly, the Catholic Church is concerned that sterilization will open the door to "immoral legislation" and even evolve into coercive measures. In addition, the Catholic Church also questioned the scientific validity of eugenics. H.H. McClelland, a devout Catholic and director of the Ohic Association for the Welfare of the Mentally Sick, wrote The Sterilization Fallacy directly after the Amendment Bill 1928 to oppose sterilization. The Sterilization Fallacy", written directly after the Amendment Bill 1928, argued against the eugenicists' use of sterilization as a solution to social problems and dismissed it as "monstrous legislation". He argued that the prevailing ideology of sterilization was based on public discrimination against the mentally handicapped and on a large number of false statistics compiled by eugenicists, and that it lacked a sufficient scientific basis.

The opposition of the New Zealand Catholic Church to the Bill influenced the views of the authorities on the Amendment Bill 1928 and guided public opinion. The Church's repeated warnings to the faithful not to vote for "bigots and fanatics" in the forthcoming general election added to the pressure on the Reform Party to take a more cautious approach to the Amendment Bill 1928.

4. Conceptual Shifts: Eclectic Pragmatic Eugenics Theories and the Rise of Foreign Threat Theories

The Amendment Bill 1928 was shaped by concerns about racial degradation in New Zealand and the development of negative eugenics. Negative eugenics was based on the theory of heredity and advocated restricting the reproduction of the "unfit" in order to ensure the health of the race. Negative eugenics dominated the early eugenics movement, but in the twentieth century an eclectic and pragmatic approach to eugenics emerged, which greatly influenced the direction of the eugenics

movement. At the same time, as immigration increased, New Zealand's focus shifted from "domestic threats" to "external threats" such as Asian immigration. This shift in thinking led the New Zealand authorities to reconsider the feasibility of sterilization provisions.

The traditional view of eugenics, which held that heredity was the most important factor in determining the destiny of the race, was a theory of genetic supremacy that influenced the direction of the early eugenics movement. However, from the 1920s onwards, an eclectic and pragmatic group of eugenicists emerged outside the mainstream, who, while recognizing the importance of heredity, also began to emphasize the importance of the environment in racial issues. Parliamentarian D. McLaren spoke of New Zealand's "excessive acceptance of the impatience and ambition of civilization; one of the results of the struggle for existence and the quest for wealth has been the prevalence of mental illness", while urbanization's "drudgery and overwork in special trades" was also a contributing factor to mental illness. "is also a factor in mental illness" under urbanization. It can be argued that New Zealand's economic development has been accompanied by increasingly crowded, squalid living conditions and mounting pressures of life, all of which affect the public's physical and mental health and lead to an expansion of the mentally deficient population. Former president of the New Zealand Eugenics Education Association and Attorney General Findlay suggested that the government's top priority should be to improve town planning, workers' housing conditions and children's playgrounds to ensure a healthy environment for the public to live in. More and more eugenicists have begun to advocate that the Government should pay more attention to environmental factors and improve the situation of the mentally handicapped groups through environmental interventions (e.g., improving living conditions, organizing outdoor activities, promoting psychotherapy, etc.).

At the same time, New Zealanders have come to see the main threats to the country as external rather than internal, and New Zealand's rapid socio-economic growth since the beginning of the twentieth century has attracted a large number of non-white ethnic groups (especially Asian immigrants), many of whom suffer from mental deficiencies, infectious diseases, disabilities and other problems. However, the New Zealand colonialists regarded their own society as "part of the great Anglo-Saxon nation" and believed that "the European races were superior to the non-European races and that the Anglo-Anglo nation had created the most perfect of all civilizations", and theories of racial superiority were prevalent. Theories of racial superiority were rampant. The large number of non-white immigrants is seen as an impediment to New Zealand becoming a better home for Great Britain's communities, impacting on the social identity and cohesion that New Zealand is trying to build, and many New Zealanders are calling for tighter border controls. At the same time, New Zealand did not view the Maori within its borders as an inferior race that had to be eliminated, and even many Maori were active in the New Zealand eugenics movement. A range of educated Māori leaders, such as Māui Pōmare, Ngata, and Buck, were actively involved in debates about population, health reform, race science, and eugenics. More worried about the impact of foreign immigration on New Zealand society than worried about domestic issues, Ngata and Buck developed graded race science and eugenics policies for ethnic

Chinese in response. It can be argued that New Zealand's racial homogeneity was seldom threatened by internal ethnicity, and so they were also more concerned with external issues, focusing on the exclusion of "unsuitable" immigrants.

The idea of negative eugenics is just one part of a broad range of racial and demographic thought in New Zealand, and it is active in New Zealand's political scene alongside other theories. When more compelling theories emerge, negative eugenics inevitably falls by the wayside, and the bills underpinning it are put on the back burner.

5. Public Opposition: Fierce Opposition and Debate from Various Sectors

Public disagreement in New Zealand over the Amendment Bill 1928 was an important factor in the eventual withdrawal of the sterilization bill. Once introduced, the bill generated a great deal of public debate, with a wide range of organizations and individuals expressing their views in the national press and demonstrating a wide range of attitudes towards the Amendment Bill 1928.

A section of the public was wary of the sterilization provisions because of concerns about the state of society. The Evening Post, in an editorial published on 18 July of that year, expressed concern about racial degradation in New Zealand, and was generally in favour of the Amendment Bill 1928, but suggested that the sterilization provisions should be postponed. Editorials in the New Zealand Herald and The Dominion praised the bill as a "progressive piece of social legislation". The Herald emphasized that the prolificacy of the mentally challenged was a worldwide problem, but argued that sterilization was too radical a measure at the present time and that the government needed to carefully consider the possibility of its implementation. The Dominion was more radical than the former, with several articles emphasizing the dangers of reproduction by the mentally handicapped and the enormous costs it imposes on New Zealand society and the public. However, the newspaper also pointed out the lack of a popular base for sterilization, and called for a greater emphasis on eugenics to improve social efficiency. The Press, on the other hand, said bluntly that "New Zealand's restrictions have been delayed for too long" and that New Zealand "already has enough safeguards in place", but it still drew the government's attention to the need to further improve the humanitarian measures for the sterilized group in order to avoid an even greater moral crisis. In addition, some social organizations commented on the bill, and their main view was that the government should be careful with the sterilization provisions.

Many members of the public were outright opposed to the sterilization clause. The Auckland Star was the most scathing in its criticism of the Amendment Bill 1928, stating that the sterilization clause was an anti-liberal attack on liberalism and a "serious menace to individual and social liberty". The Otago Daily Times accused the sterilization clause of being contrary to Catholic teaching and questioned the science of sterilization, stating that "there is no scientific consensus on sterilization" and suggesting that the government should pay more attention to the environmental impacts. Subsequently, the Times received letters of opposition from the Australian Psychological and Philosophical Association, the

New Zealand Institute of Education and others, which severely criticized the sterilization provisions as essentially "racial poison" and suggested that the Government should revise the bill in consultation with representatives of teachers, psychologists and social workers.

The above letter reflects a heated debate between academics and politicians. The main objections of the academics were the lack of scientific validity of sterilization, both because of the lack of strong evidence that genetics was the cause of the development of the mentally handicapped, and because of the strong bias of the government's research, which relied too heavily on case studies. Triggs, on the other hand, argued strenuously in defense of the government, focusing on the dangers of uncontrolled mentally defective persons and the cost to the taxpayer. The controversy continued through September 1928, with many academics and politicians debating it in the form of letters or articles, and with the opposing views of the two sides intensifying. Ada Paterson, the Director of Health, drew a direct line between academics and prbillitioners of the mental system, arguing that all actual practitioners within the mental system should support the passage of the Amendment Bill 1928. On behalf of the Auckland Progress Committee on the Mentally Handicapped bill, Professors Fitt and Anderson sent a letter to the public pointing out the concerns of academics about the Sterilization bill and emphasizing the possibility of the government taking a progressively more heavy-handed and coercive approach to sterilizations. The letter further stated that "the main provisions of the Bill are based on theories of heredity and physical improvement by certain 'eugenic' methods, which have not only been proved to be unreliable, but for which the only possible authority should be the professional researcher". The unfounded opinions and experiences of 'practical social workers' become worthless in these matters.

The debate between academics and the government is essentially a conflict between interest groups, with different sectoral interests and political leanings often determining one's stance in the debate on natural parenting. In the face of strong opposition from academics, the New Zealand authorities had to consider more carefully where the bill would go from here. At the same time, through further observation of newspaper editorials and letters from the public during this period, it can be found that the discussion about the Amendment Bill 1928 was almost entirely focused on the middle and upper social elites, and the lower class people hardly participated in the debate. The Bill fundamentally lacked a mass base, and its failure was inevitable.

6. Conclusion

A combination of factors led the government to announce on 25 September 1928 that it was abandoning the controversial sterilization provisions. The failure of the bill was not only due to a confluence of factors, including partisan conflict, religious conflict, philosophical shifts and public opposition, but also reflected the intense play of values and political forces in New Zealand society as it modernized. Although the Amendment Bill 1928 failed to achieve its highest goal, the process of its introduction and debate has undoubtedly left a deep mark on the history of the eugenics movement in New Zealand. The introduction and eventual withdrawal of the bill demonstrated New Zealand's deep

concern for social order, racial purity and the future of the nation at the beginning of the twentieth century. It was not only an attempt to put eugenics into practice in New Zealand society, but also a challenge to traditional values and social morality. The failure of the bill also signaled New Zealand's emphasis on individual freedom and civil rights, as well as its prudent attitude towards the use of state power. In addition, the bill has provided experience and lessons for subsequent eugenics campaigns and the formulation of related policies, prompting New Zealand to pay more attention to scientific evidence, human rights protection and social justice when confronting racial and social issues.

In summary, the failure of The Mental Defectives Amendment Bill 1928 became not only a turning point for the eugenics movement in New Zealand, but also one of the major points in the development of New Zealand's social history. The bill and the eugenics movement behind it constitute an important aspect of New Zealand's social history. Although it never became a popular movement, it was widely spread in the academic, political, medical, and social service sectors, and eugenics concepts gradually infiltrated into New Zealand's mental health, education, and other systems, and ultimately affected New Zealand's daily life. To this day, eugenics remains relevant to the debate about the care, management and control of people with intellectual disabilities in New Zealand.

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