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Sex Radicalism in the Canadian Pacific Northwest, 1890–1920

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WHAT IS WRONG with monogamy? Some pertinent comments on the question were made in a 1901 article entitled “The Wanderings of the Spirit,” published in the Chicago-based libertarian journal *Lucifer: The Light-Bearer*. The author conjured up the image of another world where music, not love, was the most treasured possession. In this society young people were not allowed to sing until they came of age. And even then they were allowed only one song, which was to last them a lifetime. It was a sin to hanker after another melody or be caught humming a foreign refrain. What happened? If one were stone deaf it did not really matter, but most people eventually became bored with the same old song. Illicit music-making reached such proportions that ultimately the state passed legislation to allow people to change their tunes. But, asked the author, what kind of progress was it when you simply exchanged one song for another? The conventional assumption was still being made that once you had found the right tune you should never be attracted to any other. Society chose to regard as most virtuous those who, spurning adventure and creativity, restricted their repertoire to a lifelong solo.¹

Perhaps the most interesting fact about this witty little parable on the limitations of monogamy is that it was written in Canada. Canada is not usually associated with the history of sexual radicalism. In the “true North strong and free,” such exotic strains of social criticism appear to have rarely flourished.² But in Britain at the turn of the century socialists

¹Robert Bird Kerr, “The Wanderings of the Spirit,” *Lucifer*, August 17, 1901, p. 242.

²But for Finnish sex radicals in Canada, see J. Donald Wilson, “Matti Kurikka and A. B.

such as George Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, and Havelock Ellis added such critiques of current sexual mores to their intellectual arsenals. To the horror of conservative hereditarians, these mavericks used the assertion of the importance of childbearing to argue for the creation of extensive welfare provisions and against the restrictions of traditional bourgeois morality.³

In Canada, hereditarian thinking was very much dominated by social conservatives, but a few daring individuals on the political Left were attracted by the sexually subversive potential of eugenics. Historians have told us much about the enemies of sexual radicalism in Canada and next to nothing about its proponents.⁴ To remedy this oversight, this essay focuses on two of the country's least known but most provocative thinkers, Robert Bird Kerr and Dora Forster. These two writers attempted in Canada, as did like-minded radicals in Britain, France, and America, to link the campaigns for sexual reform and social reform. An analysis of their arguments and of the similar musings found in the contemporary progressive press provides an indication of the role that eugenics played in advanced circles in the discussion of sexuality, discussions to which even Canada was not immune.

Robert Bird Kerr, the author of "The Wanderings of the Spirit," was born in 1867, the son of the parish minister of Yester, located south of Edinburgh.⁵ He attended Edinburgh University, where he lost whatever

Makela: Socialist Thought among the Finns in Canada, 1900-1932," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 20 (1978): 13; "Matti Kurikka: Finnish Canadian Intellectual," *BC Studies* 10 (1973): 60-61.

³George Bernard Shaw, *The Revolutionist's Handbook* (1903), vol. 10 of *Collected Works* (London, 1930); H. G. Wells, *Socialism and the Family* (London, 1906); Havelock Ellis, *The Task of Social Hygiene* (London, 1912); Eden Paul, *Socialism and Eugenics* (London, 1911); Eden Paul and Cedar Paul, eds., *Population and Birth Control: A Symposium* (New York, 1917).

⁴Michael Bliss, "'Pure Books on Avoided Subjects': Pre-Freudian Sexual Ideas in Canada," *Historical Papers* (1970), pp. 89-108; James G. Snell, "'The White Life for Two': The Defense of Marriage and Sexual Morality in Canada, 1890-1914," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 16 (1983): 111-28. For the larger context, see Ronald G. Walters, *Primers for Prudery: Sexual Advice to Victorians* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1974); Anita Claire Fellman and Michael Fellman, *Making Sense of Self: Medical Advice Literature in Late Nineteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia, 1981); Neil Sutherland, *Children in English Canadian Society* (Toronto, 1976); and Andrew Jones and Leonard Rutman, *In the Children's Aid: J. J. Kelson and Child Welfare in Ontario* (Toronto, 1980).

⁵On Kerr's life, see the accounts in *New Generation*, January 1927, pp. 1, 6; Hilda D. Romanes, "Robert Bird Kerr," *ibid.*, May-June 1951, pp. 4-5; Rosanna Ledbetter, *A History of the Malthusian League* (Columbus, OH, 1976), pp. 239-40; Richard A. Soloway, *Birth Control and the Population Question in England, 1877-1930* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1982), pp. 195-96, 202-4.

religious beliefs he might have once harbored and, during further study in Germany at the University of Bonn, was converted by reading George Drysdale's *Natural Religion* to neo-Malthusianism. Kerr was trained as a barrister, but what he did upon his return to Britain is unclear. He later was reported to have been associated at the time of the founding of the Fabian Society in the late 1880s with Sidney and Beatrice Webb and George Bernard Shaw.⁶ The Webbs did visit Kerr in 1911 at the time of their cross-country tour of Canada.⁷ Kerr's most important relationship, however, was with Dora Forster, who ultimately became his wife. In 1893 the twenty-six-year-old lawyer set sail for Canada; Forster, already committed to Kerr, soon followed. Kerr practiced law in a number of small towns in British Columbia—Phoenix, Victoria, and Kelowna—and by all reports led an apparently unremarkable existence. At Phoenix, a copper-mining boom town controlled by Granby Mines, he served as city solicitor and auditor.⁸ He and Forster left Phoenix for Victoria in 1905 and three years later moved on to Kelowna, where they remained until 1922. Kerr, one of the few barristers and solicitors in the Okanagan Valley, served as secretary of the Kelowna Board of Trade.⁹

But at the same time that Kerr and Forster were playing the role of a middle-class, respectable couple in a series of provincial towns, they were contributing inflammatory articles on sexuality to advanced publications in Canada, Britain, and the United States. We know little about their day-to-day existence, but in any event they must have hid from their neighbors their writing on sexual radicalism. From 1898 to 1906 they wrote for *Lucifer*, the Chicago-based libertarian journal; from 1903 to 1909 for such Canadian progressive papers as *Western Clarion*, *Western Socialist*, and *Cotton's Weekly*; from 1906 through World War I for the *Malthusian*, the English neo-Malthusian periodical; and in 1912 for the British Columbian suffragist paper, the *Champion*. We will follow their activities until 1922, when they returned to England and Kerr assumed the editorship of *New Generation*, which in 1923 replaced the *Malthusian* as the mouthpiece for the English neo-Malthusian movement.

To place Kerr and Forster in context something first has to be said of

⁶Kerr stated that he was with Shaw in Bradford in 1893; see Robert Bird Kerr, "George Bernard Shaw," *Lucifer*, January 4, 1906, pp. 437–38.

⁷G. Feaver, "'Self Respect and Hopefulness': The Webbs in the Canadian West," *BC Studies* 43 (1979): 57.

⁸On Kerr in Phoenix, see Gregory Neil Fraser, "Phoenix: British Columbia's 'Copper Camp,' 1891–1920" (B.A. thesis, University of Victoria, 1972); *Henderson's B.C. Gazetteer and Directory* (1893–1902); *Phoenix Pioneer*, March 5, 1904, p. 1.

⁹On Kerr in Kelowna, see *Wrigley's B.C. Directory* (1918); *Kelowna Daily Courier*, February 2, 1922, p. 1.

the nineteenth-century discussion of sexuality in Britain and America. Attacks in Britain on the existing form of marriage were associated with the Owenite Socialists of the first half of the century and the free thinkers of the latter half. The most influential of the mid-Victorian sexual radicals was George Drysdale. This Scottish physician was an active campaigner for fertility control and a vehement supporter of the women's movement. His anonymously authored *Physical, Sexual, and Natural Religion* (1855), in addition to being a major work on contraception, contained attacks on existing marriage relationships as forms of "legal prostitution" and defenses of prostitutes as the victims of both a double sexual standard and the restriction of women's employment.¹⁰ But when his brother, Charles Drysdale, launched the Malthusian League in 1877 to campaign for a restriction of the birthrate, the sexual radicalism of George Drysdale found no place in the league's pronouncements. To make neo-Malthusianism respectable, the league based its defense of birth control solely on the conservative teachings of Robert Malthus. Only by the restriction of fertility, it argued, could the poor improve their lot. But the employment of contraceptives, the league implied, would not in any serious way change the relationship of the sexes.¹¹

The Fabian Society, which began in the 1880s as the Fellowship of the New Life, aspiring as it did to change England both socially and morally, included members such as Annie Besant, H. G. Wells, and George Bernard Shaw, who felt that birth control could play a more positive role than that envisaged by the Malthusian League. Indeed, Shaw and Wells went on to sketch out portrayals of future societies in which the state, in its pursuit of efficiency, would actively intervene in child-bearing.¹² Kerr and Forster were on the fringes of the Fabian Society in its early years and advanced similar arguments.

Kerr was also involved in the 1890s in some way with the English Legitimation League.¹³ The *Adult*, the league's journal, edited by George Bedborough and Henry Seymour, appeared in June 1897 with

¹⁰On the Owenites, see Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1984). On Drysdale's views, see his "A Doctor of Medicine," *The Elements of Social Science; or, Physical, Sexual, and Natural Religion: An Exposition of the True Cause and Only Cure of the Three Primary Social Evils: Poverty, Prostitution, and Celibacy*, 26th ed. (London, 1887).

¹¹Ledbetter, pp. 57-121; Soloway, *Birth Control*, pp. 55-133.

¹²Angus McLaren, *Birth Control in Nineteenth-Century England* (London, 1978), pp. 174-97; Samuel Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (Princeton, NJ, 1968), pp. 87-172; Peter Kemp, *H. G. Wells and the Culminating Ape: Biological Themes and Imaginative Obsessions* (London, 1982), pp. 73-78.

¹³On the Legitimation League, see Phyllis Grosskurth, *Havelock Ellis: A Biography* (New York, 1980), pp. 191-94.

the avowed aim of securing the rights of the illegitimate and campaigning for sex education and immediately drew the support of writers interested in sexuality, such as Grant Allen, Edward Carpenter, and Mona Caird.¹⁴ Further notoriety was won by the league's involvement in the Edith Lanchester affair. This young Battersea woman, having fallen in love with a socialist, was committed by her father to an asylum. Although successful in campaigning for her release, the league and its journal both soon disappeared, after Bedborough was found guilty of selling Havelock Ellis's *Sexual Inversion*, which the court judged "an obscene and filthy work." The prosecution was in part motivated by the belief of the police that the league was a front for anarchist activities.¹⁵

In their attempts to wed political and sexual concerns, Kerr and Forster were following a course already set by the English Left.¹⁶ A central question was whether restriction of fertility, which was associated with Malthus's conservative doctrines, could somehow be turned to the purposes of the working class. Henry Seymour, who edited the *Adult* when Bedborough was first jailed, was an active anarchist. Like other libertarians, he was not at first enthusiastic about birth control. In 1886 he provided an introduction to P. J. Proudhon's *The Malthusians*, in which the French author asserted, "The theory of Malthus is the theory of political murder . . . an organization of suicide."¹⁷ But after Annie Besant attacked such moralizing, Seymour backtracked: "We Anarchists, while not urging the slightest objection to the limitation of offspring where necessary or advisable,—nevertheless do flatly deny that the increase of poverty and population necessarily go hand in hand."¹⁸

Thomas Shore, an active freethinker, went on in the *Anarchist* to endorse the neo-Malthusian Henry Allbutt's *A Wife's Handbook* as full of "solid practical information."¹⁹ Seymour continued to argue, however, that if Malthusianism were linked to the faction of the Left, it was to that which supported state socialism. Collectivists, who were not hypocrites, he argued, would see "the necessary correlative in the sovereignty of the syringe."²⁰ He extended his thinking somewhat in *Anarchy of Love* (1888), espousing the vague doctrine that since so many marriages de-

¹⁴*Adult: A Journal for the Advancement of Freedom in Sexual Relations* (published 1897-99).

¹⁵Hermia Oliver, *The International Anarchist Movement in Late Victorian London* (London, 1983), p. 145.

¹⁶McLaren, *Birth Control*, pp. 43-78, 157-74.

¹⁷P. J. Proudhon, *The Malthusians* (London, 1880), pp. 6-7; see also Henry Seymour, *The Malthusian Theory* (London, 1889), pp. 9-10.

¹⁸*Anarchist*, June 1, 1886.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, June 1 and July 1, 1886.

²⁰"The Malthusian Theology," *ibid.*, September 1, 1886.

stroyed love, sexual liberty was required.²¹ And in *The Physiology of Love: A Study on Stirpiculture* (1898) Seymour tried to wed psychological and physiological concerns. Drawing on the once popular science of phrenology, he argued that sexual activity was a necessary safety valve for the body's electrical build-up. Contraception he now implicitly condoned, stating in passing that, thanks to chemistry, women had contraceptives and so did not have to become mothers unless they so desired.²² Seymour went about as far as any English anarchist could in embracing sex radicalism. Robert Kerr reported that he attended the meetings of the Legitimation League and found most of the anarchists morally conservative. He singled out Peter Kropotkin, who, sneered Kerr, "shuns the sex question as a cat shuns water."²³

Much closer to Forster and Kerr's views were those of the American libertarians associated with Moses Harman and his journal, *Lucifer*.²⁴ From 1898 to 1907 Kerr and Forster were *Lucifer's* constant contributors and financial supporters, as it continued a long American tradition of combining social and sex radicalism. For the previous seventy years, the United States had experienced intermittent flurries of sexual debate, which frequently accompanied religious revivals.²⁵ Abner Kneeland's *Boston Investigator* provided a forum for free thought, sex radicalism, and working-class agitation in the 1830s, while in the 1850s the Mormon and Oneida experiments in communal living paralleled surges in discussions of feminism, free love, and spiritualism. And in the last decades of the century, Ezra Heywood's *The Word* in Boston and Moses Harman's *Lucifer*—first in Kansas and later in Chicago—provided outlets for discussions of sex reform. Late nineteenth-century spiritualism and free thought were not always as far apart as one might think.

²¹Henry Seymour, *Anarchy of Love; or, The Science of the Sexes* (London, 1888), p. 15.

²²Henry Seymour, *The Physiology of Love* (London, 1898), pp. 33, 97.

²³"The Truth," *Lucifer*, January 23, 1902, p. 434. Kerr claimed to have crossed the Atlantic with Kropotkin. See *New Generation*, November 1922, p. 1; Paul Avrich, "Kropotkin in America," *International Review of Social History* 25 (1980): 1–34.

²⁴On Harman, see Hal D. Sears, *The Sex Radicals: Free Love in High Victorian America* (Lawrence, KS, 1977). The Legitimation League and *Lucifer* were linked, inasmuch as Lillian Harman, daughter of Moses Harman, was honorary president of the Legitimation League. Some of the league's members, such as George Bedborough, wrote for *Lucifer*. See also Edward Royle, *Radicals, Secularists, and Republicans: Popular Freethought in Britain, 1866–1915* (Manchester, 1980), pp. 182, 248, 252–53.

²⁵See Louis J. Kern, *An Ordered Love: Sex Roles and Sexuality in Victorian Utopias: The Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1981); R. L. Muncy, *Sex and Marriage in Utopian Communities* (Bloomington, IN, 1973). For responses, see David J. Pivar, *Purity Crusade: Sexual Morality and Social Control, 1868–1900* (Westport, CT, 1974).

A perusal of these radical papers reveals the heady brew that could be concocted by combining scientism, free thought, sex radicalism, and libertarianism. "Free love" usually meant no more than marriage that could be entered and ended without coercion. "Free motherhood" similarly signified a situation in which the woman had the right to determine whether or not to bear children. The more mystical assumed that limitation of fertility would be achieved by continence; the more scientific envisaged recourse to contraception. The common goal of freedom attracted a variety of adherents. Anarchists such as Victoria Woodhull were drawn to the defense of free love, while spiritualists such as Lois Waisbrooker were led via mysticism into anarchism.²⁶ It was in response to these challenges that nervous American financiers such as J. P. Morgan and Samuel Colgate supported the Comstock Act of 1873, which was employed not just to make the sale of contraceptives illegal but to silence the supporters of sex radicalism and free thought.

What drew Kerr and Forster to the Harman group was its espousal of free love eugenics based on the early stirpiculture writings of John Humphrey Noyes and Henry C. Wright.²⁷ Anarchist eugenics—not to be confused with the later coercive eugenics of Francis Galton and Karl Pearson—asserted that only by freeing women could the race be improved.

Kerr played a key role in contributing to *Lucifer's* attack on traditional morality and its dysgenic results. Moses Harman referred to him as "our constant and faithful helper," while Lillian Harman asserted that he was "one of *Lucifer's* best friends, and a personal friend of my own as well."²⁸ Kerr and Forster sent the Harmans articles and financial support but had little direct contact with the Americans. In 1906, though, they met in San Francisco with such supporters of free love as Lydia Todd and Lois Waisbrooker. Kerr later jokingly attributed the city's famous earthquake and fire of the same year to God's displeasure at this conference of sex radicals.²⁹

²⁶Martin Henry Blatt, *Free Love and Anarchism: The Biography of Ezra Heywood* (Urbana, IL, 1989); Taylor Stoehr, ed., *Free Love in America: A Documentary History* (New York, 1979); Margaret S. March, *Anarchist Women, 1870-1920* (Philadelphia, 1981), pp. 72-76.

²⁷Scars, p. 121; Lewis Perry, *Childhood, Marriage, and Reform: Henry Clark Wright, 1797-1880* (Chicago, 1980), pp. 171-256. For a continuation of this strand of thinking in the twentieth century, see Scott Nearing, *The Super Race: An American Problem* (New York, 1919), pp. 24, 52-53, 80.

²⁸"The Truth," *Lucifer*, January 23, 1902, p. 436; Lillian Harman, letter to editor, *ibid.*, December 26, 1901, p. 407.

²⁹*Ibid.*, May 10, 1906, p. 512; August 2, 1906, pp. 558-59. Lois Waisbrooker spent some time at the turn of the century at the Home Colony on Puget Sound in the state of Washington; it is possible she was in contact with Kerr and Forster in British Columbia.

Kerr's contributions to *Lucifer* dealt with three main topics: sexuality, politics, and eugenics. He was critical, as his comments on monogamy in "The Wanderings of the Spirit" suggest, of the repressive aspects of Victorian sexuality.³⁰ Indeed he argued, as did other radicals from the time of Owen and Fourier, that the moral constraints of society were the actual cause of sexual excesses and immorality.³¹ Monogamy perhaps had been required at one time for the protection of offspring, but now, insisted Kerr, contraceptive protection offered the possibility of separating love from parenthood. All could be lovers, but only some could or should be parents. Those who led a free sexual life Kerr referred to as the "varietists," and he claimed to know several women of this persuasion.³² He was presumably thinking of the participants of what was, in effect, the "free love conference" held in San Francisco in 1906.

Kerr extended his critique of sexual relationships from monogamy to existing sex roles. In "A Strange Custom," he developed a Shavian parable concerning the planet Ceres, where the men were forced to wear dresses and always keep covered the most shameful part of their anatomy—their noses. Accordingly, they were reduced to being helpless, decorative creatures. Only with rational dress reform and equitable sharing of responsibilities could progress take place.³³

But if Kerr was a critic of existing sex roles, he reserved much of his most biting criticism for the suffragists. As his own references to writers such as August Bebel, Grant Allen, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Havelock Ellis, Edward Carpenter, Karl Pearson, William Morris, E. Belfort Bax, Edward Bellamy, and George Bernard Shaw suggest, he was preoccupied by the question of how feminism could be related to the issues of sex and socialism.³⁴ He was impatient with those feminists who on the one hand demanded political reforms, but on the other refused to come

The *Agitator* (later to appear as the *Syndicalist*), the Home Colony's journal, carried articles that sound remarkably like the works of Kerr and Forster; see, for example, the issues of October 1, 1911, August 15, 1912, and July 1, 1913. For helpful leads on this, I have to thank Charles Pierce LeWarne, author of *Utopias on Puget Sound, 1885-1915* (Seattle, 1975).

³⁰Collections of Kerr's articles, including "The Strasburg Geese," "The Rights of Children," and "Up to Date Fables," were advertised and sold by *Lucifer*.

³¹*Lucifer*, February 26, 1903, pp. 49-50; October 29, 1905, pp. 397-98.

³²*Ibid.*, April 9, 1903, pp. 98-99.

³³"A Strange Custom," *ibid.*, March 20, 1902, p. 73.

³⁴*Ibid.*, January 23, 1902, p. 434. Kerr followed Grant Allen's line: "Whether we have wives or not—and that is a minor point about which I, for one, am supremely unprejudiced—we must have at least mothers" (Edward Clodd, *Grant Allen* [London, 1900], p. 162).

down from their pedestals to deal with the practical problems of changing sex roles.³⁵

Politicians, of course, had shown even less sensitivity to sexual issues. Kerr concluded, however, that the Fabian socialists had gone furthest in attempting to place sexuality in a social and political context. In defending Sidney Webb, Beatrice Webb, and George Bernard Shaw in a libertarian journal, Kerr was leaving himself open to attack.³⁶ C. L. James charged that Kerr was blind to the coercive aspects of collectivism; Moses Harman pointed out that anarchists had always shown themselves more liberal than socialists on the sexual question.³⁷ In a spirited retort Kerr replied that "anarchistic voluntarism," as much as it promised in the abstract, simply did not work in reality. In the United States, he pointed out, whites were "voluntarily" burning and lynching blacks, and it was the state that was trying to stop them.³⁸ As for the sex issue, Kerr reiterated his argument that anarchists such as Benjamin Tucker, Wordsworth Donisthorpe, J. C. Spence, and J. Greeve Fisher had continually skirted the subject while the Fabians sought to come to grips with it.³⁹

What underlay Kerr's concern for some sort of collectivist response to the challenge of changing sexual norms was his interest in eugenics. In an article entitled "Darwin, Weismann, and Harman," he spelled out his argument.⁴⁰ Darwin, he argued, had revealed how evolution necessarily led in the natural state to the survival of the fittest. What Darwin had not taken into account, but what the German zoologist August Weismann had noted, was that the practice of birth control reversed evolution and led to racial degeneration rather than progress. Kerr be-

³⁵*Lucifer*, September 13, 1906, pp. 581-82. Kerr did go out of his way to praise Voltairine de Clayre; see *Lucifer*, May 1, 1902, p. 125. For assistance on this subject I would like to thank Paul Avrich, author of *An American Anarchist: The Life of Voltairine de Clayre* (Princeton, NJ, 1978).

³⁶*Lucifer*, June 12, 1902, pp. 169-70. One of the rare clergymen whom Kerr praised was the American Social Gospeller G. D. Herron, who took up something very similar to a Fabian socialist stance. See G. D. Herron, *Social Meaning of Religious Experiences* (New York, 1896; rpt. New York, 1969).

³⁷*Lucifer*, May 22, 1902, pp. 145-46; January 23, 1902, pp. 436-38.

³⁸*Ibid.*, April 24, 1902, pp. 113-14; December 5, 1901, pp. 377-78; "A Rose by Any Other Name," *ibid.*, January 9, 1902, p. 418.

³⁹"The Truth," *ibid.*, January 23, 1902, p. 434. But Kerr overlooked the fact that anarchist publications did carry radical critiques of existing sexual mores; see, for example, Alexander Cohen's remarkable defense of abortion reprinted in a Boston periodical ("The Case of Mrs. Eden," *Rebel*, February 1896, p. 56).

⁴⁰This article, which appeared in *Lucifer*, March 4, 1899, was also carried as an addenda to Forster's *Sex Radicalism*, discussed below. See also *Lucifer*, June 12, 1902, pp. 169-70; January 28, 1904, pp. 25-26.

lieved, however, that Jane H. Clapperton and Moses Harman had the answer—it was necessary to throw off the restraints of economic dependence and monogamy.⁴¹ “Let every mother who wishes to have a child be absolutely free to select its father, then the problem is solved.” If women were economically provided for by the state, the healthy would want children and would naturally choose as fathers for their children not the wealthy or powerful, but the most fit. The collective maintenance of children, the endowment of motherhood, and the sexual freedom of women would, asserted Kerr, result in the improvement of the race.⁴²

Kerr’s works were marked by inherent tensions. He declared himself in favor of the absolute sexual freedom of women; he also stated that everyone did *not* have the right to bear children. He cited the American eugenicist arguments of the evils spawned by the uncontrolled breeding of the infamously unhealthy Jukes family and the assertions of Fabians such as H. G. Wells that breeding was too important to be ignored by the state.⁴³ Francis Galton—coiner of the term “eugenics”—voiced the new concern that the Darwinian struggle was being reversed as a result of the employment of contraceptives by the fit. His antifeminism was explicit. Kerr and many progressives hoped that while the rights of women could be extended, they would also be complemented by an enunciation of the “rights” of children—the rights of being born and brought up as well as possible.⁴⁴

The women contributors to *Lucifer* were not all convinced. Lizzie M. Holmes put Kerr in his place by wearily commenting: “I have been so

⁴¹On Clapperton, see McLaren (n. 12 above), pp. 204–5; on Harman’s views, see Moses Harman, *The Right to Be Born Well* (Chicago, 1905).

⁴²*Lucifer*, July 9, 1903, pp. 202–3; February 1, 1906, p. 459. For a similar line of argument followed by feminists such as Olive Schreiner and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, see Jane Lewis, “Motherhood Issues during the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries: Some Recent Viewpoints,” *Ontario History* 75 (1983): 15–16; Rosaleen Love, “Darwinism and Feminism: The ‘Woman Question,’ in the Life and Work of Olive Schreiner and Charlotte Perkins Gilman,” in David Oldroyd and Ian Langham, eds., *The Wider Domain of Evolutionary Thought* (London, 1983), pp. 113–31.

⁴³*Lucifer*, June 11, 1903, pp. 169–70; May 21, 1903, p. 145. Richard Dugdale’s *The Jukes: A Study in Crime, Pauperism, Disease, and Heredity* (New York, 1877) carried the assertion that in seven generations one family had cost society over a million dollars in relief, imprisonment, and medical care. See Sears (n. 24 above), p. 124.

⁴⁴“The Rights of Children,” *Lucifer*, September 7, 1901, pp. 274–75; “How to Be Born Well,” *ibid.*, October 22, 1903, p. 321. Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* (New York, 1888) impressed the biologist Alfred Russell Wallace with the notion that female choice was crucial for healthy human selection. Grant Allen, best known for his portrayal of “bachelor motherhood” in *The Woman Who Did* (London, 1895), popularized such ideas in *Falling in Love* (London, 1891); and see also Martin Fichman, *Alfred Russell Wallace* (Boston, 1981), pp. 139–50; Donald C. Bellamy, “‘Social Darwinism’

many times exasperated since I took an interest in social questions—which is about forty years ago—at the assurance with which so many radical men have presumed to tell free women what they ought to do.⁴⁵ Holmes pointed out that there was as yet no real understanding of heredity; in any event, no one had the right to ask a mother to sacrifice herself for the unborn. Lillie D. White agreed that it was peculiar that so many “old men grannies” should be morbidly preoccupied by the issue of women’s ability to breed.⁴⁶ In reality Kerr was treating women, Carrie Austin protested, not as equals, but as livestock.⁴⁷ Kerr was not without his defenders. Amy Linnett and Adeline Champney argued that at the very least Kerr was serving a useful purpose in pointing out that women should not reproduce unthinkingly.⁴⁸ Kerr’s main support, however, came from his companion Dora Forster.

Dora Forster contributed articles to *Lucifer* between 1899 and 1905.⁴⁹ Those that appeared between 1904 and 1905 she reissued as a pamphlet entitled *Sex Radicalism as Seen by an Emancipated Woman of the New Time*.⁵⁰ The main thrust of her writings was to call for a rational reappraisal of sex. She optimistically believed that doctors would play a key role in creating a new science or sociology of sexuality and in so doing circumvent the churches’ longstanding taboos against such discussions. Women, she noted, traditionally had been praised for their ignorance or what was more politely termed their “innocence,” but the new demand for sex and marriage manuals revealed a growing desire for physiological knowledge. At the moment the available books, like those of Dr. Thomas Low Groves and Dr. Alice Stockham, were replete with

Revisited,” *Perspectives in American History* 1 (1984): 96–97; Peter Norton, *The Vital Science: Biology and the Literary Imagination* (London, 1984), pp. 136–40; Daniel Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Use of Human Heredity* (Berkeley, CA, 1985), pp. 3–40.

⁴⁵Lizzie M. Holmes, letter to editor, *Lucifer*, May 14, 1903, p. 138.

⁴⁶Lillie D. White, letter to editor, *ibid.*, August 8, 1903, p. 234.

⁴⁷Carrie Austin, letter to editor, *ibid.*, August 20, 1903, pp. 249–50.

⁴⁸Adeline Champney, letter to editor, *ibid.*, August 27, 1903, pp. 257–58; Amy Linnette, letter to editor, *ibid.*, September 3, 1903, p. 268. For the context of this debate see John C. Spurlock, *Free Love: Marriage and Middle-Class Radicalism in America, 1825–1860* (New York, 1988).

⁴⁹Little is known of Dora Forster. She claimed that she was active in the English campaign for women’s education and appears to have been acquainted with the English feminist Lady Florence Dixie. See *Lucifer*, April 9, 1903, p. 94; Lady Florence Dixie to Dora Forster, *ibid.*, April 27, 1905, p. 294. In Kerr’s obituaries there is no reference to Forster other than mention of the fact that she followed him to Canada.

⁵⁰Dora Forster, *Sex Radicalism as Seen by an Emancipated Woman of the New Time* (Chicago, 1905).

“goodly nonsense.” The growth of “secularism, spiritualism, and economic reform (socialism and anarchism)” gave Forster confidence that the sort of studies she envisaged, and of which her own tract was an example, would provide more accurate portrayals of sexual needs and practices.⁵¹ Forster reported that “in the frank-spoken west,” by which she presumably meant British Columbia, candid conversations on such subjects were already taking place.⁵²

The tragedy of the existing moral system, according to Forster, was that it doomed thousands to unnecessarily unhappy lives. Conservatives like Tolstoy, who defended chastity, monogamy, and the ascetic ideal, pessimistically believed that self-control could be based only on fear of disease or damnation.⁵³ As a result the natural sexual interest of children and young women was denied. Brides ignorantly entered marriages that soon resulted in “depleted magnetism” and lost love.⁵⁴ The wife found herself tied to her husband and legally subjected to the most immoral demands. As the Chinese bound the feet of their women, so westerners employed the institution of marriage to restrict women’s freedom.⁵⁵ The irony was that while puritans scorned the prostitute, they supported a system of marriage in which women effectively were bought and sold. The only difference between the married woman and the whore was, according to Forster, that “the honest woman like the honest politician is the one who stays bought.”⁵⁶

The fact that women were not free was Forster’s proof that a sex war, complementing the class war, was being fought.⁵⁷ Men categorized women according to whether they were married, single and celibate, or prostitutes. The single woman was prevented from achieving economic independence and offered no meaningful option but marriage. The husband gained from marriage a housekeeper, a sex slave, and a nurse. The woman received, according to Forster’s grim calculations, only the negative benefits of not being childless and not remaining a spinster. Religion, as the creation of men, sanctified this inequitable situation: “The church, with the keen eye for the material side of things which characterize it, formerly insisted on the wife promising to be ‘buxom (bowsome,

⁵¹Ibid., pp. 9, 10; see also Jayme A. Sokolow, *Eros and Modernization: Sylvester Graham, Health Reform, and the Origins of Victorian Sexuality in America* (London, 1983), pp. 127–43.

⁵²Forster, *Sex Radicalism*, p. 11.

⁵³Ibid., p. 19.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 21.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 22.

⁵⁶“Sex Morality,” *Lucifer*, December 3, 1903, p. 369.

⁵⁷Forster, *Sex Radicalism*, p. 26.

obedient) in bedde and at borde."⁵⁸ And even in the sex act itself, noted Forster, men received sexual satisfaction; few women did.

Forster traced the campaign against sexual oppression from Mary Wollstonecraft, Percy Shelley, John Stuart Mill, George Drysdale, and Edward Carpenter, to George Bernard Shaw. Each had in her or his own way shown the disastrous consequences of "exclusive sex possession" and the preoccupation with "sin."⁵⁹ But as far as Forster was concerned, the findings of historians and anthropologists such as Friedrich Engels, Johann Bachofen, Lewis Morgan, J. F. McLennan, John Lubbock, Henry Maine, and J. S. Mill on the pernicious evolutionary effects of the subjection of women were even more impressive.⁶⁰ If the race is to be improved, she argued, women should be free to select their mates on the grounds of "sound heredity, both physical and mental."⁶¹ At the moment women were not free but sold to those who could afford to keep them and then subjected to careers of unthinking propagation. Women, in revolting against such a fate, were now refusing to reproduce, much to the horror of a white male supremacist like Teddy Roosevelt. "The men would now teach the women a different lesson, in the name of patriotism. But we will not help them do it. I hope the scarcity of children will go on till maternity is honored at least as much as the trials and hardships of soldiers campaigning in wartime. It will then be worthwhile to supply the nation with a sufficiency of children."⁶² This "birth strike," according to Forster, was women's way of signaling their refusal to tolerate a life of mindless propagation.⁶³ Her chief concern, which she shared with Kerr, was how the control of reproduction could be turned to positive purposes.

Forster declared that the two most important problems of the twentieth century were, first, how to use the power of sex, and second, "how to encourage and reward women in the reproductive function so that they may be willing to bear more than two children each."⁶⁴ Her conclusion was that both issues could be answered and a friendship of the sexes made possible by sex education. Such an education would begin by accepting the naturalness of children's sex play. For Forster, masturbation

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 35.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 38; see also "The Passing Ideal and the Coming Ideal," *Lucifer*, January 22, 1903, pp. 9-10.

⁶⁰"Jealousy," *Lucifer*, March 4, 1903, p. 57; also Carrie Austin to Dora Forster, *ibid.*, April 2, 1903, p. 91.

⁶¹Forster, *Sex Radicalism*, p. 24.

⁶²Ibid., pp. 20, 39.

⁶³See also George Noyes Miller, *The Strike of Sex* (London, 1895); William J. Robinson, "The Birth Strike," *International Socialist Review* 14 (1914): 404-6.

⁶⁴Forster, *Sex Radicalism*, p. 42.

was only a danger if indulged in to excess and usually only when marriage was delayed or prevented.⁶⁵ She wanted all youths from the age of fourteen to receive some sex education. Drawing on accounts of the Oneida colony, she suggested that it would be wise for the young woman of sixteen to be sexually initiated by an older man and prepared by "surgical skill" to lose her virginity.⁶⁶ The mature woman would be free to choose first her lover and then the father of her children. Between the ages of twenty and thirty, the support of the community freeing her from economic worries, she would devote herself to childbearing. The desire for children, asserted Forster, would be recognized as distinctly different from the desire for passionate fulfillment. She cited the Oneida colonists and Lois Waisbrooker as having already spelled out the differences between amorous and reproductive love; she referred her readers to the works of Dr. E. B. Foote, Dr. Alice Stockham, and Ida Craddock to explain how fertility control made such a distinction possible.⁶⁷

At the age of thirty, the woman would leave behind her childbearing career and enter a "home partnership" with a spouse.⁶⁸ It would not always be a monogamous relationship. Unhappiness resulting from sexual exclusiveness was to be shunned; happiness based on either constancy or variety were to be pursued. In contemporary society, Forster declared, most women were robbed of all sexual feelings; the joys of maternity provided only partial compensation.⁶⁹ In the future, "compulsory motherhood" would be replaced by "free motherhood," in which the "sex freedom" of the woman would be the basis for healthy relationships. The result would be not a world of promiscuity, but one in which self-control replaced social coercion.

Women needed economic and mental independence, asserted Forster; these in turn would ensure women the right to their own persons.⁷⁰ But she recognized that if women were to change, men would have to change as well. The male had to be sexually reeducated if the woman were to gain the same sort of sexual pleasure: "He loves in the same manner as some of our northern barbarians drink,—he tosses off the wine of life in one fierce draught, caring only that it quenches thirsts, instead of sipping its delicious fragrance. More complete knowledge of

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 11.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 44.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 41. On the works of Foote, Stockham, and Craddock, see Norman E. Himes, *Medical History of Contraception* (New York, 1936), pp. 260–85. On the circulation of such works in Canada, see Angus McLaren, "Birth Control and Abortion in Canada, 1870–1920," *Canadian Historical Review* 59 (1978): 323–27.

⁶⁸Forster, *Sex Radicalism*, p. 47.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 13.

⁷⁰"Real and Ideal," *Lucifer*, September 10, 1903, p. 275.

both sexes, and more worthy experiences and training will do much to adjust this discrepancy."⁷¹ This notion of sex "training" necessarily complementing "sex freedom" had a characteristically early twentieth-century progressive ring to it. Similarly ambiguous was Forster's presentation of procreation in which motherhood would be "free," yet rewarded and encouraged.⁷²

Lucifer disappeared in 1906, falling victim to a wave of antilibertarian sentiment that swept America. Harman was arrested in 1905 for using obscenities in *Lucifer*, although the initial target of the police was Dora Forster's *Sex Radicalism*. In 1906 the seventy-five-year-old editor was sentenced to a year of hard labor at Joliet State Prison.⁷³ *Lucifer*, combining as it did an interest in sex, eugenics, feminism, and radical politics, was a perfect vehicle for Kerr and Forster's work. In the Canadian and British publications, to which they turned, they could never be quite as outspoken.

Kerr and Forster were especially circumspect in their propagandistic activities in British Columbia. They supported the Socialist party of Canada but were not as candid in their contributions to its journals as they were in *Lucifer*.⁷⁴ Dora Forster was prompted to write to the *Western Socialist* in 1902, however, after the editor of the women's page, Dorothy Drew, expressed interest in the works of Edward Carpenter and Lois Waisbrooker.⁷⁵ She sent Drew the following letter:

Dear Comrade: I see that you recommend Edward Carpenter's admirable little book, "Love's Coming of Age," and I think you may be interested to have the names of some other books on the sex question. I send you the last two numbers of *Lucifer*—the only periodical devoted to this immensely important subject.

⁷¹Forster, *Sex Radicalism*, pp. 46–47. Forster elsewhere called on lovers to become "sexual artists" ("Sex Domination," *Lucifer*, May 7, 1903, pp. 129–30).

⁷²Forster's work was both applauded and attacked by libertarians. See Lizzie Holmes to Dora Forster, *Lucifer*, April 27, 1905, p. 299; Carrie Austin to Dora Forster, *ibid.*, July 2, 1903, pp. 193–94.

⁷³Harman survived to publish the *American Journal of Eugenics* (1907–10); see Sears (n. 24 above), p. 264.

⁷⁴Phoenix was an active center of the Socialist party of Canada. On the radicalism in the Kootenay region of British Columbia, see Ronald Grantham, "Some Aspects of the Socialist Movement in British Columbia, 1898–1933" (M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1942); Paul A. Phillips, *No Power Greater: A Century of Labour in British Columbia* (Vancouver, 1967); Ross Alfred Johnson, "No Compromise—No Political Trading: The Marxian Socialist Tradition in British Columbia" (Ph.D. diss., University of British Columbia, 1975); Cole Harris, "Industry and the Good Life around Idaho Peak," *Canadian Historical Review* 66 (1985): 315–44.

⁷⁵"We Women," *Western Socialist*, November 8, 1902, p. 3.

I would especially recommend the following all mentioned in Lucifer's advertisements.

1. Women in the Past, Present and Future by August Bebel, leader of the German Socialist Party.
2. "What the Young Need to Know," by Edwin C. Walker.
3. The British Barbarians, by Grant Allen.
4. Motherhood in Freedom, by Moses Harman.
5. Origins of the Family, by Frederick [*sic*] Engels, one of the founders of scientific socialism.

It is to be regretted that American socialists shirk this subject, which has been frankly and so well dealt with by European socialist leaders—such as Marx, Engels, Bebel, Carpenter, Grant Allen and Bernard Shaw. In America nearly all the advanced thinkers on the sex question have been driven into the anarchist movement.⁷⁶

Kerr similarly attempted to convince the readers of the *Western Clarion* of the need to include a discussion of sexuality in the socialist program.

My information has been gained chiefly from talking to wage earners so my ideas are very practical. I have especially talked to women wage earners who are even more practical than men, and differ surprisingly from male wage earners in their ideas of what things are wrong. As nearly all American and Canadian socialists have confined themselves to preaching to women, it may interest you to hear the experience of one who has spent a good deal of his life learning from women. Such knowledge is very important because women suffrage is a thing of the immediate future, and there is not the ghost of a chance of getting socialism unless men and women alike cordially support the Socialist party.⁷⁷

Kerr then proceeded to give accounts of women who suffered the tyranny of males and the disinterest of socialists. But the fact that Kerr could cite European socialist luminaries such as Karl Kautsky as being sympathetic to women's immediate demands did not impress many Canadian readers. "Stonehenge" wrote in reply that the sex question was so

⁷⁶Dora Forster to Dorothy Drew, *ibid.*, November 29, 1902, p. 3. See also later discussions along similar lines in the *Western Clarion*, August 13, 1904, p. 1; December 14, 1907, p. 2. Mrs. Dora Kerr was reported as having been nominated, though not elected, to the 1903 provincial executive committee of the Socialist party of Canada. See *Western Socialist*, November 15, 1902, p. 4; November 22, 1902, p. 4; January 17, 1903, p. 4.

⁷⁷*Western Clarion*, October 13, 1906, p. 2. Kerr was also aroused by the misogyny of E. Belfort Bax to write to *Justice*, the organ of the Social Democratic Federation, to protest that it was ignoring the International's own policy on the woman question, in particular the support of the endowment of motherhood; see *Justice*, December 29, 1906.

complicated that it could only be broached after economic inequalities had been dealt with.⁷⁸

In addition to contributing to the British Columbia socialist press, Kerr and Forster also sent letters to *Cotton's Weekly*, a socialist paper published in Quebec's eastern townships by William Ulric Cotton. In 1908 and 1909 his sister, Mary Cotton Wisdom, editor of the women's page, defended the suffragist movement and castigated the sexual double standard.⁷⁹ Kerr confined his contributions to *Cotton's Weekly* to comments on the British scene; Forster continued to hammer away at the necessity of socialism explicitly speaking to the needs of women, as argued by the Webbs, Wells, and Gilman: "No woman," asserted Forster, "who is mentally worth anything will support a socialism which aims at securing systematized work and livelihood for men while leaving women in their present position of political and social slavery."⁸⁰

When the Political Equality League was formed in British Columbia just prior to the First World War to campaign for women's suffrage, Kerr and Forster threw themselves into the movement.⁸¹ Both spoke on behalf of the league, and Forster became its Kelowna organizer. At this level of political involvement they chose to cloak their socialist and neo-Malthusian interests. Eugenic concerns, however, received a good deal of attention in the mouthpiece of the league, the *Champion*. It advertised Frances Swiney's *The Responsibilities of Fatherhood*, reprinted Florence Woolston's "The Eugenics of Suffrage," applauded American laws on the "sterilization of degenerates," and insisted on feminists' concern for "racial progress." British Columbia suffragists wanted the vote, declared the *Champion*, "because they believe that a greater development of mind and heart will make them better fitted for the responsibilities of

⁷⁸*Western Clarion*, October 13, 1906, p. 2. See Karl Kautsky, *Vermehrung und Entwicklung in Natur und Gesellschaft* (Stuttgart, 1910), pp. 243-52; and on the United States, see also Mari-Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism, 1870-1920* (Urbana, IL, 1981); Bruce Dancis, "Socialism and Women in the United States, 1900-1920," *Socialist Revolution* 27 (1976): 122-23.

⁷⁹Janice Newton, "Women and *Cotton's Weekly*: A Study of Women and Socialism in Canada, 1901," *Resources for Feminist Research* (Fall 1980), pp. 58-60. I owe special thanks to Janice Newton who, in the course of her own research, uncovered information on Forster and Kerr, which she generously shared with me.

⁸⁰*Cotton's Weekly*, December 30, 1909, p. 2; February 17, 1910, p. 2; March 11, 1909, p. 7; April 15, 1900, p. 7; April 22, 1909, p. 7; May 27, 1909, p. 7; and see also Janice Newton, "From Wage Slave to White Slave: The Prostitution Controversy and the Early Canadian Left," in Linda Kealey and Joan Sangster, eds., *Beyond the Vote: Canadian Women and Politics* (Toronto, 1989), pp. 217-36.

⁸¹See *Kelowna Daily Courier*, October 10, 1912, pp. 1, 6; October 17, 1912, p. 3; and *Champion*, August 1912, p. 14; November 1912, p. 12; January 1913, p. 7; May 1913, p. 6.

motherhood.”⁸² The suffragists expressed enough of a concern for the issue of breeding to draw the support of Kerr and Forster. The eugenic preoccupations of the Canadian feminists, however, tended to be aimed at securing a more disciplined, orderly society, not the libertarian utopia envisioned by the contributors of *Lucifer*.⁸³

With the disappearance of *Lucifer*, Kerr also began to send letters and articles on the sex issue to the *Malthusian*, published in London, England. This journal, thought to be the first in the English-speaking world to defend consistently the morality of family limitation, was far less liberal than *Lucifer*. As the mouthpiece of the Malthusian League, it argued ad nauseam that only by a restriction of fertility could the working class improve its standard of living. A defender of socialism, free love, and eugenics, Kerr was very much in a minority position, but he persisted in his attempts to enlighten his fellow contributors.

His first goal was to soften the harshly deterministic line of the league. Family restriction would only be acceptable, he argued, if it were discussed in personal, not class, terms. “It is useless to tell a man that if he and ten million others will have small families, he will gain something. The thing to do is to show him how he will gain by *having a small family himself*; no matter what the others do.”⁸⁴ He attacked the idea floated in the *Malthusian* that large families be fined; all the state should do is provide sex education and free “preventatives.” “A knowledge of preventatives,” he argued, “is an important part of popular education and should be furnished by the state.”⁸⁵ Once individuals had the knowledge—and even the Malthusian League, for all its abstract discussion of neo-Malthusianism, did not give practical advice on contraception until 1913—it was up to them how they used it.

Kerr’s second goal was to maintain the links between fertility restriction and the radical counterculture in which it found its most outspoken defenders. Neo-Malthusians, he protested, in their eagerness to win respectability were hastily turning their backs on the spokespersons of such embarrassing causes as free love, socialism, and libertarian eugenics.⁸⁶ To make it clear that he had not given up the role of social critic,

⁸²*Champion*, August 1912, p. 13; November 1912, p. 6; January 1914, pp. 11–12; February 1914, p. 16; September 1913, p. 7. See also Carol Bacchi, “Race Regeneration and Social Purity: A Study of the Social Attitudes of Canada’s English-Speaking Suffragettes,” *Histoire sociale/Social History* 11 (1978): 460–73.

⁸³For attacks on the state of Washington’s sterilization law, see *Agitator*, October 1, 1912, p. 1.

⁸⁴*Malthusian*, September 1906, p. 65.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, October 1907, pp. 74–75.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, December 1908, p. 95; June 1917, p. 45; December 1917, pp. 98–99. On attacks on Kerr for his defense of free love, see *ibid.*, January 1909, p. 6.

Kerr defended these movements while attacking the puritan police state of America for its persecution of Margaret Sanger and castigating English racism and "all the superstitions of an imperial and patriotic nature."⁸⁷

Kerr's writings were presumably accepted by the editors of the *Malthusian* because he did fulfill one valuable function—that of an expert reporter on conditions in the overseas empire. With his account of the hard times that Canada was enduring, they could shore up the Malthusian argument that immigration offered no escape from the inevitable population problem; restriction of fertility was as necessary on the North American plains as in the slums of Newcastle.⁸⁸ The Malthusian League was also becoming aware by the end of the First World War of how little impact it was having on English society. To take advantage of the postwar interest in birth control, a more flexible approach was required. As a result the dour *Malthusian* was ended by the Drysdale family in 1922, and *New Generation* was established as the voice of neo-Malthusianism. Kerr, who with Forster returned to England the same year, became the journal's editor in 1923; he only relinquished its direction a short time before his death in 1951.⁸⁹

It is possible to interpret Kerr and Forster's leaving Canada as an indication that the country simply was not receptive to their mix of socialist and eugenic ideas. They certainly were not "typical" Canadian radicals, but one could just as easily say that Moses Harman was not a typical American or Havelock Ellis a typical Englishman. Obviously Kerr and Forster were so atypical that they only found friendly responses to their proposals in that small, cosmopolitan coterie of sex radicals scattered throughout the world.⁹⁰

But though they felt isolated in Canada, they were not entirely alone in believing that aspects of sex radicalism could be incorporated in a socialist program. Echoes of such concerns were intermittently sounded in the left-wing press. During the First World War, the B.C.

⁸⁷Ibid., April 1915, p. 29; July 1912, p. 51.

⁸⁸Ibid., August 1910, p. 67; December 1910, pp. 103–4; May 1914, p. 39; June 1915, p. 44; September 1915, p. 72.

⁸⁹*New Generation*, February 1923, p. 1; May–June 1951, pp. 4–5. On Kerr's later views, see his *Our Prophets* (Croyden, 1932); *Is Britain Over Populated?* (Croyden, 1927); "The Sexual Rights of Spinsters," in *World League for Sexual Reform: Proceedings of the Third Congress, London 1929* (London, 1930), pp. 91–94.

⁹⁰See Leslie Fishbein, *Rebels in Bohemia: The Radicals of the Masses, 1911–1917* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1982); Judith R. Walkowitz, "Science, Feminism, and Romance: The Men and Women's Club, 1885–1889," *History Workshop* 21 (1986): 37–59; Lucy Bland, "Marriage Laid Bare: Middle-Class Women and Marital Sex c. 1880–1914," in Jane Lewis, ed., *Labour and Love: Women's Experiences of Home and Family, 1850–1940* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 123–46.

Federationist carried letters from readers calling for “eugenic babies” rather than sickly ones and reported J. S. Woodsworth’s support of sex education and companionate marriage. Ada Muir wrote in the *Voice* of her admiration for Lillian Harman, while Florence Rowe provided the *One Big Union Bulletin* with articles on “Better and Fewer Babies.” Violet McNaughton’s opening of her column in the *Western Producer* in 1927 to the discussion of family limitation elicited a flurry of letters from prairie progressives interested in eugenics. “I hold,” wrote Carl Axelson of Bingville, Alberta, “that it is essential for every person to study physiology to the extent of securing correct knowledge of our bodies and the relation and interdependence of sex and especially information regarding reproduction.” Another writer upbraided those who were fearful that “the effort to improve the human family by using more commonsense and knowledge in the choosing of a life-mate would eliminate sentiment and love.” Sophia H. Dixon of Unity, Saskatchewan, a future founder of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, cited Russia as an example of a society in which such improvements of the race were being pursued.⁹¹

What all these individuals imagined was a better, future world in which a rational, scientific, but noncoercive approach would be taken to the sex question. Access to sex education, contraceptives, divorce, and the endowment of motherhood would, they hoped, free women from the trap of loveless marriages and mindless breeding. The evils spawned by the Victorian marriage system—illegitimacy, prostitution, venereal disease—would disappear. The sex radicals’ understanding of the laws of heredity were slim, to say the least. But their better-qualified opponents who supported conservative Galtonian eugenics would turn their “science” to even more transparently self-serving purposes.⁹²

⁹¹B.C. *Federationist*, February 6, 1914, p. 5; March 21, 1919, p. 3; *The Voice*, May 12, 1911, p. 3; *One Big Union Bulletin*, November 6, 1924, p. 2; *Western Producer*, January 6, 1927, p. 12; February 10, 1927, p. 12; March 3, 1927, p. 12. Further letters on the subject ran through November 1927. For the personal journal of a Canadian woman drawn during the years 1906–19 to the ideas of Edward Carpenter, Emma Goldman, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, see Alice A. Chown, *The Stairway* (1921; rpt. Toronto, 1988).

⁹²On the continuing interest of the British Left in eugenics, see Michael Freedon, “Eugenics and Progressive Thought: A Study in Ideological Affinity,” *Historical Journal* 22 (1979): 645–71; Greta Jones, “Eugenics and Social Policy between the Wars,” *History Journal* 25 (1982): 717–28; Diane Paul, “Eugenics and the Left,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 45 (1984): 567–90; Richard A. Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration: Eugenics and the Declining Birth Rate in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1990), pp. 199–202. On Canada see Angus McLaren, *Our Own Master Race: Eugenics in Canada, 1885–1945* (Toronto, 1990).