Abortion Act became law not because of their effectiveness as demographic tools but because their sponsors were able to present them, as indeed they are, as measures designed to improve the quality of family life.

The development of new methods of contraception, such as the "morning-after" pill or a pill for men, may indeed provide a fillip to family planning programmes in various areas of the world. But it would be perilous to suppose that these or any other advances can provide a scientific solution to what is essentially a sociological and political problem. The International Federation for Planned Parenthood has every right to take pride in the growing number of countries that support or permit family planning activities. The fact remains that no government yet has a programme to reduce the desired family size. Nor, even if family planning programmes were fully successful in their objectives, is there any guarantee that the volitional behaviour of individual families would lead to a containment of the population explosion. It is naive to hope that individuals can be induced to regulate their family size in the best interests of society by persuasion alone, not by legislation. The seasonal fluctuations in the English birthrate are a vivid reminder that in these matters, at least, people are a law unto themselves and will remain so until otherwise instructed.

Progress at Geneva

Last week's news that, almost at the last minute, the Russian delegation at the Geneva disarmament conference has accepted the principle of a limited ban on the deployment of arms on the sea bed is an encouraging sign that the two superpowers mean business. It is a significant step towards the stabilization of the balance of power and should nip in the bud another potential arms race. Last March, the two superpowers seemed to have reached a position of deadlock. At that time, the Soviet Union tabled the draft of a treaty calling for the complete demilitarization of the sea bed, and the United States replied with its treaty which would rule out the deployment under the sea of fixed nuclear weapons and other fixed weapons of mass destruction—the current euphemism for chemical and biological weapons. It seemed likely that the conference, which was to have adjourned on August 28, would be going empty handed to the autumn session of the United Nations General Assembly. Now, however, as a result of the considerable Russian concession, the session of the Geneva conference is likely to continue at least until mid-September. In the next three or four weeks the United States and the Soviet Union must hammer out a mutually acceptable draft treaty to take to New York. There remain, of course, considerable differences separating the two sides, including details of verification and the size of territorial limits. The United States has all along been arguing for a three mile territorial limit which would be excluded from the ban, while the Russians have been arguing for a twelve mile limit. But these details are unlikely to prove insuperable obstacles now that the two sides are agreed in principle. Having won a major concession from the Russians, the United States may well be willing and would certainly be well advised to concede a 12 mile limit if that becomes the chief point at issue.

It remains to be seen whether the Russian concession and a limited sea bed treaty signal a general change in attitude, perhaps leading, as many commentators hope, to the start of the delayed Russo-American bilateral talks on strategic arms limitations. But the important stabilizing effect of a treaty which prohibits deployment below the sea of fixed nuclear weapons while at the same time legalizing deployment of submarine detecting devices should not be minimized. The original Russian position, a total ban on nuclear and conventional weapons, was not only unrealistic but dangerous. Such a ban would be impossible to enforce and would be dangerous for the simple reason that prohibiting deployment of detection devices would lead to a situation in which an unscrupulous transgressor could at any time deploy submarines carrying nuclear weapons within a few miles of a potential enemy's coast with no fear of detection. Nothing could be more guaranteed to increase tension and make the military on all sides trigger happy.

A limited treaty, on the other hand, which accepts that the superpowers will not be content to manoeuvre their nuclear submarine within a three or twelve mile territorial limit, throws all the emphasis on development of more extensive and more effective submarine detection systems. Once the treaty is in force the Russian and United States navies will no doubt quietly step up their cable laying activities and once both sides feel sure that they know the whereabouts of each other's submarines, the tensions induced by uncertainty should inevitably be reduced. Indeed, there is a strong case for arguing that the United Nations should take an active part in the development of detection systems. It could, for example, convene technical conferences and study groups to evaluate detection systems in much the same way that SIPRI evaluated seismic methods for monitoring underground explosions.

PHARMACEUTICALS

There is a Gap

The fourth in the OECD's remorselessly thorough series of reports on technology gaps between the organization's members—in effect reports on the disparities between the United States and the rest—deals with the pharmaceutical industry (*Gaps in Technology—Pharmaceuticals*, OECD, Paris, 21*s*). The report makes no secret of the problems of defining meaningful

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