

Norman Haire(1892-1952)

Norman Haire was a physician who advocated for eugenics, which is the betterment of human population by promoting positive traits, and birth control rights in the twentieth century in both Australia and the UK. In the UK, Haire joined the Malthusian League, a contraception advocacy organization, and helped the League open the first physician-supervised birth control clinic, called Walworth Women's Welfare Centre in London, England. Throughout his life, Haire worked closely with other well-known contraception and women's rights advocates in the early 1900s including Margaret Sanger, Marie Stopes, and Havelock Ellis. Haire was also known for his work on sexual rejuvenation, an early twentieth century theory that the male sexual appetite could be restored through vasectomies and hormonal injections. Haire advocated for birth control rights through his practice, conference lectures, radio debates, and published work. His activism in the fields of eugenics, contraception, and sexual reform promoted the emergence of more liberal attitudes towards sex and controlled reproduction and in the twentieth century.

Haire was born as Norman Zions on 21 January 1892 in Sydney, Australia, to Clara Cohen and Henry Zions. Haire was their eleventh and final child. His father was a Jewish immigrant from Poland who changed his surname from Zajac, the Polish word for hare, to Zions. Haire's mother frequently sent him to the pharmacy to purchase purgative pills, which were advertised as a way to prevent pregnancies at the time. In 1907 Haire began attending Fort Street Model School in Sydney, Australia, on scholarship, and succeeded academically while also participating in acting and debate club.

Throughout his youth, Haire performed in many arts festivals and theater shows. In his adolescence, Haire recalled coming across Havelock Ellis' *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, a book that addresses issues like homosexuality and transgender feelings as well as descriptions of sex as natural and healthy rather than something shameful. According to historian Diana Wyndham, Ellis' writing was Haire's first exposure to the field of sexual study. The subject became one of his two career ambitions, in addition to acting. However, according to Wyndham, Haire chose to study medicine in order to appease his parents, though he continued to perform in local theater productions while in medical school.

In 1915 Haire graduated with a degree in medicine from the University of Sydney in Sydney, Australia. After graduation, Haire joined the Australian Army Medical Corps with the rank of captain. For four years, he worked part-time at the Military Hospital in Randwick, Australia, in addition to holding other medical positions at various hospitals during the war, including the Hospital for Sick Children in Brisbane, Australia, in 1915, and the Royal Hospital for Women in Paddington, Australia, in 1917.

In 1917 Haire also began working at Newcastle Hospital, later known as Royal Newcastle Hospital, in the port city of Newcastle, Australia. The hospital was disorganized and unsanitary, as many port cities were in the early 1900s. Haire's changes to the hospital's organization and focus on improving sanitation and cleanliness led the hospital board to promote Haire to medical superintendent. However, the hospital was unprepared for an influenza outbreak that came to Australia as a result of the 1918 influenza pandemic. As a port city, Newcastle received individuals with influenza, which subsequently spread to the surrounding areas. As the medical administrator, the hospital board, health officials, and townspeople blamed Haire for the outbreak, though many historians argue that he was innocent. Regardless, Haire left Australia for the UK on the SS *Lucie Woermann* in 1919.

Upon arriving in England, Haire changed his surname from Zions, the Polish word for hare, to Haire, both as an acknowledgement to his father's lineage and also to remove any German similarities in

a post-World War I Europe. In his first year there, Haire worked as a house surgeon at Hampstead General and North West London Hospital in London, England. He met Havelock Ellis, the psychologist and author of *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, who mentored Haire in his interests in birth control education and the study of human sexuality. Haire also traveled to Berlin, Germany, to work with Magnus Hirschfeld, a German physician and director at the Institut für Sexualwissenschaft in Berlin, Germany. After his time in Germany, Haire translated several German publications on the study of human sexuality into English.

Later in 1920, Haire attended his first meeting of the Malthusian League, a British organization connected to Havelock Ellis and fellow women's right's activist Margaret Sanger. The League promoted birth control and family planning based on the population principles of economist Thomas Malthus, who theorized that the world's population would increase exponentially, outgrow the available resources, and leave citizens in poverty. The Malthusian League viewed birth control as a means to limit population and prevent Malthus's predicted outcome.

In 1921 the Malthusian League established its first birth control clinic, Walworth Women's Welfare Centre, naming Haire as the medical officer in charge. The League claimed that the Walworth Women's Welfare Centre was the first birth control clinic in England under medical supervision. Marie Stopes, a fellow birth control advocate, opened the first birth control clinic just months earlier. However, primarily midwives ran the clinic, a distinction important to the Malthusian League. Haire began working part-time at the Walworth Women's Welfare Centre, and part-time at the women's department of the London Lock Hospital in London, England.

According to Wyndham, the early 1920s was a productive period that resulted in Haire's great medical fame and successful private practice in Britain. In addition to his work with the Malthusian League, he began studying sexual rehabilitation after coming across physician Eden Paul's paper "Steinach's Rejuvenation Experiments." Eugen Steinach, an Austrian physician who studied animal hormones in the early twentieth century, theorized that certain testicular surgical procedures would induce hormone production in men, and increase sexual drive and feelings of youth. After further study of the theory of sexual rejuvenation through vasectomies, Haire performed his first rejuvenation surgery in March of 1922. Haire also injected patients with testicular extracts to help sexually rejuvenate individuals, deriving the technique from studies of testosterone as a way to stimulate sexual life. Haire later acknowledged that the injections were not only useless, but possibly also harmful. Haire was one of the first of the medical community to try to influence the sexual life of patients, and according to historian Frank Forster, became well known in Britain for his work in the field of sexual study.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Haire continued advocating for birth control education, liberal attitudes towards sex, and eugenics. Proponents of the early twentieth century eugenics movement argued that interventions should be used to improve or preserve the genetic quality of a population. The ideas stemmed from the scientific understanding of heredity and how traits are passed down from parent to offspring. According to those theories, a population could limit or eliminate certain traits by providing contraception to women, specifically impoverished women. By the 1920s, sterilization of unfit individuals, including the mentally ill, became the most widely accepted method of limiting the inheritance of supposedly negative traits. According to historian Wyndham, Haire supported the practice of eugenics because it would reduce abnormalities within the population, and supported the sterilization of individuals both unfit or unwilling to raise families.

Haire also attended and lectured at international conferences in Europe, the United States, and Canada in the 1920s and 1930s. He attended the sixth International Birth Control Conference in New York City, New York, and returned again to lecture at the Symposium on the Methods of Birth Control in New York City in 1934, for which contraception activist Margaret Sanger thanked him immensely. Haire was involved with the International Medical Group for Investigation of Birth Control, the Eugenics Education Society, and the British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology. In addition to maintaining leadership positions in the World League for Sexual Reform and the Sex Education Society, Haire authored, co-authored, and edited several books on human sexuality and contributed to local journals and newspapers.

In the late 1930s, because of the Nazi party's sterilization program, the British government strongly

opposed sterilization and warned doctors who performed sterilization procedures that they could face prosecution. Haire, who was a Jew, a member of the Eugenics society, and an advocate for sterilization, found himself in the midst of political instability. Haire returned to Australia in 1940 to escape rising political tensions in Europe and also for his failing health, due to a recent diabetes diagnosis.

In Australia, Haire continued to lecture on birth control education for the Workers Educational Association and the New Education Fellowship. According to historian Forster, he acted in a well-acclaimed play, *The Doctor's Dilemma*, produced by the Sydney University Dramatic Society in Sydney, Australia. He also continued to advocate for freer attitudes towards sex by writing a series of educational articles on sex, pregnancy, childbirth, gynecological disorders and venereal diseases under the name Wykeham Terriss. The articles, which were criticized for topics that were considered improper at the time, were later published in a book, *Sex Talks* (1946). In August 1944, Haire appeared on the Australian Broadcasting Commission's radio debate "Population Unlimited." During the debate, he commented on the harm of large families and the church's beliefs about birth control. Haire's comments towards the church and the government caused tensions between him and the Australian House of Representatives, and Haire returned to England in 1946. He died unmarried in 1952 in London from cardiac failure.

Sources

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