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Letter From New Zealand

The year has been dominated not by medical advances but by the economic situation. A catastrophic fall in wool prices has demonstrated the vulnerability of our pastoral economy, which is based mainly on meat, butter and wool. Britain's devaluation of sterling precipitated the recognition of what was already a fact of life, and our own currency was devalued by 20%. The U.S. dollar which was previously worth 74¢ N.Z. now buys 88¢.

Our colleagues from the U.S.A. (*pace* President Johnson) should consider a visit to this beautiful country. Fares have never been so cheap. They can be assured of a welcome from this friendly people. In spite of financial setbacks the country will soon demonstrate its resilience because the average New Zealander, if freed from governmental theories, is industrious, reliable and well-educated.

The folly of many socialist policies has been revealed. After twenty good trading years since the end of the war we have virtually no savings on which to fall back. Many extravagant schemes are being trimmed. Cheap State housing and loans are being restricted to those in genuine need. Grandiose health and social security schemes will have to be rationalised. Although the population is less than 3 millions the free pharmaceutical expenditure has been astronomical. For example, the two most popular tranquillisers last year cost public funds \$US2,265,000. A recent suicide had in her bedroom a total of 1,873 pills, mostly barbiturates and tranquillisers, all provided free by the health service.

All round the world primary producing countries are in economic difficulties, which suggests that other

countries do not want our produce because they are becoming agriculturally self-sufficient. India is always quoted as a country which cannot afford to buy, but at least the expectation of life there has doubled in the past 20 years, from which we can infer that the nation is better fed than it was a generation ago. The food shortage on which population fears are based may not actually be so serious.

In the public health field the universal sex obsession has been reflected in a marked increase in venereal disease, and illegitimate pregnancies have risen to a new record, almost 13% of all live births. Adoption agencies can hardly cope with the business. The question of legalized abortion crops up repeatedly in the press, especially since the British Parliament gave it the green light, and in the future one can predict an active campaign for similar legislation here.

Your correspondent has submitted an article on "Therapeutic Abortion in New Zealand" to the *N.Z. Med. J.*, and hopes to have it published soon. The figures from the main obstetric teaching hospital show that the incidence has trebled in the past 5 years, the main indication being psychiatric disease, which accords with clinical experience all over the world. Catholic doctors have a duty to speak out strongly about this evil as often as they can, but they must back up their opinions with cool scientific reasoning, and meet the current hysteria with urbanity and Christian charity.

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