20 September, 1929.

Dr C.V. Drysdale,
29 Queens Road,
Richmond Hill,
Surrey.

Dear Dr Drysdale,

It is good of you to offer to let the statement go forward to the President, but I was disappointed to gather that you are not really satisfied with it. It seems to me that we ought not to put before the Council any statement which we are not prepared to support at least as a compromise, and I should much rather it were not a compromise but a statement we could both support on its merits.

As I read it the phrase "more prosperous classes" avoids the odium economicum better than "the more capable section" for our data consist of occupational groups which we certainly graded in respect of prosperity, though it is arguable, I think superfluously, that they are graded in innate superiority.

The French birth-rate is now higher than ours, both when corrected and when uncorrected for the ages
of adults. I am not very clear about Malthusian economic doctrine, but I cannot see how, if I understand the neo-malthusian aright, their prosperity can be ascribed to their supporting more children. After all the burden of children though intensely important to individuals is less than a tenth of the total wage bill, so that very large variations (say 20 per cent.) in the number of children supported make very small differences to the national standard of living. The contrast between France and England must be due to a much larger factor than the difference in the number of children supported, even if this were in the right direction.

Towards the end of your letter you speak as though there were a single moral or economic doctrine (neo-malthusian) against which I have a "conviction that it must lead to evil consequences". As far as I can see there are some dozens of arguments, some true and some false, connected with the term. The point of view that contraceptive appliances have done away with the need for sexual morality (given to women at least the ownership of their persons) is I suppose, not neo-malthusian, but would be rejected by you, as well as by me, like any other lewd folly. The point of view that everyone
has the right to utilise whatever powers new knowledge puts in his hands, in whatever way seems to him best is a moral truism. There seems little room for disagreement on any abstract principle. What causes confusion is to tie up a block of assumptions, true and false, and regard the questioning of any one of them as an attack on an imaginary entity called neo-malthusianism. You recognise as well as I do that the actual effect of increasing birth control has been eugenically disastrous, and I as well as you that this is not the fault of advocates of contraception, who have on the contrary performed a first class public service, in bringing the subject out into the open, where its merits and demerits can be publicly discussed, instead of allowing it to be merely a dirty trick by which the more selfish type of citizen can escape one of the natural burdens of citizenship. This is a great service, but of course it does not entitle malthusians to claim a favourable verdict. The fact is no one can say what verdict they are asking for, it can scarcely be that births ought to be reduced without limit, yet some of your friends seem to have no idea that it is possible to go too far. On purely economic grounds I think we have gone too far already, though that seems to me a matter for purely rational discussion, not for
one of our heated pro and anti wrangles.

The point which I am surprised you do not see is that, apart from its eugenic effect, properly speaking, unregulated birth-control is rapidly destroying those who are least prejudiced against it. Future generations are being, and will be increasingly recruited from those who have religious convictions or temperamental reactions which make contraception hateful to them. Exactly as violent religious reactions to abortion occurred in the highly rational Roman world. This cost Rome her intellectual freedom and her philosophy, yet though its action is plain enough, you would be among the last to wish to destroy the rational spirit in our own civilisation. What could you do more effectively to ensure the triumph of the prejudiced, superstitious, and spiritually unfree than to give them a monopoly of reproduction?

You say "no one will be more ready than I to acknowledge any flaws in the Birth Control argument". I am sure you mean this, but of course it cannot be true. You have been advocating the increased use of and the righteousness of the use of birth control most of your life, and worst of all have been regarding it as a cause, and not as necessarily having both good and bad aspects. I should like to see how true you could make it.

Yours sincerely,