

# 'The need is ever present': The Motherhood of Man Movement and Stranger Adoption in New Zealand

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THE LAW and practice of adoption are areas of social policy upon which New Zealand has from time to time publicly prided itself. Since the Second World War, the term 'adoption' has commonly been understood in a restricted sense, as referring to the adoption of very young children, usually born to single women, by adults unrelated to them. This type of adoption, known as 'stranger' adoption, is the focus of this paper.

In terms of the Pakeha legal system, adoption has been possible since 1881, when New Zealand became the first country in the British Empire to pass an Adoption Act.<sup>1</sup> But of the almost 103,000 adoption orders made between 1881 and 1980, only 16,222 took place before 1944, the year of the first sudden surge in numbers; annual totals continued to increase from then until 1972.<sup>2</sup> This paper looks at one Auckland organization closely concerned with stranger adoption, the Motherhood of Man Movement. It was the principal private, non-denominational agency offering assistance to unmarried mothers and placing children for adoption in Auckland after the Second World War. Its history, from its founding in 1942 to its ceasing active operations in 1978, illustrates some major themes in the post-war development and decline of stranger adoption in New Zealand.<sup>3</sup>

First, attitudes toward single pregnant women shifted and changed, together with the way they were treated, as adoptions increased. In the 1940s and 1950s some older institutions, mainly run by churches, persisted in regarding the single mother as a 'fallen woman'. Their régime still required her to work hard before and after the birth, and to care for her child, at least for a time, in the interests of her moral welfare.<sup>4</sup> New non-denominational agencies such as the Motherhood

1 The Adoption of Children Act, 1881, *New Zealand Statutes*, 1881, 45 Vict., No.9.

2 See K.C. Griffith, *Adoption — Procedure, Documentation, Statistics, New Zealand 1881–1981*, Wellington, 1981, pp.A1-A16.

3 Apart from the confidential adoption records, which are lodged with the Department of Social Welfare, Auckland, the official records and sundry other papers forming the Motherhood of Man Movement archives (MOMMA) are available in the Auckland Institute and Museum. When I saw them in July 1988, they were roughly grouped by year or decade, but had not been sorted or catalogued.

4 See Margaret Tennant, 'Maternity and Morality: Homes for Single Mothers, 1890–1930', *Women's Studies Journal*, II, 1 (1985), pp.28–45.

of Man were much less interested in moral condemnation. They focused on the baby; in their view, placing it in a home where it was wanted not only solved the mother's problem, but also met the needs of a childless couple. They quickly came to see adoption as best for everyone concerned, and operated on that assumption.

In order for adoption to be widely accepted by prospective parents and the public in general, single mothers had to be presented, and treated, as nice but foolish girls who had merely slipped, rather than as fallen women. However, this worked two ways: maintaining one's status as a nice girl depended on agreeing to adoption and never seeing the child again.

Secondly, the law not only took shape in reaction to the way adoption was seen and practised, but in turn influenced its development. Although the major Adoption Act of 1955 imposed some much-needed controls on the activities of charitable organizations such as the Motherhood of Man, it was broadly in line with their views; it encouraged their activities and reinforced the attitudes behind them. By concentrating on how the child's status was to be changed, rather than whether or why, the new Act strengthened the idea that what mattered was the rapid conversion of an 'abnormal' situation into a 'normal' one by the legal fiction of adoption. Provided that all the correct legal steps were taken, no further action or follow-up was necessary.<sup>5</sup>

A third theme is the way in which 'market forces' have, inevitably, had an impact on adoption. The involvement of the law, the adoption agencies, and the Child Welfare Division of the Department of Education developed when the 'supply' of babies available for adoption was too small to meet the 'demand' from would-be adoptive parents, and there was a waiting-list. By the mid-1960s, although numbers of adoption orders continued to increase annually, it was the babies who waited. Would-be adoptive parents were eagerly welcomed and could, to some extent, specify the sort of the child they wanted. A 'grading' system quickly emerged, according to the child's sex, health, race, religious affiliation, and (to a lesser extent) family background. The most easily placed babies, perfect Pakeha girls, rose to the top of the list, and boys who were disabled and/or of mixed race sank to the bottom.<sup>6</sup>

Adoption was, by then, firmly established in the minds of both the public and those responsible for social policy as the ideal way of providing for ex-nuptial children. It also had the great merit of costing the state very little. The need for a form of state assistance that would allow single mothers to bring up their children themselves was slow to be admitted. But the overflowing nurseries could not be ignored, and were a factor in the Domestic Purposes Benefit being made statutory from 1973.<sup>7</sup>

5 *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates* (NZPD), 1955, 307, pp.3346-59.

6 *Evening Post* (EP), 17 August 1948, 9 May 1958; *New Zealand Free Lance*, 10 October 1958; EP, 18 August 1964, 10 May 1965, 22 October 1965, 22 January 1966; *Weekly News*, 16 September 1964.

7 Report of the Sub-Committee on the Unmarried Mother and Her Child, Presbyterian Church of New Zealand Assembly Social Service Committee, May 1967, MOMMA, Auckland Institute and Museum; EP, 20 January 1967, 22 April 1968.

This leads into the fourth theme: the complex circumstances which induced so many single women to make their children available for adoption in the 1950s and 1960s — and why most had ceased to do so by the end of the 1970s. The sheer difficulty of supporting both themselves and their children was the major reason why women agreed to adoption, but it was not the only one. Single pregnant women were a highly vulnerable group; once they left home and sought help from one of the charitable organizations, they were often cut off from other sources of support and surrounded by a climate of unquestioning approval for adoption that was difficult to resist. Adoption was, at times, openly advocated and, in some cases, agreeing to give up the child was made a condition of assistance.

Similarly, the Domestic Purposes Benefit was not solely responsible for the decline in the proportion of ex-nuptial children adopted by strangers, which had already begun when it was introduced. It seems likely that this change came about partly because by the later 1960s it was taking weeks or months, rather than days, to place many children for adoption. Mothers who were aware of possible delays, particularly if their own child was 'undesirable' in some way, might find the powerful argument that adoption was 'in the child's best interests' easier to resist. When a mother did make her baby available, she might have time to make other arrangements — to marry the father, get help from her parents, or manage on her own — before adoptive parents were found.

To come full circle, the change in attitude to single mothers that was a necessary element in the growth of adoption later helped to pave the way for its decline. Single women began to find it a little easier socially to keep their children, and the state eventually agreed that some provision could be made for them without letting loose a flood of immorality.

The total number of adoption orders made each year, seen as a percentage of the total number of live births, gives an overall picture of the prevalence of adoption. Between 1881 and 1943, annual orders climbed slowly from one to around 600. Then, in 1944, adoption orders suddenly increased from 577 to 1313, representing a jump from 1.90% to 3.91% of live births. Apart from a fall in 1956, due to the delay in processing orders that resulted from the coming into force of the 1955 Adoption Act, annual orders from 1945 until 1961 stayed between 2.78% and 3.6% of live births, then jumped again to 4.47% in 1961. From 1962 Maori adoptions were included in the annual totals. The peak year for adoptions as a percentage of live births was 1969, at 6.24%, although total numbers of orders peaked in 1971 at 3976. Over the next ten years there was a steady decline.<sup>8</sup>

The annual statistics do not begin to record the distinction between 'stranger' and 'non-stranger' adoptions until 1955, and even after that are not absolutely reliable in this respect. In 1955, around 67.6% of the 1455 official adoptions were by strangers; in 1965, when total orders were 3088, 70% were by strangers. From then on the percentage of adoptions by strangers declined: by 1971, it was down to 54.7%, and by 1975 to less than half the total (47.6%). By 1979 total adoptions

8 Griffith, p.A11.

had fallen to 2200, and only 38.4% were by strangers.<sup>9</sup>

Throughout the 1940s and early 1950s, until the new Adoption Act was passed in October 1955, adoptions were arranged under the legal provisions found in various Acts and amendments passed since the Infant Act 1908, the last time there had been a consolidation. A number of common practices operated in addition to the legal practices.<sup>10</sup> Only the main features concerning an order for adoption by strangers — which usually involved very young ex-nuptial children — will be discussed here; the complex provisions concerning the Maori and adoption are not included.

Providing that the prospective parents had obtained a foster-parent licence from Child Welfare, they could take the child home before the mother signed consent, then apply for an adoption order. There were few legal restrictions on who could apply. Applicants could be single or married; a married couple could apply jointly, or one spouse could apply with the consent of the other. There was no upper age limit on married couples. The prescribed form included the full names, occupations, and addresses of applicants and birth parents, and full name, sex, date of birth, and status (whether nuptial or ex-nuptial) of the child, whose original birth certificate was also required. The application had to be supported by an affidavit from some reputable and well-known person. By the time the adoption order was made, the child was usually about three months old.

In 1925 the Child Welfare Act had set up the Child Welfare Division of the Department of Education; by 1944, it had become usual for magistrates to seek a report on the applicants and their home from a Child Welfare officer and the police. Before granting an order, magistrates had to be satisfied that the applicants were 'of good repute and a fit and proper person to have the custody' of the child, able to 'bring up, maintain and educate' it, and that the child's 'welfare and interests' would be promoted by the adoption.

The child's living parents normally had to sign the consent to adoption. There was no rule about when they could do this, but consent had to be filed with the application. From 1947, the term 'parents' was deemed not to include the natural father of an illegitimate child, though the Court might require his consent too if it was considered 'expedient'. This was normally done only where the father had both acknowledged the child as his and contributed to its maintenance. It was common practice by 1947 for solicitors to get an affidavit from the birth-mother so as to establish whether the father's consent should also be required. Consents had to be witnessed, usually by a solicitor, magistrate, or court registrar. The consent form then in use included the adoptive parents' names, the child's original name, and the birth-mother's name. However, solicitors usually concealed the adoptive parents' names from the birth-mother when she signed.

The history of changing the child's birth certificate and allowing access to adoption records is long and complex and is not directly relevant here. It is enough to note that by 1944 there were few legally enforceable provisions for

<sup>9</sup> Griffith, pp.A2, A5.

<sup>10</sup> For the legal position prior to 1955, see W. R. Birks, *The Legal Relationship of Parent and Child*, Wellington, 1952, pp.238-65; confirmation of common practices is found in my interviews with former social workers, 1988.

keeping the identities of the adoptive and birth parents secret from each other, or for concealing the child's original or new identity from anyone directly involved.<sup>11</sup>

In 1952 an interdepartmental committee began drawing up recommendations for a comprehensive new piece of legislation; a bill was then drafted and, after considerable amendment, became the Adoption Act 1955. Its major new provisions (apart from those concerning the Maori, who regained the right to adopt Pakeha children) were to do with placing a child in the home of strangers, obtaining an adoption order, getting the mother's consent, and restricting access to records.<sup>12</sup>

Provided that all the legal requirements were met, anyone could (and still can) arrange an adoption; but s.25 forbade any payment to be made in connection with it (though this was amended in 1957), and the Superintendent of Child Welfare had to approve any advertisements. Only married couples could make a joint application; if the applicants were strangers, at least one had to be 21, and at least 21 years older than the child. No upper age limit was set for applicants. Children under 15 could not be placed in the home of strangers 'with a view to adoption' unless Child Welfare had approved the placement, or an interim adoption order had been made. This order gave the applicants custody of the child for up to a year, but at least six months had usually to intervene before the final order was made. During that time the mother remained the child's legal guardian. Child Welfare had to report before the Court could make an interim order, and again before the final order. However, each decision rested with the Courts, and they were not bound to follow Child Welfare's recommendation. The applicants and child attended the closed Court hearing for the interim order.

The Act allowed two forms of consent: one showed the adoptive parents' names as before, the other did not. After 1955 the second form was routinely used. It included a clause allowing the mother to specify the religious denomination in which the child was to be brought up. She could not sign the consent to adoption until the child was at least ten days old, and the adoptive parents' solicitor could no longer witness her signature. Once she signed, as subsequent court cases were to prove, it was extremely difficult for her to withdraw her consent even before the interim order was made, though in some circumstances mothers succeeded in getting an order revoked or discharged.<sup>13</sup> Finally, under s.23 of the Act, adoption records were no longer open to inspection except under very restricted conditions, which were tightened over the next 14 years.<sup>14</sup>

The history of the Motherhood of Man Movement (MOMM) falls into four main periods: from its founding in 1942 by Mrs May Harvey of Parnell to the 1953 crisis in its financial affairs; its reorganization in time to meet the provisions of the Adoption Act 1955, through the relatively smooth-running years from

11 Griffith, pp.41-42.

12 For the legal position post-1955, see I.D. Campbell, *The Law of Adoption in New Zealand*, 2nd ed., Wellington, 1957.

13 See, e.g., the following reported decisions: *A v. T et Ux.* (1964) 11 M.C.D. 258; *A v. B* [1969] NZLR 534; *Re TFM's Application* (1970) 13 M.C.D. 158.

14 Griffith, pp.41-43.

1955 to the early 1960s; its attempts to cope with the problems posed throughout the 1960s by the rapidly growing numbers of babies to be placed for adoption; and the final decline in demand for its services until 1978, when it ceased to provide any services directly, and subsequently became a financial trust making grants to assist other organizations.<sup>15</sup>

An early statement about MOMM's work, probably written in late 1952, claimed that the Movement 'began its activities as a war measure, intended at first to meet the needs purely for that time'. The statement pointed out, however, that 'the need is ever present and continues to grow'.<sup>16</sup> Mrs Harvey, founder of the Movement, believed that the neglect of motherhood was 'a crime against the race', but she advocated 'State aid NOT State interference'.<sup>17</sup> An undated pamphlet about MOMM's work, issued around the end of the war (it refers to 'the new order, from which we are hoping so much'), stated that its first aim was 'to rescue and give kindly help and advice to destitute and lonely girl-mothers, married or unmarried'. The offer of help to all young mothers, rather than to the unmarried only, was unusual: generally it was the absence of a husband that was seen as the overwhelming problem, firmly setting one group of women apart from all others. However, the text of the pamphlet indicated that the Movement focused on the single mother.<sup>18</sup>

Apparently 'duty to her family forced Mrs Harvey to give up active work for the society in 1945', but she did not resign as President until September 1950.<sup>19</sup> By 1953 MOMM was running a complex organization, providing care for single pregnant women, adoption placement, and a day nursery.

The nursery was opened in 1946, with the backing of Dove-Myer Robinson (who gave mothers employment in his Childswear factory); by the end of 1952 it had dealt with 56,000 daily attendances. Lest anyone should think it was encouraging mothers in general to go out to work and neglect their families, MOMM was quick to assure the public that the nursery's sole purpose was 'aiding those Mothers who MUST work and who do so to raise their living standards to a decent and worthy level'.<sup>20</sup> Public disapproval of 'working mothers', married or single, was strong and widespread, but the existence of the nursery was in line with Mrs Harvey's original concept of assisting any mother who needed help. It is a rare example of practical assistance being made available so that unsupported mothers, in the years before the Domestic Purposes Benefit, could take a job other than a live-in housekeeping position.

But the Movement was best known for its assistance to single pregnant women, and there was no shortage of clients. Unmarried women who became pregnant tended to move away from their usual homes: some would go as soon as the pregnancy was confirmed, others before they started to 'show'. The

15 *Auckland Star*, 28 February 1965; *Dominion*, 14 April 1988.

16 Four-page typescript on Movement letterhead [1952], MOMMA.

17 Statement signed by May Harvey, 1945, MOMMA.

18 'The Motherhood of Man Movement', printed pamphlet, [1945?], MOMMA.

19 *Auckland Star*, 28 February 1965; executive meeting minutes, 3 September 1950, MOMMA.

20 One-page typed statement on MOMM's work [1970?], four-page typescript [1952], MOMMA.

secrecy in which closed adoption was embedded started here: the primary reason for moving away was to conceal the pregnancy from relatives (sometimes including the woman's own parents) and friends.<sup>21</sup>

The larger cities offered a number of options for such women, and two sources give a picture of these. In 1948 the Immigration Department became concerned about the plight of British immigrants who became pregnant here, without family or friends and not knowing where to turn. In response, Child Welfare officers gave frank reports on various institutions. St Mary's in Auckland, run by the Anglican Church, was not well thought of, because of the restrictions it placed on the inmates, that 'give the place the air of some antediluvian reformatory'.<sup>22</sup> 'No phone calls are allowed, all mail is censored, the girls rise at 5.30 a.m. and retire at 8 p.m., doing all the work in the home including laundry, scrubbing, polishing, and cleaning windows. . . . This institution still adheres to the idea of reforming what are regarded as "fallen girls".'<sup>23</sup> The Alexandra Home in Wellington was run on similar lines. 'It will thus be seen that the general arrangements [in such institutions] fall heavily on the unmarried mother.'<sup>24</sup>

Reforming the fallen was certainly one aim, but there was another, more worldly, reason behind this régime. 'Such institutions depend on the labour of the unmarried mothers for the domestic work in the Homes and hospitals, most . . . catering also for married women.'<sup>25</sup>

There were other 'Homes', some run by churches, others by interdenominational community groups, and a few small ones run by private individuals. A summary of the overall conditions in 1955 was given by a medical student, W. I. Glass. As he described them, even the least restrictive institutions were strongly reminiscent of girls' boarding schools, and indeed all women who entered them immediately became 'girls' again, regardless of their age. Glass summed up what he found: 'routine monotonous work, confinement to the institution, no permission to see the putative father, and a compulsory stay after the birth of the baby is wholly or partly the case in most New Zealand shelters today.' These conditions suggested, he thought, 'that for a time such a girl is an inferior being and her personal convictions of moral worthlessness is [sic] reinforced.'<sup>26</sup>

In some cases women would avoid institutions or charitable agencies altogether. Their doctor or clergyman arranged for them to live with a safely distant family, usually in return for household help. Often other clergy or doctors took them in; there was a network of such exchanges throughout the country.

21 See L.C. Langridge, 'Adoption: The Birth Mother's Experience', MA thesis, University of Auckland, 1984, pp.60-62.

22 Director of Employment to Superintendent of Child Welfare, 3 June 1948, Child Welfare (CW) 40/57/2, National Archives, Wellington.

23 Director of Employment to Superintendent of Child Welfare, 30 September 1948, CW 40/57/2.

24 Wellington Child Welfare Officer (E.G. Tocker) to Superintendent of Child Welfare, 30 September 1948, CW 40/57/2.

25 *ibid.*

26 W.I. Glass, 'Survey of Unmarried Mothers in New Zealand', MBChB thesis, University of Otago, 1955, pp.50-53.

Alternatively they might answer a newspaper advertisement for live-in household help, or be found a place by Child Welfare, especially if they had come from a city to the provinces.<sup>27</sup> Like the institutions, some households undoubtedly treated their 'guests' well, others not so well, but whatever the women encountered they had little choice other than to put up with it. 'Unmarried mothers were a marvellous source of cheap, uncomplaining labour . . . how could you complain? There was nowhere else to go.'<sup>28</sup>

The Motherhood of Man Movement (like Childhaven, also in Auckland) operated on what it called 'the hostess system', though later a number of hostel places were also available. It kept a list of married women who offered room and board to pregnant women in return for help in the house. Those 'girls' who received sickness benefit also paid £1.5s. a week (about half the benefit). The *Woman's Weekly*, outlining MOMM's work in April 1953, explained that the 'girls' wore wedding rings and usually passed themselves off as the wives of seafaring men, but there is no other reference to this practice.<sup>29</sup>

Some groups in the community held that this was far too lenient a way to deal with sinful women, and from time to time they openly criticized organizations that operated on the hostess system. The Movement's report for 1955 noted such criticism, but disagreed with it on the grounds that their methods of reform worked better: 'the first consideration in helping unmarried mothers is to see that they are confined in good surroundings, and that they are given every opportunity to rehabilitate themselves. It is too early yet to be able to say whether the generous assistance which [our] movement gives to girls is being abused or not, but present statistics tend to show that the vast majority of girls who seek our aid make good. Though we have some girls who cause our hostesses and staff considerable trouble, the majority are good, respectable girls from good homes.'<sup>30</sup> Movement publicity from the early 1950s stressed this last point, contrasting its own clients with those in institutions: 'We do not believe in Institutions. We think it degrading for a young girl, who has made the mistake of loving too much and trusting too much, to have to be prepared to rub shoulders with the professional of the street, with girls of all types. Institutions are needed for a certain type only, but we deal with the very young, and the better type of girl who is frightened of life and the burden she has to carry.'<sup>31</sup>

For the birth of the child, unmarried women were more likely to go to private hospitals than were women generally. In 1955, public hospitals provided over 77% of all maternity beds, and 75.6% of all hospital confinements were in public hospitals; but Glass's study found that in the year from April 1954 to March 1955, of 1348 unmarried women confined in the four main centres, one-third

27 Information on these informal arrangements and women's experiences of them has been gathered from submissions to the Statutes Revision Committee and correspondence on the Adult Adoption Information Bill, 1980-1, office of Hon. J. Hunt MP, Wellington; and from interviews with former social workers, 1988.

28 Individual submission appended to submission no.47, Jigsaw (Inc.), to Statutes Revision Committee, re Adult Adoption Information Bill (1981).

29 *New Zealand Woman's Weekly* (NZWW), 9 April 1953, pp.12-13.

30 President's Report to AGM, 19 March 1956, MOMMA.

31 Four-page typescript [1952], MOMMA.

(445) went to private hospitals. Of these confinements, over 70% were in charitable institutions.<sup>32</sup>

The Motherhood of Man opened its own maternity hospital, Fairleigh, in 1954; before that it arranged for women to go to other private hospitals. When adoption was planned, the mother did not see the baby.<sup>33</sup> In the older institutions, women agreed to stay for three to six months after the birth, to care for the child and do domestic work. Child Welfare officers saw this enforced stay as very hard on the mother; it 'naturally develops her maternal affection, which, if adoption is to follow — as is often the case — creates acute distress upon the subsequent separation. . . .'<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, not allowing women to stay for more than 14 days after confinement, which appears to have been the practice at MOMM, seemed to one observer 'to exert undue pressure on a defenceless girl to have her child adopted'.<sup>35</sup>

As far back as 1948, facilitating adoption was seen as the main purpose of agencies such as the Motherhood of Man and Childhaven.<sup>36</sup> In the mid-1940s the Movement had listed its aim 'to encourage the mothers to keep their babies and to find congenial homes where the mother may support herself and the child' ahead of assisting 'in finding suitable foster-parents where adoption is the better plan for the child'.<sup>37</sup> But by 1950, Mrs Harvey was suggesting that MOMM advertise as an 'Adoption Bureau';<sup>38</sup> and by 1952, though 'the care of the unmarried Mother' was the Movement's first aim, the second was 'the selected adoption of babies'.<sup>39</sup> A similar shift, from presenting adoption as a regrettable second-best for both mother and child in the early 1940s to the virtually automatic linking of ex-nuptial birth with adoption by the 1950s, can be traced in the records of older organizations originally set up to assist women in difficulties, for example the Society for the Protection of Women and Children.<sup>40</sup>

There was certainly a steady demand for children. Prospective adoptive parents who contacted MOMM in the early 1950s were sent a form letter which told them that 'our waiting list is a lengthy one and it is impossible to given any indication as to how long it will be before your wish could be fulfilled'. The applicants were to notify Child Welfare of their intention to adopt, and to obtain a foster-parents' licence. The letter asked for their full names, occupation, and religion, and 'some idea of your colouring is helpful'.<sup>41</sup> There is no suggestion that they needed to supply more information than this, or come in for an

32 *New Zealand Official Yearbook*, Wellington, 1956, p.146; Glass, p.49.

33 Four-page typescript [1952]; President's Report to AGM, 5 September 1955, MOMMA; NZWW, 9 April 1953, pp.12–13.

34 Wellington Child Welfare officer (E.G. Tocker) to Superintendent of Child Welfare, 4 July 1948, CW 40/57/2.

35 Director of Employment to Superintendent of Child Welfare, 3 June 1948, CW 40/57/2.

36 *ibid.*

37 'The Motherhood of Man Movement', printed pamphlet [1945?], MOMMA.

38 Executive meeting minutes, 26 January 1950, MOMMA.

39 Four-page typescript [1952], MOMMA.

40 See the records of the Society for Home and Family (formerly the Society for the Protection of Women and Children), 1938–49, Auckland Institute and Museum.

41 Form letter typed on Movement letterhead [1952], MOMMA.

interview. However, a 1952 statement claimed that the 'cultural and financial background of all applicants' was carefully investigated, 'assuring the security of a good Christian home for every adopted child'. In a seeming contradiction, it also noted proudly: 'we cover the whole Dominion and our babies are placed for adoption over both islands, Fiji, and we even have parents in Pakistan waiting for a baby.'<sup>42</sup>

Applicants were invited to register as members of the Movement, to help support the work, and were asked for £16.5s. to cover the costs of a private hospital confinement; the form letter listed the mother's not seeing the baby, the routine blood tests (for venereal disease), and the 'full medical history of both mother and baby' obtained by MOMM's doctor as advantages of this arrangement. The applicants would be notified ten days after a suitable child was born, and MOMM's own solicitor obtained the mother's consent as she left the hospital. All details were kept strictly confidential, 'but we can at all times give assurance that the baby handed over is of perfect health and excellent background'.<sup>43</sup> This was in line with MOMM's stress on catering for the 'better type' of girl.

The way charitable agencies and individuals arranged adoptions was criticized by Child Welfare in 1948. For example, they did not always trouble to keep the mother's address for getting her consent when her child went to new parents after she had left. As for checking out the applicants, 'three babies were placed with applicants who were not married but were cohabiting, and this was only discovered when the legal papers were required'. There appeared to be 'urgent need to have the position regarding adoptions overhauled and clarified' and legal authority given to a definite body 'to undertake this most important work'.<sup>44</sup>

In 1952 an Interdepartmental Committee was set up to make recommendations for a new adoption bill.<sup>45</sup> At that time, Child Welfare was responsible for only 27.6% of all adoption placements. In Dunedin they handled almost half, but in Auckland, where other agencies were most active, they arranged only 17 of 548 placements.<sup>46</sup>

One of the principal, though unstated, aims of getting the legislation revised was to bring the activities of agencies and individuals under better control. Two main motives were at work: genuine concern, occasioned by instances of negligence, or worse, which had come to the attention of Child Welfare; and a drive to expand the role of social work in general, and Child Welfare in particular, so as to give it virtually complete control of adoptions, based on the conviction that that was the best and only way to ensure the welfare of all concerned, especially the child.<sup>47</sup>

42 Four-page typescript [1952], MOMMA.

43 Form letter typed on Movement letterhead [1952?], MOMMA.

44 Wellington Child Welfare officer (E.G. Tocker) to Superintendent of Child Welfare, 4 July 1948, CW 40/57/2.

45 Memorandum from Secretary for Justice to Director of Education, 9 January 1952, J18/20/18, Department of Justice, Wellington.

46 'Placements for Adoption by C.W.O's', table supplied by L.G. Anderson to Interdepartmental Committee, 24 June 1952, J18/20/18.

47 See Committee papers, J18/20/18.

The committee submitted its report on 22 July 1952, but the Cabinet did not approve the drafting of a bill until August 1953.<sup>48</sup> Child Welfare lobbied for the largest possible role throughout this process. In an article of late 1953, the then Deputy-Superintendent (later Superintendent) of the Child Welfare Division, L. G. Anderson, stressed how unsatisfactory the current situation was: the only real safeguard against unsuitable placements, the foster-parents' licence, simply meant that the home and parents had complied with a minimum standard. Anderson claimed that only trained social workers could match children and parents properly. But, unlike the officers of 1948, he expressed no concern about pressures put on women to agree to adoption. The focus of his article was the child and the adoptive parents; the mother was hardly mentioned.<sup>49</sup>

Meanwhile, the turn of events at the Motherhood of Man was demonstrating why better controls were needed. From 1946 on, MOMM was heavily reliant on the work of one married couple. The Movement was run from their house, with the day nursery on the ground floor. Mr X. acted as Treasurer; Mrs X. managed the nursery, interviewed, placed and supervised the unmarried mothers, and arranged all adoptions — 1882 of them up to the end of September 1952, says the 1952 statement, which she probably wrote.<sup>50</sup>

The minutes of the 1948 Annual General Meeting congratulated Mrs X. on her effort as 'unique in the country'.<sup>51</sup> However, by June 1953, Warren Freer, MP for Mount Albert, and on the committee of MOMM from 1949, was reporting 'most disturbing news': the Minister was insisting on an audit of the Movement's financial affairs before releasing its annual government grant.<sup>52</sup>

The auditor's report of 12 July made unpleasant reading. There was no satisfactory system of recording monies received, including fees paid by adopting parents; and the fee charged was in some cases well in excess of the actual cost of confinement. Yet he found liabilities of over £500, including £108.12s. owed to nursing homes. There were many other irregularities in the accounts. He was particularly disturbed that every blank cheque in the book he received had already been signed by the Treasurer and a committee member.<sup>53</sup>

Even more serious was evidence that Mrs X. had 'declined assistance to unmarried girls who wished to keep their children'. It was reported that one attempted suicide as a result. Those mothers whose babies were stillborn or died had apparently been required to pay for both their confinement and the funeral expenses. Applicants for adoption had been discouraged 'if there was little chance of a donation to the movement, whilst obviously well-to-do couples were able to obtain infants, in many cases without delay'.<sup>54</sup> The police were called in, and Mrs X. stood trial in February 1954. Her counsel submitted that there had

48 Cabinet Memorandum (53) 38, 17 August 1953, J18/20/18.

49 L.C. Anderson, 'Chosen Children', *New Zealand Parent and Child*, I, 4 (1953), pp.19–20, 41.

50 Four-page typescript [1952], MOMMA; NZWW, 9 April 1953, pp.12–13.

51 AGM minutes, 8 December 1948, MOMMA.

52 Executive meeting minutes, 12 June 1953, MOMMA.

53 Auditor's report, 12 July 1953, MOMMA.

54 Report of Finance Committee, 12 July 1953, MOMMA.

been 'muddlement, but nothing more', and she was acquitted.<sup>55</sup>

By the time the first draft of the Adoption Bill reached the House in September 1954, MOMM had been thoroughly reorganized, and the 'adverse publicity' of the previous year's scandal overcome.<sup>56</sup> MOMM's funding came from three main sources — a government grant of £1000, donations from businesses such as Dominion Breweries and the Auckland Savings Bank, and its own fund-raising activities, plus adoptive parents' fees and the sickness benefit. The president's report for 1954 stated that 178 women, including 61 private (i.e. married) patients, who paid their own fees, had been confined at Fairleigh. The hospital covered costs easily, but the day nursery ran at a loss.<sup>56</sup>

Glass estimated that there were then about 750 unmarried mothers in Auckland, but an Auckland Child Welfare officer commented that 'with the mushroom growth of adoption agencies peculiar to our city', very few of them — 'not more than six a year' — contacted Child Welfare. In fact, 'efforts made by the Child Welfare officer to establish . . . liaison [with the agencies] were politely but firmly refused'.<sup>57</sup>

MOMM was clearly the dominant agency. In 1954, 174 'girls' registered for assistance, including 25 who were separated or divorced; the youngest was 14, the oldest 43. Their most common occupation was nurse or hospital aid; among their partners, the largest group were Royal Navy personnel. There were 137 births that year, 117 of them at Fairleigh; 131 babies lived, but only 16 were kept by their mothers. This is lower than the national figure for 1954, when at least 16% of illegitimate children were kept by solo mothers (i.e., not including mothers living with the father). The policy of assisting those who wished to keep their child should not be altered, said the president, 'although some . . . make a tragic mistake, and I am certain, regret their decision': if they could not take the baby home to their parents, their only prospect was a housekeeping position, involving the risk of finding 'that more is expected of them than their routine duties'.<sup>58</sup>

There may have been particular pressure on mothers to agree to adoption that year, in order to obtain their consent before the law changed. One woman recalls approaching the Movement late in 1954. It agreed to help, on condition that she quickly sign the papers to have the baby adopted 'on the date of birth'. Her baby was born in August, shortly before the new Act, making consents signed before the birth invalid, came into force.<sup>59</sup>

The Movement's report for 1954 summarized statistics on 97 adopting couples, though it is not clear when, or how, these were collected. By then the form letter sent out by Mrs X. had been replaced by an application form; it asked for a little more information, but was far from searching, and did not mention income, housing, or marriage history. Not all applicants were interviewed; those

55 *New Zealand Truth*, 24 February 1954.

56 President's Report for 1954, 5 September 1955, MOMMA.

57 Glass, p.44.

58 Glass, pp.34–35; President's Report for 1954, 5 September 1955, MOMMA.

59 Individual submission no.121 W, to Statutes Revision Committee, re Adult Adoption Information Bill (1981); Adoption Act 1955, s.7(7).

who could not come in were asked to send a photograph.<sup>60</sup> Ages of applicants ranged from 26 to 55 for husbands, but 66 were 31–40; wives were aged from 21 to 45, with 75 aged 26–35. Length of marriage ranged from one to 21 years; in eight cases there had been a previous marriage. Applicants were mainly in the middle-income bracket: the majority (74 couples) had £500 - £999 per year, the rest from £1000 to £3300. Only 47 had no children; 30 had adopted children, 19 had natural children, and one couple had both. In three cases the child placed by MOMM was returned, and then re-adopted by someone else.

The Movement regretted that such information would not be 'as freely available in future', and similar statistics could not be compiled, because of 'a decision . . . to allow adopting parents to use their own solicitors'.<sup>61</sup> Yet Child Welfare's new forms would routinely record such basic information, and more.<sup>62</sup> The Movement's solicitor, W.I. Gunn, also feared that the new statutory requirements about solicitors would make it difficult for the Movement to keep a record of when (and presumably whether) adoptions were finalized. Moreover, the adopting parents' solicitor might have some connection with the natural mother, as had occurred in one case, thus breaching confidentiality. Yet it seems that for some years the MOMM solicitor had both acted for the applicants and witnessed the consent of the natural mother. The Adoption Regulations 1956 would forbid this practice.<sup>63</sup>

Finally, the 1954 report also raised the matter of race. 'Some other organizations discriminate against [Maori and Island] girls, possibly because of the great difficulty involved in arranging adoptions. . . the bulk of these cases are now coming to us.' This claim is supported by Glass, who found that in 1954 'some homes primarily concerned with adopting [illegitimate] children [were] loath to take mothers of coloured blood'. MOMM stressed that Maori and Island girls were treated in the same way as Pakehas — except that they were warned that adoption of their babies might not be possible.<sup>64</sup>

An amended draft of the Adoption Bill was referred to the Statutes Revision Committee in May 1955.<sup>65</sup> The Motherhood of Man sent in the longest submission the Committee received, and Gunn appeared in person. The submission strongly opposed many of the Bill's provisions, especially those that expanded the role of the Child Welfare Division and introduced additional steps into the adoption process.<sup>66</sup>

Above all, MOMM wanted approved adoption societies to be licensed, and their authority extended, so that they would have much the same powers as the Child Welfare Division in making placements and getting custody of children.

60 See P.J. Eynon, 'Child Adoption in New Zealand', MBChB thesis, Otago University, 1956, pp.61–62, Appendix.

61 President's Report for 1954, 5 September 1955, MOMMA.

62 See Forms E5/28, E5/29, Child Welfare Division, Department of Education, Wellington.

63 President's Report for 1954, 5 September 1955, MOMMA; Regulation 9(2), Adoption Regulations 1956 (S.R. 1956/169), 16 October 1956.

64 President's Report for 1954, 5 September 1955, MOMMA; Glass, p.50.

65 NZPD, 1955, 305, p.929.

66 Submissions on behalf of the Motherhood of Man Movement Inc., by W. I. Gunn, Solicitor to the Movement [1955], MOMMA.

It stressed its own experience in the careful matching of children with adopting parents, and claimed that unmarried mothers preferred to go to societies such as MOMM because they got more personal attention there than at Child Welfare. MOMM denied that it pressured mothers to agree to adoption. 'It merely happens that in the vast majority of cases it is the most sensible thing for the mother to do.'<sup>67</sup>

Secrecy was a major concern. MOMM believed there should be no possible opportunity for the natural mother to learn the adoptive parents' identity, and wanted the new provisions on this point strengthened. Citing anecdotal evidence, it raised the bogey of the mother finding out where her child was, and making a nuisance of herself; or worse, blackmailing the adoptive parents. Giving adoption societies a much larger role, it argued, would help to eliminate any such risk.

But the strongest objection was to section 26 of the draft bill, forbidding any payment to be made in connection with an adoption.<sup>68</sup> The submission pointed out that MOMM needed to collect fees from adoptive parents in order to cover confinement expenses, quite apart from placement expenses. It also objected to section 27, which forbade advertising except with the permission of Child Welfare. This issue was to surface again in the 1960s, when the 1950s position was reversed and the 'supply' of babies began greatly to exceed the 'demand'.

None of these points was conceded in the Bill when it reappeared for its second reading on 26 October 1955. Freer was one of the few MPs who spoke to it at length. He went over the same arguments again, referring to his personal experience of 'loose administrative practices' in support of registering approved societies and preventing individuals from arranging adoptions, and pointed out how much money adoption societies saved the state by confining unmarried mothers in private hospitals.<sup>69</sup>

In view of the 1953 scandal, it was hardly surprising that the Bill did not license adoption societies or extend their powers. The Minister of Justice, John Marshall, rather drily replied to Freer that no doubt it was 'the success achieved by the adoption societies in England that makes people want to see them recognised in the same way here'; but 'we do not wish at this stage to bring in regulations which will unduly restrict their activities, which would be the condition of granting further responsibilities'.<sup>70</sup>

As for payment, the Minister suggested that the Bill did not outlaw the recovery of hospital fees. But in 1956 MOMM was twice found guilty of contravening the new Act by charging fees. Freer argued the case again, and in October 1957 an amendment allowed adopting parents to pay confinement expenses according to a scale approved by the Director-General of Health.<sup>71</sup>

The Child Welfare Division and the Motherhood of Man had opposing views

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*, p.1.

<sup>68</sup> This subsequently became s.25 of the Adoption Act 1955.

<sup>69</sup> NZPD, 1955, 307, pp.3354-7.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*, p.3357.

<sup>71</sup> NZPD, 1957, 313, pp.2144-5; Freer to Hanan, 17 October 1957, Hanan to Freer, 8 November 1957, MOMMA.

on the important question of when the mother should be legally able to sign consent to adoption. Child Welfare wanted the child to be six weeks old, in line with English practice, and the Interdepartmental Committee accepted this; the May 1955 Bill reduced the time to four weeks.<sup>72</sup> MOMM's written submission does not refer to this issue, but does stress that the new parents wanted to get the child at 14 days. As the Movement normally took consents at around the tenth day, it seems likely Gunn would have mentioned that period at the hearings. In the end the Statutes Revision Committee overrode Child Welfare and cut the time back to ten days.<sup>73</sup>

In the House, the Minister justified the shortened time on the ground that mothers had a marked tendency to disappear before signing the consent form. No speaker questioned this, or pointed out that agency practices were at least partly to blame; and no one looked at how the realities of the mother's situation might lead her to 'disappear'. 'It was felt', said the Minister, 'that a mother would certainly be in a condition to give a valid consent after ten days from the birth'; but whether she would also be in a position to do so was apparently never considered.<sup>74</sup> No one objected to this clause in the House; indeed, apart from Freer, no one objected to anything. Once in place, the ten-day minimum became the norm, and mothers were routinely asked to sign consent shortly after leaving hospital, or even before. They therefore had little opportunity after the birth to find out whether they could make satisfactory arrangements to keep their child, until delays in finding adoptive parents began to occur in the 1960s.<sup>75</sup>

The Adoption Act was passed on 27 October 1955. Although it came into force immediately, regulations were not gazetted for almost a year. Despite the confusion this delay caused, and the problems over fee payments, MOMM's work continued. A table drawn up by Child Welfare covering 207 adoption placements of illegitimate children in the Auckland Child Welfare district shows MOMM as responsible for 83 (45 of them to people outside the area); other organizations arranged 29, hospitals 28, doctors 19, other 'third parties' 23, and 19 were 'unknown'. Only 6 were arranged by Child Welfare.<sup>76</sup>

Movement finances in 1955 steadily improved, thanks largely to the profit from 117 private confinements at Fairleigh — nearly half the total. But the flow of 'girls' was increasing: numbers in the first two months of 1956 were equal to a third of the total in 1955. Defending the help MOMM gave, the president linked having a baby to innocence and ignorance rather than to sin: 'It must be remembered that "bad girls" don't have babies; they are either too well versed in birth-control methods or resort to other means to terminate a pregnancy.'<sup>77</sup>

After October 1957, adopting parents could once more legally be asked for

72 Report of Committee Set Up to Consider Adoption Laws, 22 July 1952, J18/20/18; Adoption Bill, 4 May 1955 (Hon. Mr Marshall), s.7(7).

73 Adoption Act 1955, s.7(7).

74 NZPD, 1955, 307, p.3349.

75 See submissions to Statutes Revision Committee re Adult Adoption Information Bill (1981); interviews with former social workers, 1988.

76 Adoption Regulations 1956 (S.R. 1956/169), 16 October 1956; Eynon, p.57.

77 President's Report for 1955, 19 March 1956, MOMMA.

hospital fees, now £20, and a new application form was approved.<sup>78</sup> As adoption placements rose, so did Child Welfare's share of them; in 1957 it came to just over a third, whereas private organizations arranged 23%, maternity homes and doctors 33.8%, and birth parents or grandparents only 4%. By 1959, Child Welfare had increased its share by 5%; but placements by private organizations had grown by over 10%, to 33.7% of the total.<sup>79</sup>

The Motherhood of Man Movement now reached its zenith: under the energetic presidency of Dr W. R. Harrison, 1959 was 'the year of revival'. Publicity and fund-raising went extremely well. Women representing 'a complete cross-section of the community' came from all over New Zealand for help; 123 were completely cared for, and 90 adoptions were arranged, but applicants for children still faced a wait of two years.<sup>80</sup>

For a few years more, the whole operation ran smoothly. By the end of 1961 the Movement's subscription membership had doubled, and the hospital was over £2500 in credit. However, the first signs of the coming reversal in adoption supply and demand were beginning to appear: Roman Catholic babies were becoming difficult to place. The Home of Compassion might help, but only if it was a single woman's first child.<sup>81</sup>

By 1962, MOMM was contacting all Child Welfare departments in Australia about potential adoptive parents, and Gunn gave permission to use the Movement's seal on documents for adoptions arranged via the American Consulate. Meanwhile the problems with placing part-Maori babies had increased to such an extent that their mothers were now being warned they might have to pay for foster homes until parents could be found.<sup>82</sup>

By mid-May 1963, 95 babies had already been born, nearly double the number for the same period in 1962, and the secretary reported MOMM was 'just holding our own' in finding adoptive parents, especially for boys. A deputation planned to meet the Minister of Justice to ask for an amendment to the Act, giving the right to advertise generally, and requiring every girl in care to pay £1 a week. By September, 175 babies had arrived, and there were no parents waiting for boys or the four 'with coloured blood'. Child Welfare and other organizations placed some children, but in such cases MOMM received no fee. However, the fees charged were not the problem, as the shortage of adoptive parents was general.<sup>83</sup>

In November, MOMM won the right to advertise specific babies, despite opposition from Child Welfare in Auckland; however, many of those who replied could not get Child Welfare's approval as parents. By December, it was necessary to limit the numbers of unmarried mothers admitted to Fairleigh, convert one hospital ward into a nursery, and write to the Health Department saying the delay in placing babies was beyond MOMM's control.<sup>84</sup>

78 Management meeting minutes, 22 July 1957, MOMMA.

79 Griffith, p.A4.

80 President's Report for 1959, 24 March 1960, MOMMA.

81 Management meeting minutes, 28 February, 28 June, 25 October 1961.

82 Management meeting minutes, 9 August, 1 October, 8 November 1962, MOMMA.

83 Management meeting minutes, 31 February, 15 May, 11 September 1963, MOMMA.

84 Management meeting minutes, 14 March, 13 November, 12 December 1963; President's Report for 1963 [1964], MOMMA.

There was to be no improvement, and the minutes of a management committee meeting in May 1964 summed up the outlook: 'Adoption position bad for both boys and girls — applications coming in from prospective parents very low and list of girls booked into the hospital in the near future very high.' That year, though Child Welfare was still responsible for less than half of the 2885 adoptions (47.8%), organizations, homes, and doctors combined managed to arrange only 24.7%; another 24.2% were arranged by (and usually for) birth parents or grandparents.<sup>85</sup>

The MOMM staff of three (one part-time) were under extreme pressure. As well as typing, book-keeping, and answering the phone, they dealt with all the correspondence, interviewed and matched girls and hostesses, shopped for the hospital, took girls to hospital and collected babies for parents, interviewed would-be parents, and arranged placements. The last task was 'certainly now a very quick procedure — there are so few parents to choose from'. The acting secretary believed her post required office rather than social-work experience — there was simply no time for social work. But she foresaw that as the number of applications to adopt declined, the job would soon consist mainly of turning away unmarried mothers, 'while frantically trying all sources to place the 100 or so babies appearing in the next six months'. Some were much more difficult to place than others:

Already we have no adopting parents in view for European male babies and Child Welfare admit that they are being asked for approval of placements before they have had time to inspect the homes. If an adoption application has been on our files for more than a month it is not uncommon to find a baby has been procured elsewhere. Baby boys with coloured blood are filling the hospital nursery with no prospects in view. Child Welfare and Maori Affairs are unable to help — even foster homes are difficult to find. . . . The prospects of finding homes for the deformed babies are therefore practically impossible.<sup>86</sup>

Applicants remained scarce, and two of the couples obtaining children through MOMM in 1965 had to fight for their orders in Court, one couple because they were Rationalists and the other because the husband had a police record. In 1966 the hospital had to be temporarily closed; its licence allowed it to house only 14 babies, but 26 were waiting to be adopted.<sup>87</sup> The new secretary, Mrs Bailey, pointed out that 'many girls would prefer to, and are capable of, caring for their babies if they had sufficient moral and practical support'. However, their only reliable income was the family benefit of 15s. a week, unless they could obtain maintenance from the father, and this was unlikely: 'so many of the girls have lost the case even though the young man knows perfectly well that he is the father. It is altogether a humiliating experience. If the case is proved (I only know one last year and this because of the extremely rare blood group of the father) payment of 25/- to 30/- weekly is ordered. There could be a great deal

85 Management meeting minutes, 13 May 1964; Griffith, p.A4.

86 Two-page typescript [Mrs Bright? 1964], MOMMA.

87 President's Reports for 1964 [1965], 1965 [1966], 1966 [1967], MOMMA.

of difficulty in obtaining even this sum from the man if he decides to move on or to marry someone else.<sup>88</sup>

Meanwhile the movement was having financial troubles of its own. Boarding babies was not a profitable undertaking. By June 1964, the hospital's bank balance was down to £376, and only six of the 13 adoptive couples waiting were willing to pay the full hospital fees. It was a help that five were Catholics; but there were another 25 Catholic girls due to be delivered before Christmas — plus 68 others. A doctor was to be told they could not take his Maori patient; and if babies had not been placed by the time they were three weeks old, they were to be fostered out, at the mother's expense. At the end of the year the accounts showed a net loss for the hospital of close on £7000, and in 1965 an overdraft of £1000 had to be arranged.<sup>89</sup>

The financial decline of the hospital was not caused by an excess of unmarried mothers and babies but by too few private patients. By 1967, private patients had fallen to 10% of Fairleigh's confinements. Thanks to free state care, few married women were having their babies in fee-charging private maternity hospitals, and in Auckland 17 such hospitals had closed; apart from Fairleigh, only those run by religious bodies were still operating. Nursing staff were difficult to keep, and the continuing deficit meant it was hard to maintain, let alone modernize, the hospital. But the 'girls' were continuing to flood in: 591 were interviewed in 1967, along with 247 adoptive parents and 22 'boys re girls', that is putative fathers.<sup>90</sup> That year there were 152 adoptions, but 96 mothers kept their babies. In the 1950s, allegations of pressuring women to agree to adoption had been denied; now Mrs Bailey felt compelled to state that 'it is certainly not true that the girls are told that they should keep their babies'. However, if they showed signs of wanting to do so, 'every possible encouragement is given . . . the opportunity for marriage [for such girls] is more than likely'.<sup>91</sup>

The 1967 report recommended selling the hospital or turning it into a hostel for mothers keeping their babies, since that was obviously where the need now lay. It closed on 30 April 1968, and later reopened as a hostel, providing accommodation for ten mothers and babies and 14 places for expectant women. By the end of October, 17 mothers and their babies had stayed there. They ranged in age from 16 to 36; three were still in residence, a few had left to marry the father or gone home to their parents, others took up housekeeping positions or managed with friends' help. Two, faced with parental opposition, had given up their babies for adoption after all.<sup>92</sup>

Problems remained. The shortage of adoptive parents continued. Critics were again accusing the Movement of encouraging illegitimacy, and 'certain (execu-

88 Two-page typescript [Mrs Bailey?], 13 June 1966, MOMMA.

89 Management meeting minutes, 10 June, 9 September, 10 March 1965; President's Report for 1964 [1965], MOMMA.

90 Summary of interviews, January to December 1967; President's Report for 1967 [1968], MOMMA.

91 Report for Consideration by Executive Committee [Mrs Bailey? August 1967], MOMMA.

92 Mrs Bailey to Miss M. King, National Women's Hospital, 16 May 1968; typed list, October 1968, MOMMA.

tive) members have stated quite frankly that they have no sympathy whatsoever with the unmarried mother. They seemed to think that they could somehow isolate the child and concentrate sympathy in this direction entirely. . . . We cannot help one without aiding the other.<sup>93</sup> There was more work to do than ever, with three different hospitals to cover. The secretary suggested various cutbacks, such as not visiting the mother or the baby before proposing adoption: 'Childhaven do not make these visits, nor do Child Welfare, who while they feel it is quite wrong to propose an infant for adoption when they have not seen it, cannot avoid it as they are short of staff.' Alternatively they could close the hostel or cease arranging adoptions altogether.<sup>94</sup>

The hostel was to stay open for almost another decade. By 1973, the Domestic Purposes Benefit was made statutory, giving single mothers — and those who assisted them — a basic income. Staying in the hostel cost \$15 a week, enabling mothers to survive while waiting for a state house. Some could even save, as an undated 1970s statement explained: 'We encourage the girls to open a bank account while they are with us and I even keep their bank books in the office and try to make them bank so much each week when they receive their cheque, because they just do not realise how difficult it is when they go flatting . . . as compared to boarding.' Women could go out to work; schoolgirls could continue their studies in 'a schoolroom specially for unmarried mothers close by' at Bethany, run by the Salvation Army.<sup>95</sup>

The adoption picture was changing fast. In 1971, 60 of 192 mothers kept their babies; by 1973, 69 of 146 did so, and private organizations were responsible for only 3.9% of all adoptions.<sup>96</sup> With so few babies being made available, demand was once more starting to outstrip supply. At MOMM, mothers could now 'be involved with helping . . . to choose the environment in which they would like their child to be brought up. . . . This involvement I have found makes the girl . . . far happier with her decision.' And for some time there had been less exaggerated concern about severing all contact: 'If the girl wishes, we keep in contact with the adoptive parents and pass on any news of the baby and family.' Some women were still writing and receiving news of their child seven years after the adoption.<sup>97</sup>

From 1974 onwards, the Department of Social Welfare, which had absorbed the old Child Welfare Division, belatedly inspected and registered all mother and baby hostels under the Children and Young Persons Act. Its reports on Fairleigh were full of praise for the 'accepting, caring' staff. But numbers of both pre- and antenatal residents fell steadily, from 22 women and 11 children in March 1975 to ten women and eight children in November 1978, the date of the last report. It noted that 'like other institutions of a similar nature' the hostel was 'not used

93 Report, 5 May 1969 [Mrs Bailey?], MOMMA.

94 *ibid.*

95 Nine-page handwritten draft MS [1974?], MOMMA.

96 Secretary to Mr M. L. Curtis, Buddle, Weir & Co., 9 December 1974, MOMMA; Griffith, p.A4.

97 Nine-page handwritten draft MS [1974?], MOMMA.

to capacity and in parts has an empty, uncared for atmosphere. Redecorating may help the appearance but it cannot alter the situation.<sup>98</sup>

Despite the energetic involvement of a new president, Dr Jennifer Wilson (who believed that the passing of the Contraception, Sterilisation and Abortion Act 1977 would result in an increased demand for the Movement's services), in 1978 the MOMM committee decided to close and lease Fairleigh. The Movement became a trust, administered by the Guardian Trust, and ceased to provide any services directly, though it remained a substantial contributor to the work of parallel denominational institutions. Currently it makes grants totalling around \$35,000 a year to such groups, for example Bethany, as well as to newer groups set up to help women and children, for example, women's refuges and Parent-line.<sup>99</sup>

The law and practice of adoption involves the operation of what Michel Foucault calls 'bio-power', the power of the modern state, concerned with life rather than death.<sup>100</sup> For a comparatively short period, in New Zealand as in all the other Anglo-American countries, large numbers of women were routinely induced to sign their newborn children over to strangers, knowing they were unlikely ever to see them again. How was this achieved?

Adoption is closely related to sexuality, and Foucault sees sexuality as an 'especially dense transfer point for the relations of power'.<sup>101</sup> The operation of power with regard to adoption can be seen as beginning, paradoxically, at the point where society attributes to women a power they do not in fact have: the almost absolute power to control sexual relations with men.

Before the Second World War, women who became pregnant out of wedlock were condemned for failing to exercise this moral power, and thereby endangering society. The fact that women alone had great difficulty both supporting and caring for their children was seen as a just punishment for this sin. Labelling single mothers immoral and irresponsible justified the harsh terms of the gendered division of labour, whereby women were denied access to adequately paid employment on the grounds that their place was at home, supported by male earnings. Thus it turned a socially-constructed situation into a personal dilemma.

Prior to the Second World War, all children — or at least all children of European descent — came to be seen as potentially valuable future citizens, and therefore worth rescuing. Then in the immediate post-war years, the circular logic of developing nuclear family ideology introduced a new dimension. It insisted that all children needed both a bread-winning father and a stay-at-home mother, so that they could grow up correctly adjusted to their natural gender roles.

Foucault describes the power of the modern state as 'distributing the living in

98 Department of Social Welfare, Notice re Registration of Mother and Child Homes, 1974, and Reports on Fairleigh, 1975, 1977, 1978, MOMMA.

99 *Dominion*, 14 April 1988; John Hetherington and Margaret Horton, personal communications, 1988.

100 M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Harmondsworth, 1971, I, p.143.

101 *ibid.*, p.103.

the domain of value and utility'.<sup>102</sup> This is exactly what adoption achieved. It not only replaced the missing bread-winner in a way that cost the state almost nothing; more importantly, it also replaced the child's missing legal and social father.

Creating this new nuclear family meant separating the child from its original mother, and characterizing her as both unable and unfit to rear it. Nevertheless, the rhetoric of concern for children's welfare did not normally permit a new-born baby to be 'rescued' by being forcibly removed. The decision to give the child up had to appear to be made by the mother herself.

There was no need for overt pressure on the single woman, although this was certainly used on occasion. It was enough to ask her a question no other kind of expectant mother was asked: was she going to keep her baby or not? She was told to compare what she could offer the child with what a married couple could offer, and to decide, not according to what she wanted, but according to what was best for the child. It took exceptional determination for a young woman, pregnant for the first time, to resist that argument and insist that what was best for the child was the child's mother.

In addition, almost everything that happened to her, from the day she revealed her pregnancy, was based on the assumption that her baby was going to be adopted. The history of the Motherhood of Man Movement shows how matter-of-fact and business-like the whole process quickly became, and how completely it was accepted as both normal and necessary, so that keeping a child could be described as 'making a tragic mistake'.

'We must cease once and for all', writes Foucault, 'to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it "excludes", it "represses", it "censors" . . . In fact power produces reality, it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him [or that she may gain of herself] belong to this production.'<sup>103</sup> Examining what happened to pregnant single women in the heyday of stranger adoption, we can begin to understand how power did indeed produce reality for them, profoundly affecting both their own lives and the lives of their children.

However, as it became clear that the supply of babies for adoption was outstripping demand, reality was slowly re-produced. Those who worked most closely with unmarried mothers began suggesting that they might actually want to keep their children, and should even be assisted to do so by the state, if not for their own sake, then for the sake of the child. Sixteen years after the introduction of the Domestic Purposes Benefit, adoption is once again being presented as the best way to 'rescue' children from incompetent young single mothers.

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<sup>102</sup> *ibid.*, p.144.

<sup>103</sup> M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, New York, 1979, p.194.