

From
Joy 23/5

10 DOWNING STREET

REPLY FROM THE RT HON MRS MARGARET THATCHER MP TO CONSTITUENTS CONCERNING THE UNBORN CHILDREN (PROTECTION) BILL

Thank you for your letter about the Unborn Children
(Protection) Bill.

Enoch Powell presented this Bill which was given a Second Reading by the House of Commons on 15 February. The Bill has now completed its Commons Committee Stage and will come up for its Report Stage in the next few weeks.

The main effect of the Bill would be to require doctors to obtain authority from the Secretary of State for each woman being treated by in vitro fertilisation and to prevent research using human embryos. It would reject the recommendations of the Warnock Report that there should be an independent licensing authority to control activities in this field and authorise some carefully controlled research.

The Government have fully recognised for some time that recent developments in the treatment of infertility have been the cause of deep concern to many people, and for this reason we commissioned the Warnock Inquiry to investigate the many important and difficult issues involved. The strength of feeling was again underlined by the wide range of views which were forcefully expressed during the Second Reading Debate and in Committee, and by the letters we have been receiving.

Speaking in the Debate, Kenneth Clarke indicated that MPs were free to vote according to their conscience on this Bill which deals with fundamental issues of principle, and that the Government are "neutral" to it, because of the considerations indicated in the next paragraph.

The Government are currently considering the Warnock Report and the many representations which we have received from organisations and members of the public. We have already introduced the Surrogacy Arrangements Bill which will prohibit in the UK the operation of commercial surrogacy agencies and advertising of or for surrogacy services. We aim to introduce legislation on the other issues dealt with in the Warnock Report at a later date once we have completed our consideration of these issues. We will take careful account of all these before we take any decisions on our future course of action, including framing any legislation.

Margaret Thatcher