

## FILM REVIEW

### BIRTH

Director: *Sam Pilsbury*. Producer: Helen Brew.

Commentary by *R.D. Laing* : *Media Insights Ltd.*

**Birth** is a searing attack on the predominant childbirth practices as institutionalised in the West. R.D. Laing, in his narration, systematically questions each of what are generally regarded as routine technological interventions in labour: inductions, shaving, stirrups, episiotomy. The film asks why mothers have no voice in the services which supposedly exist entirely for them.

"The fundamental issue is the deep gulf in communication between expectant mothers and the medical profession . . . puts emphasis on the dignity of the baby as a sensate human being. This dignity is the root of Laing's thesis in Mrs. Brew's film."

"It is often said that we care more for our animals than our children. Certainly animals are allowed to bring their offsprings into the world without the bedrugging, prodding, swabbing and cutting of the medical profession. **Birth** argues that human mothers should be given the same choice. Dr. R.D. Laing questions the medical logic behind the massive intervention by doctors which now accompanies childbirth."

### THE CHICAGO MATERNITY CENTRE STORY

Whilst **Birth** reveals the problems of hospital delivery the way it works now, **Chicago Maternity Centre** shows one solution - and the fight to defend it. The Maternity Centre in Chicago was established over 75 years ago, and helped thousands of mothers to give birth at home, with a far lower infant mortality rate than the city's hospitals, and at a far lower cost to the patient - an important criterion in a country where medicine is still private.

In the first part of this film, a group of mothers dramatically tell why they favour the low-cost, preventative care the Centre provides, and there are excerpts from **fight for Life**, a 1939 Pare Lorentz documentary on the Centre's history and contribution to obstetrics.

In 1973 the plans for a big new Chicago city hospital threatened the end of the Maternity Centre altogether. The second part of this powerful documentary explains how this could possibly be so, by revealing the big business control of medicine in America, and in particular how this worked in Chicago. It shows the fightback by the people affected, when the black, white and Latin women who use and need the Centre vocally confront the Board of Directors of the new hospital.

"To capture on film the essential humanity of giving birth at home and, at the same time, to document the unequalled struggle to save the Chicago Maternity Centre is the twin triumph of this extraordinary work. See it."

**Mari Kuttna**