

# AIDS

by David Jones

Fran Mosley reviews John Button's book in this issue. Here is a quote from it, about AIDS (*Getting Closer: Sex, Love and Common Sense* by John Button published by Optima 1992, p12)

“AIDS is still a rare disease and, contrary to popular mythology, does not always result in a swift and inevitable death. Yet partly because it links our culture's four main taboo subjects — sex, death, drugs and homosexuality — and partly because it refuses to succumb to mainstream medicine, the disease has caught the popular imagination in a unique way.

“The first British AIDS case was diagnosed in 1981; nine years later the most recent figures show 3,798 cases, of whom 2,040 have died. The number of people in this country known to be HIV positive is now 14,723. AIDS is still predominantly a homosexual phenomenon (in Britain accounting for 80 per cent of the figures). But the rate of increase of homosexual cases is slowing, while the opposite is true for heterosexuals. ‘Cases of AIDS in this group are increasing faster than in any other,’ comments Sir Donald Acheson, the government's Chief Medical Officer. ‘During 1990-91 the number of cases of AIDS acquired by heterosexual intercourse has risen by 95 per cent, from 123 to 240, and cases in women by 72 per cent, from 104 to 179.’”

Editorial comment. John might have added a fifth taboo subject, race, for the myth seems to have “caught the popular imagination” that black people were the originators of AIDS and an important source of infection — whereas they were not and are not. John's book is, of course, about relationships and only one small part of it is about AIDS and how ideas about AIDS are used to fuel fear. It is worth noting that AIDS is a serious medical condition but the scale of the suffering it causes is much less than the suffering caused by cigarettes, motor cars and abortion. For example, in England and Wales 35,000 people a year die from lung cancer, and thousands more die of heart conditions: all caused by cigarettes. And that leaves out the uncounted thousands who suffer chronic respiratory, bladder, kidney and heart conditions all brought on by cigarettes. Motor cars kill about 6,000 people a year and for every one killed more than 50 are maimed. There are approximately 350,000 women in each year group (i.e. roughly the number of 18 year olds, 19 year olds and so on.) The number of abortions carried out each year is approximately 150,000. Against the statistics of avoidable misery AIDS would seem to have been hyped beyond belief — to whose benefit and to whose detriment?