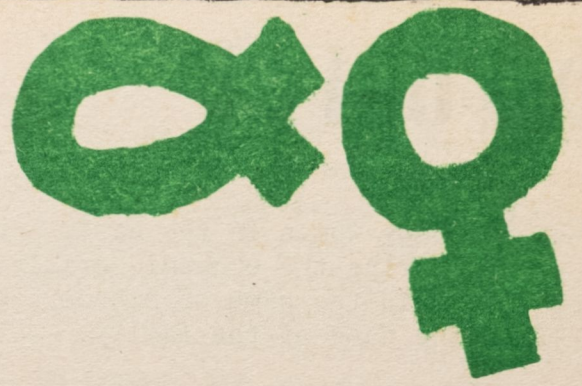


Abortion is a woman's **FILE COPY**  
*Right to Choose*



Issue No. 16

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25 cents

**SUPPORT N.Z. WOMEN!**



ON SEPTEMBER 15, WOMEN IN NEW ZEALAND CELEBRATE WINNING THE RIGHT TO VOTE. IN 1977, PARLIAMENT SAID THAT NEW ZEALAND WOMEN, WHO CAN VOTE, MAY NOT CONTROL THEIR OWN BODIES. A WOMAN WHO WANTS TO END AN UNWANTED PREGNANCY MUST SEEK THE CONSENT OF FOUR DOCTORS AND EVEN THEN IS NOT GUARANTEED AN ABORTION. NO WOMAN SHOULD HAVE TO BEG IN ORDER TO CONTROL HER BODY. THIS LAW MUST BE TAKEN OFF THE BOOKS.

ON SEPTEMBER 15, 1978, WOMEN THROUGHOUT NEW ZEALAND WILL BE DEMONSTRATING TO OPPOSE THIS REPRESSIVE LAW. IN AUSTRALIA WE WILL DEMONSTRATE TO SHOW OUR SOLIDARITY WITH OUR NEW ZEALAND SISTERS IN THEIR STRUGGLE TO REPEAL THE CONTRACEPTION, STERILISATION AND ABORTION LAW. WATCH FOR ANNOUNCEMENTS OF ACTIVITIES IN YOUR AREA ON SEPTEMBER 15.

- . FIGHT FOR A WOMAN'S RIGHT TO CHOOSE
- . REPEAL ALL ABORTION LAWS
- . FREELY AVAILABLE, SAFE CONTRACEPTIVES
- . NO FORCED STERILISATION

# EDITORIAL

Y900 3117

Gains won by women in the early seventies are slowly being eroded during the economic crisis. Health care funding is cut in the name of economy, abortion rights are attacked in the name of the family.

The right is becoming more vocal and more organised. It points to the family as the backbone of society. The implication seems to be that if women would only stay in their place the economic uncertainty will go away.

As feminists we cannot allow such a retrogressive political program to go unchallenged. We must continue to put forward our demands and to make our analyses of power relations in society.

A recent leaflet circulated on some university campuses suggests that the demands for the right to choose and the right to control our own bodies are part of male oppression. The authors suggest that only men benefit from easy access to abortion.

It is as if women have no power over their bodies at all; that access to reliable contraception and safe abortion makes all women fair game for exploitative men. These authors are saying that once the fear of pregnancy is not a deterrent to sexual intercourse, a woman can no longer say no and mean it.

They suggest that the only thing that makes men responsible in relationships is the fear of a 'shotgun marriage'. If that is so it is all the more reason to have freely available abortion. Few, if any, women would actively seek a relationship with an unwilling man.

The whole leaflet reeks with a male chauvanist view of male/female relationships, yet asks us to give up the demand for control of our bodies until social relations are changed. The authors seem to think that the demand for control of our bodies is the entire feminist program rather than a necessary first step to complete liberation.

We must not lose sight of the final goal of liberation as we struggle to maintain the few rights we do have and to extend them to all of our sisters.

In New Zealand, we have seen how temporary judicial precedents are. They offer no assurance of our rights. So as we support our sisters in New Zealand we must also remember that in New South Wales we, too, are as vulnerable to the whims of an opportunistic legislature, hopeful of buying a few votes as the electorate moves right in search of security. The security represented by Mum at Home with Milk and Biscuits.

We must hold fast to a feminist analysis of human relationships which sees the domination of women by men in statements about the sanctity of the family. We must not give up in our struggle to control our own lives. First, we must take control of our bodies. We must take control of our bodies away from our fathers, our husbands, our lovers, our doctors and our parliamentarians. We must fight together for our bodies are our own.



## INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR ABORTION RIGHTS

The International Campaign for Abortion Rights was founded at a meeting in London on 10 June 1978. The first activity of ICAR will be to organise the international day of action originally called for by the international feminist meeting in Vincennes, France in May 1977.

### MINUTES OF INTERNATIONAL MEETING ON ABORTION RIGHTS, 10 JUNE 1978.

Present were representatives from: France, Britain, Holland, Belgium, Spain, USA, Switzerland, Italy and Columbia (resident in Belgium).

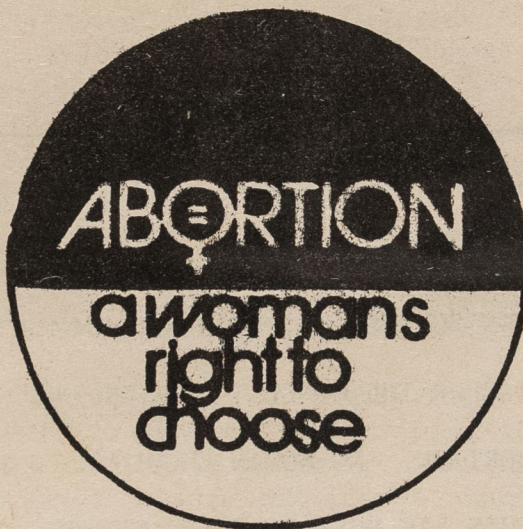
#### 1. Date of International Day of Action

It was suggested that the international day of action on abortion should be in early April 1979. This would give countries time to organise and to gather support from the women's movement and in the labour, students movements etc.

AGREED to have the day of action on 31 March or 7 April 1979, exact date to be decided at next meeting in September, after consulting national groups.

#### 2. Slogans

The demands of the abortion movements in each country were discussed as well as the overall situations. It was felt that the demands for the day of action would have to be general and that each country could elaborate on them to make them more relevant to their specific situation.



AGREED that the international demands for the day of action will be: CONTRACEPTION AND ABORTION ARE A WOMAN'S RIGHT!! NO FORCED STERILISATION!!

#### 3. Coordination

It was decided that one group (country) would have to take responsibility for coordination - this would include preparing mailings and sending out information. Other groups would take on responsibilities later, eg publicity, etc.

AGREED that Britain would be responsible for general coordination at first (pending the approval of NAC).

AGREED all groups will help to finance the work. Each group represented at the next meeting should be asked to contribute 10 pounds sterling or 100 francs (French) or equivalent. Each group should make a regular financial commitment to cover the cost of mailings, phone, etc.

#### 4. Organisation of International Day of Action

There were two suggestions. One suggestion was to have one international demonstration somewhere in Europe. The second suggestion was to have actions in countries throughout the world, countries that couldn't organise alone could participate with a neighbouring country. After discussion, it was agreed to hold simultaneous actions throughout the world. This would involve many more people than one international demonstration. Suggestions to build up international solidarity: bring international speakers to address rallies, picketing at different embassies.

AGREED to send names and addresses of contacts in other countries (especially Latin America, Africa, Asia) to Britain (NAC), to involve as many countries as possible.

#### 5. Next Meeting

Next meeting of ICAR will be held on Saturday, 23 September 1978, in Brussels, Belgium.

WAAC will be in contact with ICAR and report plans for Australia on the International Day of Action in Right to Choose.

# NEW ZEALAND ABORTION LAW

ONE OF THE MOST INHUMAN AND REPRESSIVE  
IN THE WORLD

By Christine Beresford

Only 15 women in Auckland have been able to obtain legal abortions since the repressive anti-abortion legislation passed by the NZ Parliament came into effect on April 1, reports the April 19 issue of the New Zealand Herald. Dr. J.H. Taylor, a consulting gynaecologist at National Women's Hospital, is quoted as saying the women were "desperate and deserving cases".

They also, fortunately, qualified under the terms of the new law. Taylor pointed out that he was able to deal with "only the tip of the iceberg" in granting abortions to women.

In other parts of the country, the situation women face is even worse. No abortion "service" under the terms of the new law exists at all in Wanganui, Taranaki, Nelson, Marlborough, North Otago, or Timaru, as no doctors sought appointment as consultants.

According to the Abortion Supervisory Committee, only in Wellington and Christchurch have an adequate number of consultants been appointed.

Sisters Overseas Service (SOS), which arranges abortions for women in Australia, is still sending between 30 and 40 every week to Australia,

For those women who cannot afford to go to Australia, and who now have no hope of obtaining legal abortions there are few alternatives - back-street abortions at the risk of their lives, enforced pregnancy, or an attempt at self-abortion at the risk of up to 14 years imprisonment.

The new law is one of the most inhuman and repressive in the whole world. The grounds for legal abortion are extremely narrow. Abortion is now legal only if continuation of pregnancy would result in serious danger to the life or to the

physical and mental health of the woman.

To make matters worse, an amendment was added that abortion is legal only when such danger "cannot be averted by other means". Such a provision presumably means that if a woman faced the prospect of mental illness as a result of childbirth, and if this could be "cured" by a stay in a mental institution, then abortion is illegal.

The only other grounds for abortion are incest, or pregnancy in a woman who is "severely subnormal" or "a girl under care and protection as defined by the Crimes Act."

Rape, possible foetal deformity, social and economic factors (such as poverty) are not grounds for abortion and, with the exception of rape, are also excluded as matters to be taken into account when deciding if abortion is permissible.

The new law requires certifying consultants, but few doctors have applied. The reason for this is that under the law a majority of doctors are "pro-abortion extremists".

The General Practitioners Society conducted a survey of its members in December 1977 and found that 55 per cent thought abortion should be a decision between a woman and her doctor. However, doctors cannot become certifying consultants if they hold "extreme" views on abortion.

Extreme views are defined as either (a) the belief that abortions must never be performed or (b) the belief that a woman and her doctor should have the right to make the decision.

Since nearly all anti-abortionists are prepared to see at least some abortions, the effect of this provision is to ensure that only anti-abortionists can become consultants. In fact, a large number of the consultants so far appointed are or have been members of the anti-abortion "Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child" (SPUC).

In addition to the lack of certifying consultants, women face an additional barrier in seeking abortion. The procedure they must follow is designed to make it as difficult as possible to obtain one.

A woman must first gain approval of a doctor, who refers her to two certifying consultants, one of whom must be an obstetrician and gynaecologist. After these two have "certified" the woman, the operating doctor must also agree to do the procedure. A total of four doctors are to make the decision for each woman.

The severity of the abortion law is out of step with what most New Zealanders think about abortion. For the past four or five years, public opinion polls have shown 65 per cent of the population favoring a liberalisation of the abortion laws.

In the last year New Zealand has seen the largest pro-abortion marches ever. Opposition to the law is widespread, and women angered by this attack on their rights have been increasingly taking part in actions opposing the law and demanding the right to choose.

An abortion conference organised by the Women's National Abortion Action Campaign (WONAAC) held in March drew 180 women. The women there decided to make 1978 "Abortion Action Year" and will continue to campaign for the repeal of restrictive abortion laws and for legislation which will safeguard a woman's right to choose. The conference has planned nation-wide marches for September 15 (the anniversary of the day NZ women won the vote).

The weak position of the NZ Labor Party on the abortion question is being challenged at this year's conference, with delegates being called on to vote for the repeal of the existing abortion laws and to throw the issue open to referendum. The Labor leadership has consistently ducked taking a pro-abortion stand, leaving the issue as a "conscience" matter.

Another indication of the growth of opposition to the law is that some unions are beginning to take pro-abortion positions. The National Abortion Conference was endorsed by the Wellington Insurance Union and the Auckland Public Service Association.

The attack on abortion rights in NZ should be seen in the context of attempts to cut back the gains made by women internationally. In countries where abortion laws were liberalised in the late '60s and early '70s (USA, Britain, France) attempts are being made to interfere with women's access to safe, legal abortion. Such attacks are made through both legal restrictions and cutbacks in funding and abortion facilities.

Any attack on the right of women to abortion anywhere in the world is an attack on all women. The fight of NZ women to repeal the repressive abortion legislation and win the right to choose must be supported here in any way possible.

Reprinted from the AUS leaflet OUT OF THE BACK-YARDS AND INTO THE STREETS - FIGHT FOR FREE, SAFE ABORTIONS NOW!

If you are interested in working for the repeal of abortion laws, selling *Right to Choose* and working in the campaign, contact your local WAAC group at Women's House or Women's Centre.

## Abortion Referrals

### Perth

In W.A., Abortion Information Service provides trained voluntary lay women counsellors to offer information, support, friendship and practical assistance to women wishing to obtain legal abortions and to women who would like to 'talk it over' with another woman. Counsellors also offer help to men and women who would like to obtain contraception including sterilisation. The service is free.

Telephone: 384 2425 - Anytime.

### Brisbane

Control (a feminist abortion counselling and referral agency) is now operating in Brisbane. They work closely with Control in Sydney to provide a continuity of practical and emotional support for Qld women who travel south for abortions.

Control and other groups in Brisbane organized a picket outside the Health Dept. at the end of June to protest against proposed changes to Medibank, such as the cessation of bulk-billing. They also protested against the proposal by Fed. Minister Hunt to make abortion an 'optional extra'. The lunch time picket was reported to be very successful with about 100 people attending.

W.A.A.C. at Qld University is active in the campaign to prevent A.U.S. (Australian Union of Students) from changing its policy on abortion from its present supportive position to that of 'no policy', which means in fact favouring the status quo. They will need a lot of support as there is strong pressure from the conservative groups on campus to alter the existing policy.

CONTROL BRISBANE

Phone: (07) 521.444

# New Zealand Abortion Rights Conference

In Sydney recently there has been some discussion about how Women's Liberation can meet the concerted attacks on women in areas such as health care, employment, abortion rights and child care. New Zealand women are facing the same difficult problems in their fight against the Contraception, Sterilisation and Abortion Law. These two accounts of the Conference may help us organise to fight for women's rights in Australia.

The first account of the Conference and the proposals that were passed comes from the New Zealand Women's National Abortion Action Campaign newsletter. WONAAC was the initiator of the Conference. The second is an editorial from Broadsheet New Zealand's feminist magazine and brings out some of the questions about feminist theory and practice, which were highlighted by the Conference.

## REPORT

The Women's Abortion Rights Conference opened in Auckland on March 18, and attracted 183 women from various parts of the country. Uppermost in their minds was the critical situation facing New Zealand women with unwanted pregnancies. For two days the participants discussed the anti-abortion laws, assessed the situation of the abortion rights movement and made plans to launch a counter-offensive against the government's attacks on women's right to abortion.

The conference overwhelmingly passed a proposal calling for the repeal of the Contraception, Sterilisation and Abortion legislation and all other restrictive abortion laws and called for legislation that would safeguard a woman's right to choose safe, legal and free abortion.

To achieve this aim it was decided to initiate a year of activity to highlight the abortion issue and declare 1978 to be Abortion Action Year. A series of peaceful protests was projected beginning with the weekend of April 1, when the new law comes into full force, at the opening of Parliament (May 11) and on September 15 (Women's Suffrage Weekend) when a nationwide mobilisation is planned.

Plans were also made to intervene with the issue during the election campaign later this year, and to protest the laws at meetings of the leaders of the major political parties.

A National Publicity Committee was set up to coordinate national publicity material for these activities and to liaise with abortion rights groups around the country. It will work from Auckland.

Discussion and debate took place around a number of proposals. The Wellington March 8 Committee proposed that demonstrations be held on Friday, June 2. This was voted down by the conference, reasoning that the opening of Parliament would provide a better focus for nationwide protests.

Another proposal which was rejected was for a 'national strike day when women withdraw their support from men in any way they can in protest against the abortion legislation.' Speakers opposing this motion pointed out that it was not individual men who are denying women the right to abortion but parliament and that the way to win abortion rights is through a visible campaign by women to force parliament to accede to their demands.



Through the plenary discussions and workshops which preceded them, all the women present were able to fully participate in the decisions of the conference. Time was also allotted for workshops where women planned action related to specific areas of activity: Women and trade unions, Campus women, Lesbian women, etc.

When WONAAC initiated the call for such a conference it aimed at providing a national forum which could bring together women from all walks of life, with views representative of the broad spectrum of opinion in the abortion rights movement, to map out a plan of united action for 1978. If success is gauged by the achievement of the aim set out then this conference was an undoubted success. In its endorsements and participants the conference involved women from all shades of political opinion, from all groups active in the abortion rights and the women's movements and, importantly, attracted many women and organisations - including trade unions and Maori activists - not previously involved. The almost unanimous adoption of the main proposals for action by such a diverse gathering provides a sound basis for a successful year of abortion rights activity.

KAY McVEY

### PROPOSALS ADOPTED AT ABORTION RIGHTS CONFERENCE

#### AN ACTION PERSPECTIVE FOR 1978

##### Preamble

The passing into law of the Contraception, Sterilisation and Abortion legislation last December, has stimulated the broadest ever opposition to the restrictive abortion laws. A wider cross-section of the general public and of the women's movement have taken a public stand on the abortion issue. This ranges from the REPEAL petition, SOS, the NZUSA-initiated March 8 actions, WEL's planned intensive lobbying of candidates and the activities of ALRANZ and WONAAC.

The Women's Abortion Rights Conference should not set itself against these developments but should seek to complement and incorporate them through its action perspective.

This gathering of so many women, from so many different backgrounds and viewpoints, could not hope to, and should not try to come to agreement on every little point of action. Rather we should agree on the main focal points for 1978 on which we can all come in together and put maximum pressure on the lawmakers regardless of what other activities we are involved in through other organisations.

In determining the major focal points for action, we should have one guiding principle - the need to involve the largest possible number of women to campaign on their own behalf for the right to abortion. This means in particular that the campaign must be open to all women of whatever political persuasion and the activities should be non-partisan towards all political parties.

**PROPOSAL:** That the Women's Abortion Rights Conference calls for the repeal of the Contraception, Sterilisation and Abortion legislation and all other restrictive abortion legislation and that we call for legislation that will

safe-guard a woman's right to choose safe legal abortion, and declares 1978 to be Abortion Action Year; and that in Abortion Action Year we call on all women's and abortion rights organisations to intensify their own activity in whatever form they feel appropriate to advice the cause of abortion rights; and

that we actively support the REPEAL petition; and

that we call on all abortion rights forces to stimulate the broadest possible discussion of the abortion issue through the use of the media, speaking tours, and by raising the issue in church groups, community organisation, unions, political parties, and educational institutions; and

that we seek every opportunity to bring the issue to the attention of the politicians and the general public, in particular by calling for peaceful protests at (1) the weekend of April 1, (2) to coincide with the opening of Parliament, and (3) the public meetings of the leaders of the major political parties; and

that to culminate Abortion Action Year and bring the greatest possible pressure to bear on the politicians during the election period, we call for a massive lobby on Friday, September 15, (Women's Suffrage Weekend), that is a nationwide abortion rights mobilisation. Proposed by the Conference Organising Committee, Pat Stockley (Auckland NOW), the Council for the Single Mother and Her Child, and Francese Wright (Co-ordinator Auckland Coaction).

Proposal: That a nationwide leafletting campaign be mounted, the leaflet to be a brief explanation of the abortion legislation in the form of questions and answers using the most basic laypersons language possible.

Proposal: That after thorough investigation unsympathetic doctors that hold positions as certifying consultants have their names published. And that their patients be encouraged to go elsewhere.

Proposal: (a) That the Repeal petition be taken to the Easter Show.

(b) That a large eye-catching poster be prepared alongside which women taking the Repeal petition can stand advertising future action and a contact phone number.

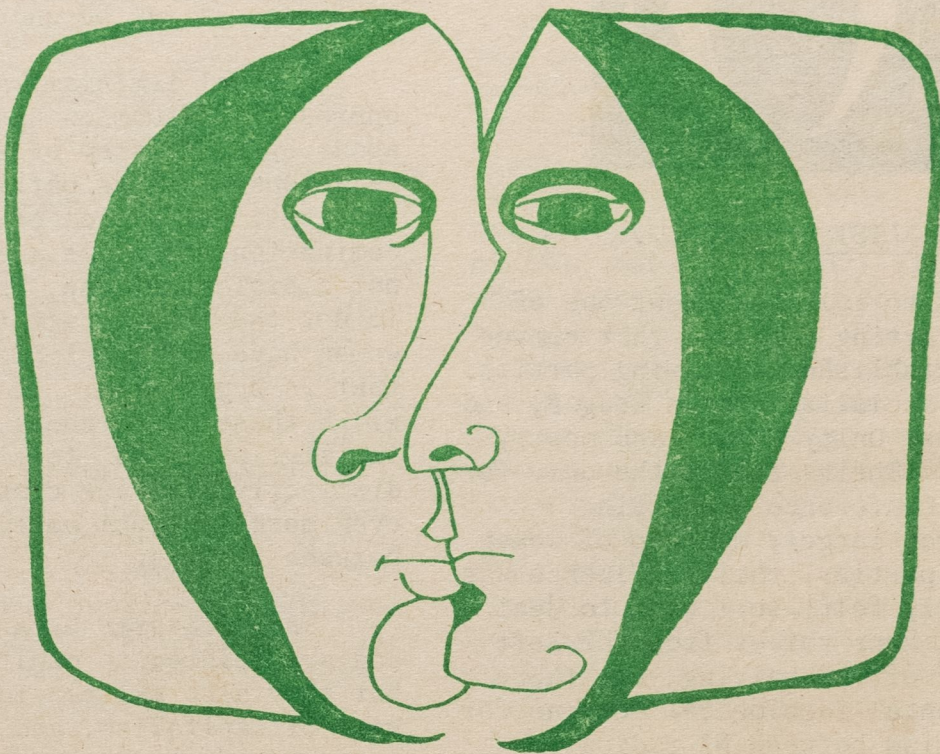
(c) That groups of women attend large sporting meetings, eg rugby, rugby league, soccer, racing, and carry banners or wear political statements calling for women's abortion rights. Banner carriers could run around the field at half-time to capitalise on a large captive audience.

(d) That women during the September 15 protests chain themselves to Parliament Buildings in Wellington. Government House in Auckland, and wherever else considered appropriate, as a visual display of our anger and symbolising how we are chained to the state with restrictive legislation.

PROPOSAL: That there be an information sheet with names and phone numbers of women in pro-abortion organisations circulated among all groups and organisations for instant contact re information.

PROPOSAL: That we aim to find out the opinion on abortion of all the candidates in the general elections and inform the voters in each electorate of their candidates' positions on this issue; that we aim to do this by distributing leaflets and posters, participating in election meetings, organising pickets and open election forums; that we encourage women to go to the polls at the coming election and to seriously consider the abortion issue as a major priority when casting their vote.

PROPOSAL: That there be a national meeting in Wellington in July to plan, as new issues and problems are likely to have arisen by then.



## COMMENT

Organising an abortion campaign - what is the best way to do it? JILL RANSTEAD looks at the recent Women's Abortion Rights Conference held in Auckland, and shows how differences in organisation spring from differences in ideology.

This was to be a straight report of the Women's Abortion Rights Conference held in Auckland over the weekend of March 18-19. But when I started to think about the hows and whys of what happened during those two days, I found it impossible not to go into other matters - like the abortion issue itself, and New Zealand feminism, its aims, goals, direction, dynamics and what has happened to them - and then to see these in relation to the Conference.

To say that the Women's Liberation Movement is in a state of depression is nothing new. A political movement needs to have a coherent ideology, clear strategy, effective methods of communication and a definite direction in which it is heading, before it can be said to be a movement, i.e. something that is moving. More than that, it needs some form of organisation to keep these together and developing. We do not have this. Or if we do, it's a well-kept secret, which hardly makes for an effective political movement. So the Movement as such is depressed; split and scattered, directionless and powerless. The extent to which this has happened is roughly equivalent to the extent to which we have lost control we need to start identifying some of these forces. Because if we don't we face the danger of disintegration co-optation and ultimate failure as

over ourselves as a political force. Couple this with the fact that the legislation over the last year has made it even more difficult for us to keep control over our own lives, and there's another kick in the gut.

Sometimes I wonder whether it's going to be the pressures of this society that will get us first, or the Movement that is supposed to be liberating us from it. If there is a Movement - it seems to me to be more a collection of forces, each one existing in antagonism to another, and all of them pulling in every which way except in the direction we wanted in the first place. Perhaps this process is necessary, or at least inevitable; but I think

an effective political movement. 'We flicker in our heads like so many shadows; we break up and disappear through myriad terrors, when the ideas and dynamics that gave us our images walk out of lives .. We become fertile ground for grand compromise.' 1

### THE CONFERENCE AND THE CONFLICTS

Such a process was quite clearly taking place during the Women's Abortion Rights Conference. Most of the forces were represented there, and each one performed the usual conflicts. Witness the media issue. With their customary arrogance and ignorance, the media failed to arrive in time for the opening speech. So they wanted to interview the speaker and, as the Conference was supposed to be in committee for the rest of the weekend, they asked if they could film the Conference room during the lunch hour. This request was duly put to the Conference floor and debated. It was a very much *deja-vu*, with all the same old tired arguments: 'We need the media to get to the women who couldn't get here', countered by 'We don't want anything to do with them', countered by 'Our collective silence is just what they want, so we can't ignore them', countered by 'Any coverage we get is likely to do more harm than good'. There may be some truth in each of these arguments, but the end result was an interview with Kay McVey (who gave the opening speech) and a few shots of an empty Women's Abortion Rights Conference, with some whinging son-of-a-media 'explaining' what had happened.

Damage was done; but it could have

# NZ Conference

been avoided, or at least handled better if the basic issues had been sorted out. The arguments that were used over the media question conflicted violently, but the reasons for such conflict - i.e. the political differences which lay behind each argument - remained untouched, spectres hovering in the atmosphere.



## BETWEEN SOCIALIST FEMINISM....

I want to talk now about one of these conflicting forces - that coming from the established left-wing parties, namely the Socialist Action League, and the Socialist Unity Party, and mostly the former. Theirs is not the only force, but as the Conference Organising Committee was largely made up of women from these parties, their influence was most strongly felt, so I want to deal with it. I hear voices from the left accusing me of red-baiting, but there are fundamental ideological reasons for the antagonism between NZ radical feminists and traditional Socialist women. I do not pretend to know all the twistings and turnings of this conflict, but will attempt to sort out the main points of departure.

These, I think, are based in the explanation of the roots of our oppression as women, and in the definition of the enemy. These differences are also found in the approach to the abortion issue. The left has long defined abortion as a diversion from the main struggle, which it sees as the struggle between the classes that have been formed by capitalist society. Now the analysis seems to have shifted slightly to accept the fact that the denial of our right to control our bodies is part of the foundations upon which this oppressive society rests. But this analysis is confined to a purely class struggle perspective - we women are denied this right because it keeps us down and in a position which helps maintain and perpetuate the capitalist system. So if we want to win our right to abortion, if we want to win our liberation from this position, then this system first needs to be overthrown. The class struggle thus becomes paramount, and sex oppression becomes something built into and caused by capitalism. The enemy is the ruling capitalist class.

## ....AND RADICAL FEMINISM

Such an analysis is based on strictly economic considerations, saying that these form the material basis of any society, and make up the conditions that determine our lives. Radical feminism does not deny this, and sees the pressing need for the transformation of capitalism. But there is another level of reality that does not stem from the economics of production, or the way in which society organizes production and labour. There is also the fact that women are able to reproduce as well,

and just as the worker has little or no control over his or her labour power, women do not have control over their reproductive systems. And never did have, from the first primitive tribes through to the present day, when despite the development of modern day technology, we still do not have decently safe contraception, or access to abortion services as of right. Also based on this ability to reproduce is the idea that women exist to serve this end, an idea that has kept us confined to one world and its related work, and men to another. An idea that has resulted in the rigid definition of ourselves as heterosexual, refusing to let us live with and love other women as we would men. We are at the mercy of forces as yet beyond our control.

Radical feminism says that this oppressive situation has been brought about by the system of sexual and social relations known as patriarchy - i.e. the institutionalisation of male power and domination. Man, as a social grouping, not a biological one, is the enemy. It is not the simple fact that men and women have different biological builds that is oppressive; it's the way in which these differences have become institutionalised, forcing us into distinctly separate classes, with an even more distinct power imbalance between the two.

These classes exist alongside of, and are related to capitalist classes, but they also existed long before the rise of capitalism, and they have a separate identity. Traditional socialism fails to recognize this on a theoretical and political level and so its analysis is incomplete. The class struggle may transform capitalism and capitalist relations, but it won't change the patriarchal system. There is an interesting conversation between Margaret Sanger and a German gynaecologist, where she asked him why he opposed contraception and favoured abortion. He answered, 'We will never give the control of our numbers to the women themselves. What, let them control the future of the human race? With abortion it is in our hands; WE must make the decisions.' Changing the means of production will not change these attitudes, the causes of these attitudes and their oppressive effects. If self-determination can be said to be the power by which we gain control over the conditions that determine our lives, then we must have complete control over our bodies, our reproductive system. This is our struggle as women, and it does not deny the struggle for control over the way in which we work and produce. Nor does it exclude the struggle to regain control of Aotearoa; the land we live on and what it meant before the Waitangi treaty was signed, thus officially setting into motion the system known as racism.

## BACK AT THE CONFERENCE

We need to fight on all these fronts, not one to the exclusion of another, or one at the expense of another. I think the main criticism I have of the Women's Abortion Rights Conference is that it effectively did just that, sliding around any moves, and opposing any proposals that touched on the patriarchal system, the causes and the nature of our oppression.

One example of this was an action proposal asking for the support of the Conference for those 'individuals or organisations throughout the

country that educate on or provide non-exploitative facilities for menstrual extraction to women in need'. This was opposed by members of the SAL and SUP on the grounds that it did not attack the power structures. But if it is seen that the lack of control we have over our bodies is very much tied into the power structures, then the development of good menstrual extraction facilities by women's organisations is an attack on those structures. On its own, it could not be ultimately effective, but it is a constructive step to take and one that should have been supported as such. It's the same old conflict - that based on the different definitions of the power structures held by traditional socialists and radical feminists.

There is also the matter of an amendment to one of the proposals submitted by the Conference Organising Committee. This proposal asked for the repeal of all restrictive abortion legislation, 'so that women may have the right to choose ..' The amendment qualified the last phrase 'freedom from financial exploitation and with protection from exploitative and patriarchal medical practice.' This caused some stirrings from the left, which argued that there might be a difference of opinion about the wording of that amendment and so successfully put another one forward: '..and that we call for legislation which will safeguard women's right to choose safe, legal and free abortion.'

Another proposal, submitted by the Every Woman Can Collective, stated that 'men have power over women. All relationships between men and women are political,' and was followed by a proposal calling for a national women's strike day, where women would withdraw their support from men in any way they can in protest against the abortion legislation. While I am unsure about the political effectiveness of this, both short-term and long term, and I am doubtful about such statements as, 'the only valid proposal that this conference can make is the withdrawal of the personal support which each woman gives to the patriarchy through individual men', these proposals were at least a recognition of the political nature of our sexuality, and sexual relations. A recognition that was not apparent elsewhere during that Conference.



## THE PROBLEMS OF ORGANISATION

More important, though, is the structure and organisation of the Conference. It was organised into two main sections: discussion of action proposals; and area workshops. The second section was designed to bring together women of similar orientation and interest to discuss the abortion issue as it particularly affected them. From such discussions were to come the ways and means by which the women from each workshop could best organize in her area. The reports and proposals from

this section however, were quite separate from the action proposals of the other section. These proposals took up the best part of the Conference and were largely geared towards days of action - demonstrations on both the opening of Parliament and on Suffrage Day. The Conference Organising Committee became a National Publicity Committee, set up to co-ordinate these activities and to make sure that as much publicity as possible was given to them. It seems possible that the communications gap between the action proposals and the area workshops during the Conference is to reproduce itself at national level. This possibility was made clearer when someone from the floor suggested that the National Publicity Committee be made responsible to the different regional groupings. A suggestion that was opposed on the grounds that the Committee would not have the time to keep constant communication and consultation with the rest of the country if it was going to operate effectively.

There were a lot of good suggestions and proposals put forward and carried by the Conference. Like a nationwide leafletting campaign to explain the abortion legislation; the publication of the names of unsympathetic doctors; the distribution of leaflets at election meetings; the circulation of a contact list of WONAAC and NZUSA women; the stimulation of the abortion issue through the media, speaking tours, and through various community groups. But I would have felt a lot happier about these if they were firmly tied into an organisation that was in touch with the rest of the country. Central committees might work well for traditional socialist organisations, but I have doubts about their effectiveness in building a mass women's liberation movement. I would also have felt a lot happier if I thought that this organisation was heading in a direction towards our long-term objective - i.e. changing the patriarchal system. I don't think it was. The ideological differences between radical feminism and traditional socialism that I talked about before, do have their influence and impact, and I think there is a possibility of a mass diversion from our struggle, a possibility that the ideas and dynamics that set us into motion in the first place will become lost, split and scattered, directionless and powerless.

The confusions and diffusions within the movement run deep; that much is obvious. Little else is. It has been a very difficult article to write, and perhaps I could be accused of reactionary pessimism. But I know that there is always a tension between what we vaguely think we could have, with the struggle to resolve the gap between the two. If we want to change the world for the total liberation of women, then we need to transform this movement from the mess that it is in, into a strong and effective political force. It can be done. This mess can be sorted out, must be sorted out, and soon. It is clarity of ideas, purpose and direction that attracts women and we need both. There will be no revolution without them.

1. From *Me Jane*, Vol 2, No. 2, April 1974.

Reprinted, with permission, from *Broadsheet*, New Zealand's Feminist magazine, No. 59, May 1978.

## ARSON AT S.O.S.

The Sisters Overseas Service (SOS), an organisation which helps women to get abortions in Australia, was burned down at Easter. SANDRA CONEY reports.

Easter is a time when arsonists' matchbox fingers start twitching. At least that's what you might conclude from the Easter Monday attack on SOS headquarters in New Street, Auckland. The women workers at SOS suspected something like this might happen. The AMAC hospital in Epsom was attacked on April 1, two years ago - there seems to be something about the Easter festival that works anti-abortion fanatics into a fit of vengeful fervour and sends them looking for the petrol and the matches. The SOS women had rung the police before Easter suggesting a special eye to be kept on the premises because, besides forebodings about the time of the year, there had been several strange events in the weeks leading up to the attack: a telephoned bomb threat, four men in a car parked outside the offices all one day, a dazed looking man walking around in the streets outside with a pair of surgical forceps in his hand. All these events worried the SOS women and so fortunately all important files and documents were removed from the offices before Easter.

the arsonist expecting that they would be destroyed in the ensuing blaze. But the old model stove had fused, leaving the arsonist's equipment intact. The police are trying to trace where these containers were bought and have been able to fingerprint them.

### WHO DID IT - CRANKS OR ORGANISED

Of course people are asking each other who could have done this and most of the answers are that of course it must be some extreme anti-abortion crank and that the organised anti-abortion would not be responsible for such an act. But it is quite likely that the firing of SOS is not just the isolated act of a fringe element in the anti-abortion ranks but further evidence that arson is being used internationally as a strategy against institutions performing abortions or helping women to get them. Besides the New Zealand experience of the firing of AMAC and SOS, clinics all over the world have been burned down or damaged by fire. The Preterm clinic in Sydney was severely damaged by fire a couple of years ago and in the States there have been a number of similar occurrences, particularly at Preterm clinics. It may be stretching coincidence just too far to believe that anti-abortion 'cranks' in such diverse places as Auckland, Sydney and Boston all independently arrived at the idea of committing arson on their local abortion service.

Fireman shovels out the debris.

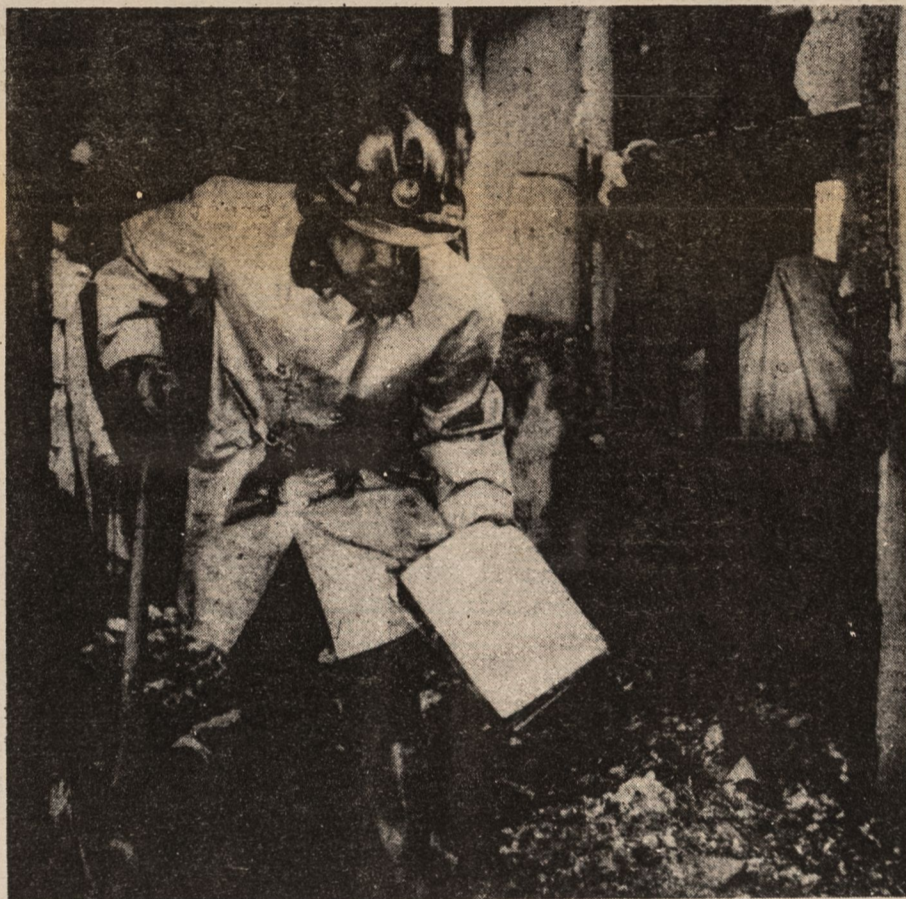


Photo: Sandra Coney

The fire was lit about 3.30 am on the morning of Monday, 27 March, and because the seat of the fire was in the side of the building facing the empty CSMC offices, the blaze was not noticed by occupants of the motel on the lower side till 4.30 am, by which time it was well under way. By morning the building was a charred and soggy shell. Three attempts had been made to light a fire: once on the floor of an office, another in a hall cupboard and the final one, which took off, in the upstairs hostel accommodation. This burned fiercely dropping through into the waiting room, kitchen and offices downstairs.

On Tuesday morning, an SOS worker removing undamaged items from the kitchen found several large plastic containers which had held an accelerant on the stove. The stove had been turned on to high underneath them -

### A TACTIC IN THE BATTLE

Arson has long been used as a political tactic; even our suffragette sisters in Britain burned down buildings to show their anger and impatience after reformist tactics appeared to be getting them nowhere. Arson, when directed at a functioning service, is a crippling form of attack. As a weapon for anti-abortionists it is particularly useful. For all the while that they are using conventional tactics (lobbying, meetings, publishing) to try to get restrictive abortion laws, they can see that abortions are still being performed (or babies murdered as they see it).

Arson is the easiest, most effective way of preventing this happening. So while organised anti-abortionists may disassociate them-

# THE RIGHT TO LIFE — WHOSE RIGHT? WHOSE LIFE?

Many of those opposing a woman's right to choose say that they are pro-life. This suggests that those of us who are pro-choice are also pro-death. Such an argument is patently false, yet does have a fine rhetorical ring to it.

Who are those who put forward the 'pro-life' argument and what are they really saying? In N.S.W. the Right To Life organisation claims 12,000 members. They work very closely with the health fund, the Hibernian Australasian Benefit Society. So closely, in fact, that until his recent death, the president of Right To Life, Sid Alewood, used the Hibernian office. The Hibernians are so far the only health fund to delete payments for abortions from their schedule of benefits.

The Right To Life also works closely with the Catholic Church and some politicians. Sue Russell, secretary of the Phillip electorate branch told Anne Summers, 'For Right To Life Sunday we sent all the churches sermon notes. I don't know if they used them. For the recent Bill we sent lots of petitions to Jack Birney (MHR for Phillip), asking that medical benefits be deleted. He sent a telegram back along the lines of 'good work'. He gave the impression he was for us.'

On August 27, the Right To Life will hold a rally in Hyde Park. The main speaker will be U.S. Congressman Henry Hyde. Hyde is the initiator of the amendment to the funding of the U.S. health benefit program medicaid which allows states to refuse to fund abortions. This is an action which discriminates against the poor, since only people on welfare can receive medicaid. Hyde cares nothing for the rights of women. He does not care that his amendment affects only the poor. In a speech in Congress he said: 'I certainly would like to prevent, if I could legally, anybody having an abortion, a rich woman, a middle class woman, or a poor woman. Unfortunately, the only vehicle available is the HEW medicaid bill. A life is a life.'

Perhaps a life is a life, but he clearly does not think much of the lives of women faced with the choice of backyard abortion or unwanted motherhood. That Hyde Park rally is being billed as a family picnic day. Buses will bring people in from the suburbs.

In September, Mary Whitehouse will be touring Australia for the Festival of Light. She will be speaking about the need for all of us to conform to her standards of good behaviour in order to make Australia a better place in which to live. Contrary to Whitehouse's opinion, attitudes do not change the world. Our attitudes are formed by the society in which we find ourselves. If the Festival of Light finds that society offensive, they should work to change actual conditions of life - or would that require a different political vision?

What is the political vision of those pro-life groups? The authors of 'A New Call to the People of Australia', which is supported by the Festival of Light, begin this way:

'We call on all Australians to safeguard the twin constatuions of marriage and the family, believing them to be the rock on which stable and healthy communities are built.'



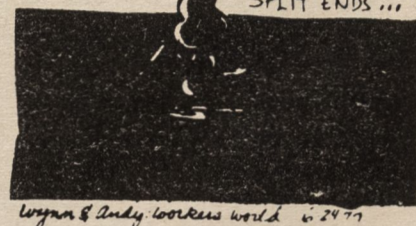
In this society those twin institutions act as a control on the sexuality and life chances of women. Women are seen as belonging first to their fathers and then to their husbands. As long as adequate contraception and safe abortion are denied, any attempts to live outside those possessive relationships is filled with danger. So the supporters of the Right to Life are supporters of the institutional relationships which make women inferior to men - which make women the possession of men - which keep women from being free.

The Right to Life has little to do with the rights of those living in human relationships today. How does the Right to Life propose to support those who it encourages to continue unwanted pregnancies? It suggests members knit baby clothes for those unhappy women! What a joke! A hand-knit jumper offered to help a woman whose life has been altered by one act of sexual intercourse.

It is time to expose these 'Pro-Lifers' for what they are. They are oppressors of women. They value the power relations of society more than the lives and dignity of women. They are not deterred in their campaign by the prospect of poor women being forced to rely on backyarders if abortion is removed from all health benefit schedules. Nor are they worried about the deaths that might result. 'God gives life and God takes it away', Sid Alewood told Anne Summers.

ALICE STEWART

FALLEN ARCHES, ANTS  
AT PICNICS, FLIES IN  
THE BUTTERMILK,  
POST-NASAL DRIP,  
RECEDING HAIRLINES,  
SOGGY FRENCH FRIES,  
SPLIT ENDS...



## ARSON AT S.O.S.

sevles from the firing of SOS, it is quite conceivable that the act is not a random one.

After the AMAC 1976 arson two Hare Krishna men blew themselves up while making expolsives in their Grey Lynn backyard. There were suspicions that the bomb had been intended for AMAC (they had spoken to associates of 'getting the meat works' and were violently anti-abortion) and therefore they were implicated in the earlier arson. Many people latched onto that explanation as it was more comfortable (Hare Krishna freak/irrational act/won't happen again) than acknowledging that arson is a tactic in this battle. This latest act indicates that the same people might be responsible for both acts of arson since the tactic, the timing and the method in both fires is remarkably similar.

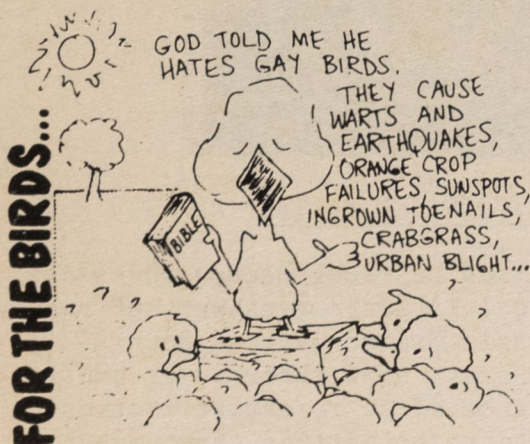
Besides being disruptive and destructive, arson is also intimidating. Victims of an attack wonder when it will happen again and start to fear for their personal safety and for the safety of the placd where they live and those who live with them. Only strong political convictions enable people attacked in this way to carry on.

SOS is now looking for new premises, preferably brick and in a well-lit place. They are not letting the attack get them down and are enthusiastically going ahead with plans to expand into a feminist health clinic with self-help groups and educational programmes.

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