

Abortion is a women's

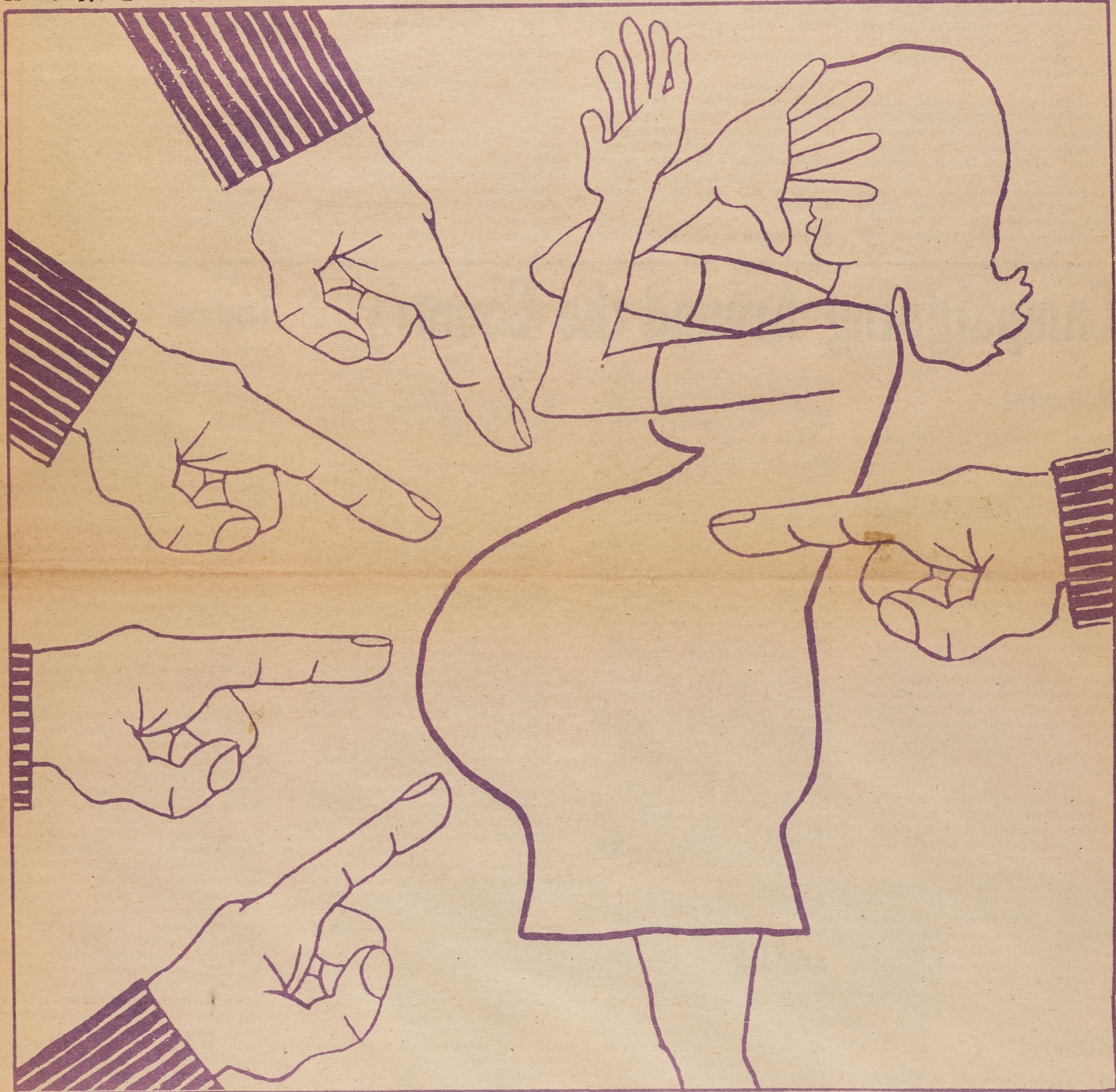
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Right to Choose!



Issue No 2

20 cents



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Editorial

The response to the first issue of Right to Choose has reinforced our belief in the importance of the abortion issue. The reaction of the many women who bought the paper on the street, at meetings etc. was extremely enthusiastic, with women of all ages stopping to talk, to find out what was being done by the Women's Abortion Action Campaign and others working for a change in the present laws, and to express their support.

This response alone provided a sample of the latent interest and support that exists for the right of women to abortion and also for other women's issues. We know that an overwhelming majority of women support us in our campaign and think that women should have the right to decide to have an abortion. We know that women are generally indignant that

this decision should be always in the hands of men — politicians, doctors, psychiatrists, priests, husbands etc.

But the problem is how to encourage and organise this support into a political force which can actually change things; and to demonstrate to other women that we have got the power to change things if only we get together.

To be successful in this, we have to be active and visible. We have to get our views across at every available opportunity, we have to solicit the support of a wide range of individuals and we have to organise activities which can give people a chance to show their active support of our aim.

WAAC is still in an early stage in

attempting to build a successful abortion rights movement but we've got plenty of ideas and determination. Right to Choose is one way by which we can get our aims and ideas across to people and we hope to make it better and more regular in the coming months so that it reflects the growth and experiences of the abortion movement. On March 7 in Sydney and March 21 in Melbourne we are holding public meetings. In Sydney the feminist play about abortion by Myrna Lamb, a US playwright, will be produced as a feature of the public meeting. We will also be undertaking an endorsement drive to get as many endorsements for our campaign as possible, from among all kinds of well-known people who support our aims.

On May 11, one year from the defeat of the Medical Practice Clarification Bill put forward in Federal Parliament by Labor members David McKenzie and Tony Lamb, WAAC will be holding demonstrations calling for the repeal of all abortion laws. These actions will

also be a reminder that women did not take the defeat of that Bill as any permanent setback but are resolved to keep up the fight to entirely remove laws restricting and prohibiting abortion.

We think it is important to build a large and visible movement which can try to exert continual pressure on this issue and make use of the enormous potential weight and resources of the masses of women who agree with what we are doing. The demonstrations on May 11 are a positive step in getting across our aims and helping to give many more women the confidence to join us in our campaign.

Any support or help you can give in the form of ideas, endorsement, money, equipment or time would be greatly welcomed. Help us to build May 11 into the biggest demonstration yet of women's feelings on this question.

MARCH MAY 11 TO REPEAL ALL ABORTION LAWS AND FOR FREELY AVAILABLE, SAFE CONTRACEPTIVES !

Campaigning Around the Country

Melbourne

Towards the end of 1973 Melbourne WAAC held a number of suburban public meetings which helped to establish important groups of supporters around Melbourne, eager to be involved in building and extending the campaign.

On November 1, a successful film night was held at the Carlton cinema which gave a good boost to our finances, necessary for effective functioning this year.

WAAC will be involved in the International Women's Day activities in early March, organised around a wide range of women's demands relating to work, childcare, education legal rights as well as the repeal of abortion laws and freely available contraceptives and birth-control information.

A public meeting is planned for March 21 aimed at bringing the abortion issue to public notice and building the coalition further. The biggest activity yet planned for this year is a demonstration on May 10 or 11 in conjunction with women in other cities. This is planned to coincide with the anniversary of the defeat of the McKenzie/Lamb bill in Federal parliament last year and is seen as an opportunity to express our determination to keep up our fight to have all abortion abortion laws repealed.

Adelaide

In Adelaide a women's health group called The Body Politic has been set up and this includes a WAAC group.

Beginning in April The Body Politic is beginning a series of radio programs based on "Our Bodies, Our Selves". "Our Bodies, Our Selves" is a book for and by women written by the Boston Women's Health Book Collective. It contains information on all aspects of women's sexuality from a feminist point of view and makes excellent reading.

As part of their campaign the group has produced and is distributing a broadsheet called "How not to get pregnant". The response to this has been encouraging. Already 4000 copies have been handed out. They have been particularly well received at high schools.

The group also plans to write an account of the current situation regarding abortion in South Australia. Despite the "liberalised" abortion laws in South Australia women are still in a very oppressed position as regards getting abortions. They plan to write an article exposing the whole situation and explaining why it is important to fight for total repeal of all abortion laws. We intend to print this article in Right to Choose when it is finished.

The group is also planning to organise a night to show the WAAC slide show some time in mid April.

Armidale

Despite their small numbers the group of women in Armidale who are supporting the WAAC campaign are very active and have sent us lots of helpful information for Right to Choose.

They sold all the copies of Right

to Choose that we sent up — 30 in all, and are enthusiastic about receiving the next issue in time for the University of New England orientation week.

Some of these women are involved in producing the local WEL newspaper.

An action is being planned in Armidale to co-incide with our proposed demonstration on May 11

Paper Sales

Our first issue of Right to Choose has been very well received wherever it has been circulated. We feel pleased with the interest and the enthusiastic response of women to the paper and the abortion issue generally.

In Sydney about 500 papers have been sold in a number of different ways — at women's liberation meetings and demonstrations, at other public meetings, in pubs, on campuses and on the street.

Street sales were very encouraging as we sold the paper to a broad section of women. A number of men have shown interest in Right to Choose and expressed their support.

Melbourne WAAC has also been successful in distributing the paper, selling over 400 copies. In addition papers have been sold in Taree and Armidale.

We have also received a good number of subscriptions. If you haven't already subscribed send in your subscription with this issue. We need your support.

Campuses

With the campus year about to begin there are great opportunities for women on campus to participate in the right for abortion. Much support can be gained from students and students' unions by way of publicity and finance, not to mention drawing more women into the movement.

Last year campus WAAC groups were set up on Macquarie University and University of NSW in Sydney. At Macquarie the group was formed to publicise and work around the June 30 demonstration. The group won the support of a majority of students at a general meeting to ratify a decision by the Students' Council to give \$150 to WAAC. This was done at a time when the Right to Life Association was at a peak of activity in opposition to the Medical Practice Clarification Bill relating to abortion.

The group at the University of NSW was set up some time after June 30. As a result of the lull in activity at this time the group was not extremely active, but they started things moving and set the scene for a more active group there this year.

During orientation week this year women from WAAC will be on most campuses selling Right to Choose and other women's literature. They will also be collecting names of interested women to start up new groups on every campus. They will have plenty to do working to build the planned demonstrations in May. These groups will be trying to get material in student newspapers — as well as producing their own leaflets etc. Also student councils can be approached for support.

So there's lots of activity for women on campus who wish to participate in the struggle for the right to abortion in Australia today.

How to get in touch

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Women's Abortion Action Coalition,
16 Little La Trobe Street,
Melbourne 3000

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Women's Abortion Action Campaign
25 Alberta Street,
Sydney 2000
Phone 61.7325 or Wendy 660.1990



Interview with David McKenzie

On May 10th last year two Labor Members of Federal Parliament, David McKenzie, the member for Diamond Valley, and Tony Lamb, the member for La Trobe, put forward a bill entitled the Medical Practice Clarification Bill advocating reform of the current abortion laws for the Australian Territories. This Bill created a fierce debate within the community between supporters and opponents of a women's right to abortion. The Bill was subsequently defeated with an amendment calling for an enquiry into abortion in Australia being carried. Almost twelve months later Right to Choose discussed with David McKenzie the effect of that Bill and his views on the prospects for abortion law repeal.

* * * * *

Right to Choose: Do you think abortion is a woman's right to choose? Do you think there should be any other basis for a woman obtaining an abortion apart from the fact that she has her own reasons for wanting one?

McKenzie: No, I don't think that there should. I think when you try to legislate on a subject like this it is impossible to design legislation which fits every category of need anyway, and the woman concerned is in the best position to judge whether she needs an abortion or not. This isn't to say that there shouldn't be adequate services provided to advise her if she wants advice, and of course these sorts of services aren't presently available to her.

I think these services should be provided by qualified, experienced people where the woman is not put under pressure which is based on community or other prejudices. The advice should be freely available to her if she wants it but as far as having laws on this, well, I don't think they're advisable.

Right to Choose: There are some feelings, even in the women's movement that the laws are not important as women are already able to get abortions. What is your opinion of the importance of reform or repeal of the laws?

McKenzie: Well it is obviously true that some women can obtain abortions relatively easily but this only points out the discriminatory nature of the laws in the first place because those women, as I think I mentioned in my speech in favor of the Medical Practice Clarification Bill last year, who are either well informed or are wealthy find it much easier to get an abortion than other women and this is a form of discrimination within a discrimination.

Right to Choose: In putting forward the Medical Practice Clarification Bill last May with Tony Lamb, what was your aim?

McKenzie: My aim was to basically reform the law and although

this was replacing a law by another law, in other words it wasn't repealing abortion laws altogether, at least I felt it was a step in the right direction, and the bill of course included all sorts of other considerations. If you completely repeal the laws there are other aspects that you need to consider like the right of conscientious objection for nursing staff etc. — the individual needs some sort of protection.

I wanted to have the whole matter discussed because I saw that as the first step to obtaining rights for women in this area. I was told at the time that what I should have done was to put up a motion for an enquiry into the need for abortion law reform and related matters and I rejected this at the time. My experience since confirms that I did the right thing — that abortion reform wasn't put back as some people claim, by moving a bill of this nature. The reason for saying this is that in Victoria some time afterwards Ivan Traving had intended to move a bill in Victorian Parliament to achieve abortion law reform and he was persuaded by various people that it would be much better to ask for an enquiry. When it came up before the House it was defeated. I've no doubt whatsoever that had I put up a motion for an enquiry even along the lines that were carried later on, on the amendment of Malcolm Fraser that it would have been defeated, even if it had been worded in identical terms to the motion of Fraser's that was carried.

Right to Choose: Were you pressured to modify the bill at all by other Labor members?

McKenzie: I received a lot of suggestions from a lot of people. Some of them were on medical aspects and I think within the framework of the bill some were probably

quite reasonable. One of the problems we faced with abortion law reform and abortion generally in the context of the Australian environment was that, because abortions are relatively, and in some cases very difficult for a woman to obtain, it is sometimes quite late in pregnancy before a woman is able to have an abortion. This in itself is undesirable and one of the things the bill sought to do was to encourage women, by graduating the ease of it, to seek an early abortion. This was for purely medical reasons.

Right to Choose: Was the result of the vote on the bill as you anticipated? How optimistic were you about its success?

McKenzie: A little, but not all that much. I understood pretty well I think the sort of prejudices that existed in the Parliament and the numbers, as they turned out, were very much as I expected. The Matthews amendment which called for an enquiry by a Federal judge with a committee of persons of whom the majority would be women was soundly defeated by about two to one. I was very surprised at that because I thought that that at least, was so eminently reasonable that any fair-minded person could have voted for it regardless of their personal views on abortion.

Right to Choose: If a similar bill were put to parliament today do you think the outcome would be the same as last year?

McKenzie: Yes, I think so. There may have been some slight change but I think what we have to realise is that this is the same parliament that rejected that bill and that at the moment there would have to be a hardening of views on it. I wouldn't think that you would get more than a handful of people who would change their minds one way

or the other. Quite possibly no one would.

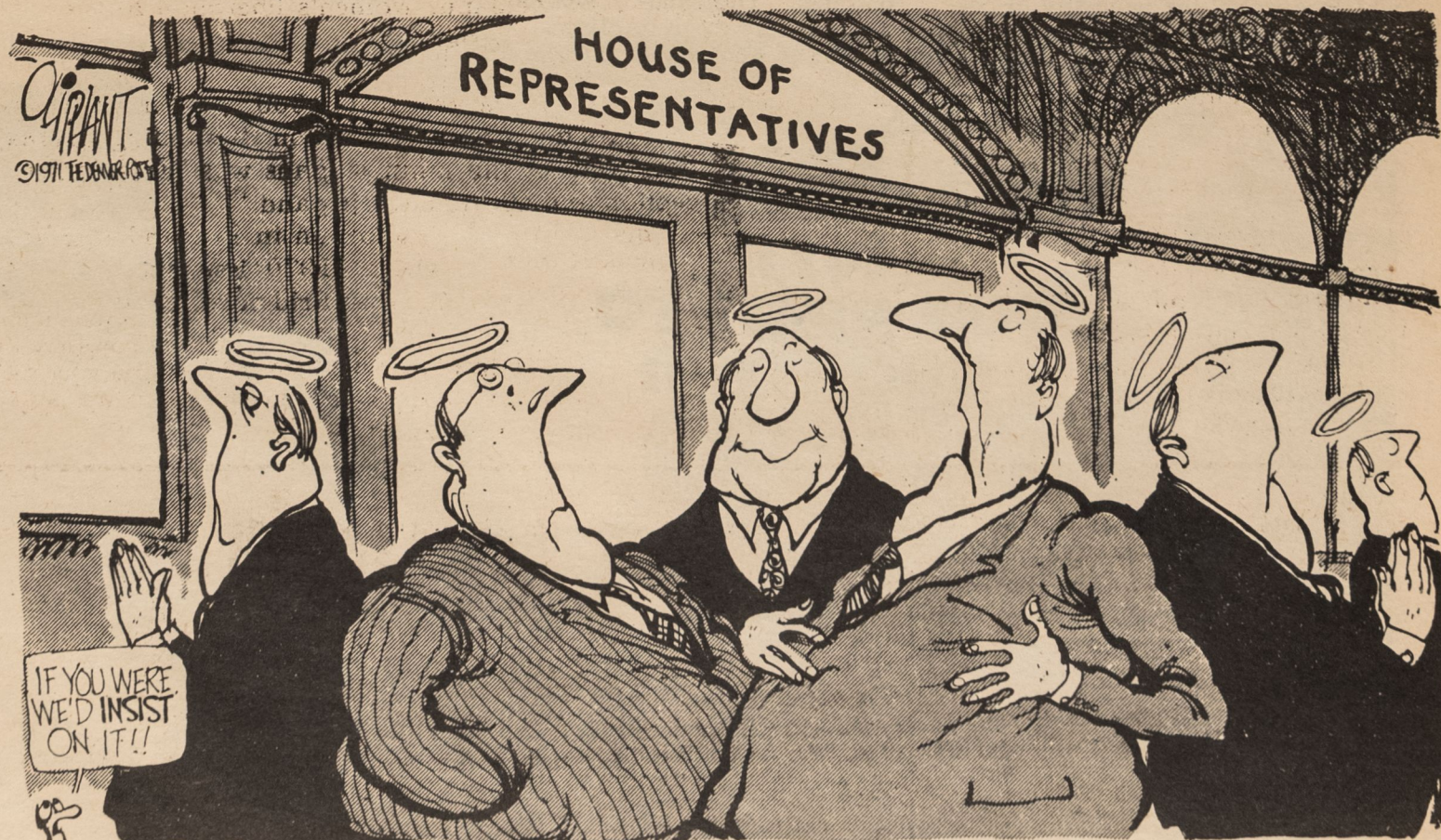
Right to Choose: What impact do you think the "Right to Life" campaign which preceded the discussion of the bill in parliament, had on the outcome?

McKenzie: I think it had a tremendous effect. It was very well organised, very well funded and had the support not only those who believed in the campaign very strongly, but many entrenched forces in the community including some quite powerful sections of the press. I think it's probably a lesson for a lot of people who are interested, not only in reforms in this area, but also in others to realise that the education of the public is a very long-term process and that on issues such as this those people who oppose change, if they feel strongly enough about it can marshal very powerful forces against reform.

Right to Choose: Are you or any other supporters of abortion law reform or repeal in Federal Parliament planning on taking any more steps to get the laws changed?

McKenzie: This will depend on how the situation develops over the next year but because of the call for an enquiry it is likely we would have to wait until after this was formed. Such an enquiry into abortion and related matters will be one of the things which will educate the public. Here again it will depend partly on how much use is made of the information which will come out of such an enquiry by those supporting abortion law reform or repeal (and these are related).

Once you educate the public and start to get public opinion on your side then the politicians will fall into line.



'WELL, IF I WERE PREGNANT I CERTAINLY WOULDN'T HAVE AN ABORTION!'

New Zealand

On the eightieth anniversary of Women's suffrage in New Zealand last year, (September 19), the newly formed Women's National Abortion Action Campaign (WONAAC) held its first national actions. These had been launched from the National Women's Abortion Action Conference in July. There were rallies in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Palmerston North, Hamilton and Dunedin.

In Wellington on September 18, the day before the national actions, there was a WONAAC deputation to the Minister of Justice. The submissions contained strong criticisms of the government's lack of initiative in taking up the issue as a matter of justice to women. It was pointed out that since the government recognised abortion as a conscience issue (by assuring all MPs they would have a 'conscience' vote should a private member's bill be introduced), it should extend to all women the right of acting according to one's own conscience - by repealing the abortion laws immediately.

The following day confident and enthusiastic marches were held in the above-mentioned centres.

The biggest action took place in Auckland, with approximately 350 marchers. About 150 marched through Wellington's main streets. In both these actions Helen Reddy's song "I am woman" was very popular. The only place where opponents of abortion made their presence felt was in Dunedin, where a group turned out to follow the women's march.

The enthusiasm of participants was obvious in all centres where actions were held. Women active in the fight for the repeal of the laws know that the battle is going to be hard but they made both the opponents and proponents of abortion aware that they were launching on a vigorous campaign.

France

On November 10-11, 1973, the first national conference of a French abortion group, Mouvement pour la Liberte de l'Avortement et de la contraception (MLAC - Movement for Freedom of Abortion and Contraception) was held.

MLAC evolved in 1973 out of actions which revealed the necessity of co-ordinating and strengthening the struggle for a woman's right to

choose. Late in 1972, 343 women issued a public manifesto declaring that they had had "illegal" abortions.

Around the same time charges were laid against a young woman and her mother for having arranged an illegal abortion. This led to a trial in Bobigny which received a lot of public support. In February 1973, 330 French physicians declared publicly that they had performed abortions by the Karman method free of charge.

Soon after this a call was issued by physicians who had performed abortions, for setting up an organisation to try and co-ordinate all the separate actions. It was responded to by members of family planning groups and of the official Family Planning system, and members of the CFDT (Confederation Francaise Democratique du Travail - French Democratic Federation of Labor, the country's second largest trade-union federation.)

Immediately after the founding of MLAC, Dr. Annie Ferrey-Martin was arrested on charges of having performed abortions. A week of mobilisations followed, organised by MLAC. Thousands of people in many different cities raised the demand of free abortion and contraception on demand for all, and demanded that the charges against Ferrey-Martin be dropped.

The conference in November is the first that has been held by the MLAC.

Workshops were held on four main points:

- * a campaign around the proposed new law on abortion.
- * a campaign for sex information in schools.
- * the strategy and future of MLAC.
- * child-care centres.

At the end of two days of discussion, agreement was unanimous on the necessity for taking the offensive again and launching an on-going campaign.

United States

Abortions have been legal in the United States for one year now. What has it meant for American women?

First, the Supreme Court ruling has put most illegal abortionists out of business. Thousands of women today are able to go to clinics, hospitals, and private doctors for

medically safe abortions. The quacks and butchers are disappearing.

There are no official figures on the number of legal abortions performed this year nationally. We do know however, that in cities where a year ago it was impossible to get a legal abortion, thousands are now being performed. In Atlanta, for instance, there are now seven abortion clinics, some performing as many as 100 abortions a week. Detroit has 22 abortion clinics and referral agencies. Even in Massachusetts, one of the bastions of the so-called right-to-life forces, it is estimated that 40,000 women will have legal abortions this year.

The legalization of abortion has also driven the cost down. Once abortions were taken out of the black market, treated as medical procedure, and facilities established, the cost, in most cases, was reduced.

The costs today vary. In New York City approximately half of the abortions performed this year were covered by Medicaid. The average cost in a Detroit clinic is \$150 for a first trimester abortion. Many clinics have a sliding of cost according to income.

"The biggest discernible change however," writes the New York Times "is in attitude."

"Before the decision, women would come begging for abortions," Marilyn Cringer, a counselor for Arkansas Woman's Rights, told the Times. "Many used false names, and were extraordinarily concerned over our confidentiality."

"Now, when women call, they feel that an abortion is their right. We don't have to assuage their guilt. Women just want the facts-where they can go for the best and least expensive abortion."

Perhaps not as immediately discernible, but just as important, is the added confidence women have won to decide the kind of lives they want to lead. Legal abortions mean that women can plan their studies, jobs, or careers without the fear of forced interruption by an unwanted pregnancy.

This new confidence also means that women are better prepared and more inspired to fight around other issues as well.

There are still obstacles. Many states have yet to comply with the ruling. Some have passed anti-abortion laws that are in clear violation of the Supreme Court decision.

So far whenever the state laws have



been challenged the courts have ruled in favor of a woman's right to abortion. Recent court victories include a Florida ruling to remove the requirement of parental or husband's consent, and a Pennsylvania decision that women on public assistance may have the cost of an abortion paid for by the Department of Social Welfare.

None of the proposed constitutional amendments that seek to reverse the Supreme Court decision have gathered much steam. But the "right-to-life" forces are still doing whatever they can to hinder implementation.

Senator James Buckley (R-C-N.Y.), for instance, has introduced a rider to a Social Security bill that would deny women the right to have their abortions paid for by Medicaid.

But the gains in just one short year are already significant: fewer women killed by botched abortions, less expense, less fear and guilt, and a new confidence.

Italy

In Australia we could perhaps regard ourselves as fortunate when we compare our campaign for the repeal of the abortion laws and that of the Italian women's liberation movement. The Italian women's movement has to contend with two sets of laws both of which are vigorously enforced and lead to the imprisonment of many women.

The first set of these laws states that most abortions are illegal.

Legalised abortion is the primary plank in the platform of the women's movement in Italy because of the exceptionally high rate of illegal abortions - estimated at between 500,000 and 3,000,000 a year. Women recently picketed Parliament in the hope of encouraging debate on an abortion bill. Under present law not even "therapeutic" abortions are permitted.

Italian feminists claim 20,000 women in Italy die or remain permanently physically maimed because of



Women's Suffrage Day national march for women's rights to abortion on September 19, in New Zealand.

Roundup



fight for "abortion on demand". Shirley Lewis is now living in England and was able to send us the following report on the situation in Britain at present.

Legal abortion - on certain conditions of course - came into effect in 1968. Since then a steady flow of information, sometimes gushing into hysteria, has been published in the national press and media. On all sides, the debate continues. The pro-abortionists are not satisfied with what they have gained, the anti-abortionists, and here they describe themselves as the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child, among other things, forever proclaiming that Britain is becoming, has become, the "Abortion Capital of the World" and so on.

Oddly enough, the anti-s are furious that Britain has an "abortion on demand" service!. But Women's Liberation, specifically the Women's Abortion and Contraception Campaign, WACC, and the Abortion Law Reform Association, ALRA, know quite well that this is far from true.

In fact it is difficult enough already. You have to get the consent of two doctors, and both must believe that the woman's life, or mental or physical health is at risk, or that her family might suffer, or that the child stands a strong chance of being seriously handicapped. In fact its legal for a doctor to be reasonable if he wants to. And if he is, the abortion can be done on the national health. If not you can go to the Pregnancy Advisory Service in London or Birmingham, which does abortions on nearly all women who want them, but they cost about £55 which, added to the cost of travel for women living outside these cities, often makes an abortion impossible or very difficult.

Fortunately for us, there is a great wedge of favourable evidence in the door which the anti-s are trying so volubly to close. (SPUC descended in a well-clad, middle-class body on Westminster to lobby MPs last November to repeal the present laws) :

1. Foreigners abortions aren't costing British taxpayers anything or using up health service beds because they're being done privately;
2. the numbers of deaths from abortions have dropped since 1967;
3. the total number of abortions is levelling out (1968 - 35,000, 1973 - 150,000);
4. abortions on women under 16 have actually dropped since 1967;
5. illegitimacy has dropped to below the figures in 1964 when as we all know the dreaded permissive society reared its offensive head;
6. pro-

secutions for illegal abortions (and therefore by inference the numbers of back-street abortionists) have dropped. And last but not least, adoptions have increased! I won't bore you with the figures on these but they can all be confirmed by ALRA who published them in their winter 73 edition of Abortion Now.

Other hopeful signs are the frequent articles on all women's issues - including self-help groups springing up across the country - in many national newspapers as well as in left-wing and underground publications. In London, one woman doctor has been sponsored by the International Planned Parenthood Federation to carry out a year's research into the Karman cannula method. Working in with three London teaching hospitals, she plans to do about 500 so-called "early terminations of suspected pregnancy". She does all the counselling herself.

The abortion law of 1967 is still further proof that simply changing the law doesn't change society's attitudes. The morality play still goes on. But meanwhile, behind the statistics, hundreds of thousands of women are that much less oppressed, that much more in control of our bodies, which so often means, our whole future.

Canada

In the last issue of Right to Choose we reported on the case of Dr Henry Morgentaler, who was facing thirteen charges under the Abortion Section of the Canadian Criminal Code. He is now facing 12 charges. If convicted on any of these charges he is liable to life imprisonment.

The first three of these charges were filed against him in 1970. The other ten in 1973. In March 1973 he spoke at a rally of the Canadian Women's Coalition to Repeal the Abortion Laws. In his speech he declared that he had performed over 5000 medically safe abortions in the last few years at his clinic. On August 15 he was arrested and four more charges added to his previous three.

This time charges were brought under a preferred indictment, a procedure by which the case goes directly to trial without a preliminary hearing. Dates for his trial were set for September. Quite blatantly it was an attempt to convict him as swiftly as possible.

Then on August 30 he was arrested again and six more charges were filed against him.

On November 13 he was acquitted

of the first of his thirteen charges - of having performed an an illegal abortion on August 15, 1973.

During his trial Dr Morgentaler freely admitted to having performed the abortion in question, as well as 6000 other abortions in his Montreal clinic in the last 3 years. He based his defense on article 45 of the Criminal Code, which protects a doctor from prosecution if the medical act was carried out with "reasonable care and skill" and for the health of the patient. The jurors found that this was the case for the specific abortion which Morgentaler had been charged

The government has not been slow to react. Only three days after the verdict, the Crown Attorney filed an appeal against the acquittal, alleging that the judge should not have permitted the use of Article 45 in the case.

One of the most significant aspects of the trial has been the focus of a head-on confrontation between the abortion rights movement and anti-abortion forces.

Women have jammed the courtroom to support Dr Morgentaler, pickets have been held outside the courtroom and supporters across Canada have continued the defence campaign to support the case. From the 'right to life' side, for the period of the trial at least, Dr Morgentaler displaced Jesus Christ as the most talked about man in Quebec pulpits. He was even described as a Dominican priest and a mass murderer.

Following Morgentaler's acquittal the Crown also began the preliminary hearing of Dr Macchabee, an associate of Dr Morgentaler also charged with performing an illegal abortion. The hearing was supposed to continue on December 4, but on that day it was postponed until late January when the Crown's witness could not identify Dr Macchabee as the man who had performed her abortion.

The defence of these two doctors is continuing. At a rally in Ottawa on December 8, Anna Cushman the co-ordinator of the Toronto Committee to Defend Dr Morgentaler stated:

"The defenders of Drs Morgentaler and Macchabee have tasted a small bit of the sweetness of victory, but we are not going to stop. We are going to build this campaign until we have won the whole thing - we are not going to stop until all charges against Dr Morgentaler and Dr Macchabee have been dropped and abortion has been removed from the Criminal Code "

clandestine unskilled abortions each year.

As well as being difficult to obtain, abortions are also very expensive. In a good private clinic, an abortion with anaesthesia costs about \$325, while self-styled abortionists charge approximately \$108.

It is no surprise then to find situations such as the following being repeated throughout Italy.

"At first I went to the village witch," one Italian peasant woman from Calabria told Italian journalist Elvirra Banotti. "Then I learnt to do it myself. I've had 37 abortions."

The second set of laws relating to abortion was promulgated in Mussolini's time and establishes prison terms of from two to five years for women who abort illegally. These laws aimed at protecting "the integrity and health of the species", are still involved.

In Trento recently, formal charges were laid against 260 women for having had illegal abortions. After the deaths of two women police seized the office records of a Trento gynaecologist, who allegedly conducted an abortion practice, and brought charges against women whose names were found in his files.

Outside of the women's movement there is very little organised support in favor of abortion. Roman Catholic members of Parliament are prohibited from any consideration of legislation on abortion. The second largest party in Italy, the Italian Communist Party, shies away from a Parliamentary debate on the issue. All official channels refuse to even review the present oppressive laws. They refuse to face the fact that women are seeking abortions, that they are not accepting the moral dictates of the clerical state. Because of this hundreds of women die needlessly.

Britain

While in Australia, Shirley Lewis, was an active participant in the



Demonstrations like these outside the courthouse contributed to the "not guilty" victory of Dr Morgentaler in Canada.

Women's Health Clinic Set Up

The idea for a Women's Community Health Centre arose at the same time and for the same reasons as the setting up of the 'Control' Abortion Referral Centre. It was from the same group of women that the submission for a grant was drafted.

It is fair to say that although the drafting of the submission was taken seriously, the possibility of it ever being accepted was not. Apart from the submission itself, no active planning followed. In December news that a grant of \$33,000 for six months, renewable at \$55,000 per annum for the following three years was approved. The 'Control' group went into action and within 6 weeks premises had been obtained, staff appointed and most of the problems had been ironed out.

A number of considerations prompted the choice of Leichhardt as a suitable area for the centre, firstly because it would receive sympathetic consideration from the Leichhardt Council.

Secondly, Leichhardt has a large migrant population in addition to its being traditionally a working class, borderline poverty area. The third consideration was the large student population in and around the area, most of whom are living on scholarships and whose needs are not being met by existing institutions.

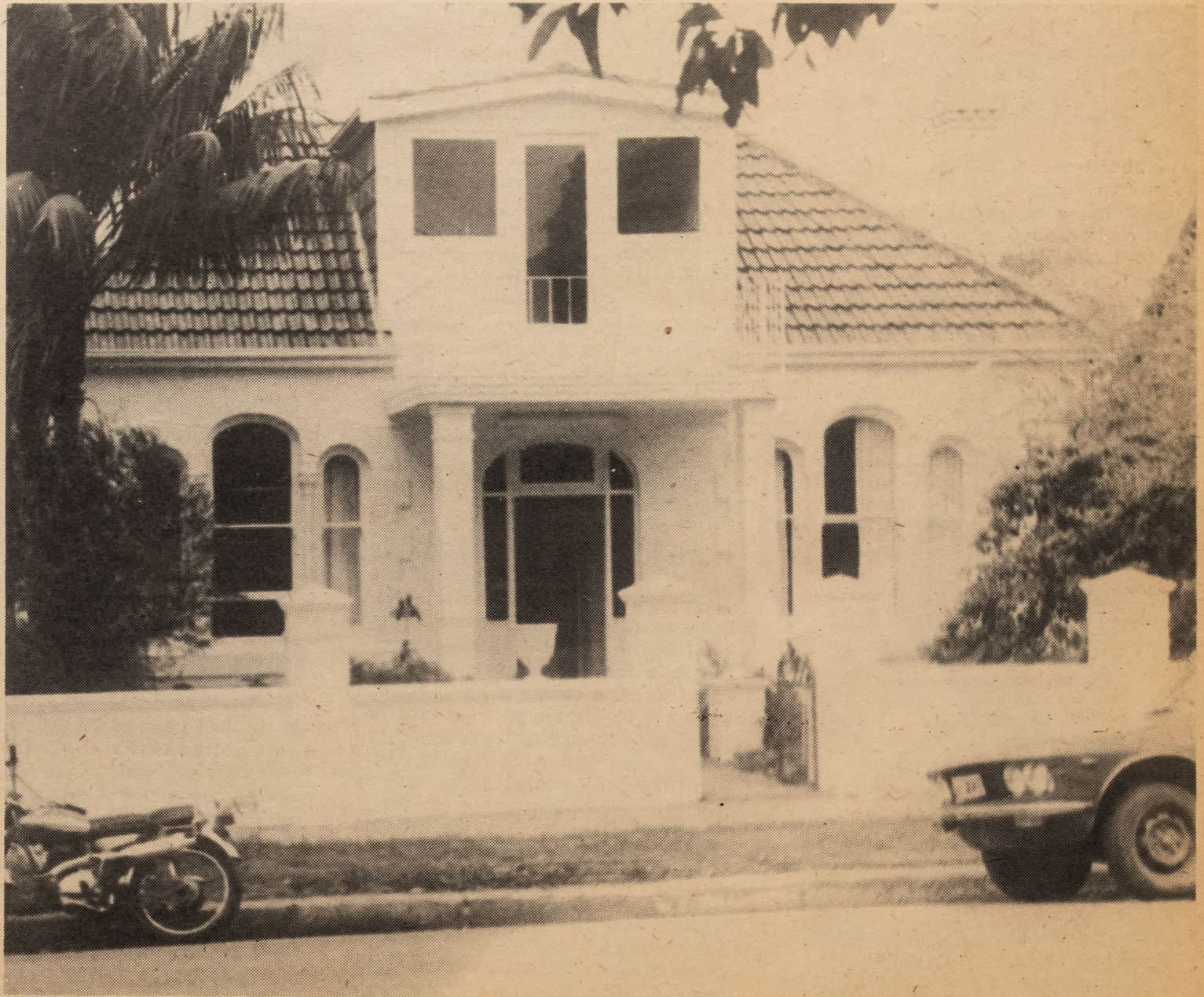
It was decided to staff the Centre entirely with women because the Centre is seen primarily as a learning place, and the staff not only as having skills they can use to help other women, but as learning themselves. We see the whole issue of women learning about their bodies as crucial to the way the centre will function and we see this as being a very revolutionary step and one which can only be undertaken by women themselves.

A gynaecologist and a general practitioner have been appointed (both of whom will work 20 hours a week) and also a full time nurse and one nurse working part-time to cover the medical area. A full-time secretary will cover all the areas of administration and a community health educator will be responsible for gathering and disseminating information. A research worker will collate and evaluate all existing available data on women's health and hopefully in the long term will work on data gathered in the Centre itself.

The Centre will be equipped with two medical consulting rooms, a library and research centre, meeting room and reception centre. Both doctors will be trained in the technique of menstrual extraction and one of the consulting rooms will be equipped for this purpose.

The clinic will continue to follow the method that has evolved in the 'Control' referral service of empathy as opposed to treatment. In a report published by the organisers of the clinic it sums up: "Even if we do no more than help women to an understanding of how our bodies function so that we are no longer held captive by our ignorance, then we will have achieved a minor revolution."

THE CENTRE OPENS ON THE 8TH MARCH. IT IS SITUATED AT 164 FLOOD ST. LEICHHARDT, SYDNEY
PHONE 56-5059 MONDAY - FRIDAY 9.30 - 5.00



The women's health clinic in Leichhardt, Sydney.

Abortion Referral Service

One of the things to emerge most clearly from the Women's Commission sponsored by the Women's Liberation Movement and held in Sydney in March last year, was the state of ignorance about their bodies in which most women are kept both by their upbringing and, in later life, by their doctors. As so much of a woman's life is bound up with her biological function, this is of major concern.

Both as an outcome of the Women's Commission and the mass demonstration on June 30 for the repeal of all abortion laws, a group of women met at Women's Liberation House to discuss ways and means of giving women access to the sort of information that would free them of much of the psychological stress that can result from ignorance.

The issue of abortion was considered to be of primary importance and it was decided to set up an Abortion Referral Service which would give women information on the legal situation in NSW, would find doctors who would give sympathetic and informative attention to women seeking abortion and who could be referred to for comprehensive medical advice, until such time as a women's clinic could be opened in Sydney.

A telephone service was established and a team of 30 women recruited to answer calls and counsel women seeking help. Names of doctors were canvassed and these doctors were visited and information gathered as to their attitudes, fees etc. Much more needs to be done in this area.

We are of the opinion that many doctors are unaware of the present

legal position with regard to abortion and a circular letter is being prepared setting out the position as it holds today in this State.

Most important we are concerned that the method of menstrual extraction, which could greatly reduce the need for abortion, as well as overcome the psychological stress which accompanies every unwanted pregnancy, is neither being used by the medical profession in Australia except in isolated instances, nor given the publicity that it has received in other countries.

Abortion laws have forced women into an intolerable position. In every country and every society women have evolved ways of dealing with unwanted pregnancy. In our society, due to our oppressive laws, those

ways have been secrecy, fear and guilt. We see our task as helping to overcome those factors.

We have found that the initial enquiry to our referral service is hesitant and frightened, and we try and give as much reassurance as possible over the phone. We ask everyone who contacts us to come in and talk to us and it is here that we seem to make the biggest breakthrough. By first of all outlining the legal position we can eliminate the fear of breaking the law and, to a large degree, the feelings of guilt. We can further ease the guilt feelings by acceptance and understanding, by not taking up any moralistic attitude we can assist women to see their situation as it actually is - something that can happen to any women at any time.

Has your contraceptive failed?
Do you know about contraceptives other than the pill?
Do you have a certain itch that lessens the pleasure?
We can possibly help you

CONTROL

Ring 61-7325 between 6-9pm Mon-Fri
or call at 25 Alberta Street, Sydney

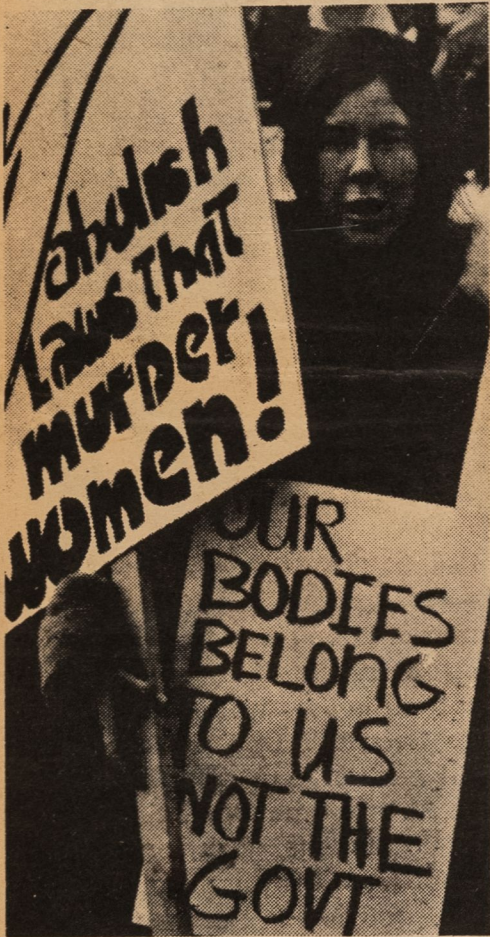
Abortion and the Law

Is it necessary to build a campaign to demand our right to abortion or do women already have that right? How free are women to decide to have an abortion and to carry out that decision?

The abortion laws in Australia vary from state to state. It is easier to gain a 'legal' abortion in NSW, Victoria and South Australia than in Queensland, Tasmania or Western Australia. Even in those states where it is easier there are differing grounds.

In NSW there has been no reform of the abortion laws in Sections 82-83-84 of the Crimes Act 1900. These sections make it an offence to unlawfully administer any drug or noxious thing or use any instrument "with intent to procure miscarriage". The law has however been liberalised as a result of interpretations given by the courts to the word "unlawfully". In *R vs Davidson* (1969), a Victorian case, it was held that the onus of proving the act "unlawful" rested on the Crown.

In a later NSW case *R vs Wall & Wald et al* (1971), it was accepted by the judge that defence council



could validly raise the point that the defendant had taken into account the physical and mental health of the woman and her economic circumstances in determining whether or not to perform the abortion. The effect of this was to extend the categories of "lawful" abortions. Thus the courts will now declare as "lawful", abortions performed on the basis of wider grounds than the physical health of the woman. But does this extension make abortions legal or freely available? Far from it. Abortions will only be "legal" when all prohibitory legislation is removed from the statute books.

Some women, of course, can obtain abortions but the list of "ifs" attendant on this is very long — if you know the right people, if you have sufficient money, if you are not presented with conditions ("I'll give you an abortion if you also consent to be sterilised"), if you can overcome the social stigma which is still attached to the operation and the guilt which women have traditionally been expected to feel etc. etc.

While abortion remains illegal women will continue to be taken

advantage of in numerous ways. The operation will continue to be considered a favor handed out by doctors rather than a right like any other medical treatment. Unscrupulous doctors and quacks will be able to continue fleecing many women who are unaware of standard fees being charged and who are too intimidated by the "illegality" of the situation to protest or to query.

The "illegality" of abortion also prevents the effective setting up of proper clinics throughout the community where all women can receive the best medical care in having abortions, counselling and contraceptive advice. Although some public hospitals have stepped up the number of abortions performed in them, there are still enormous waiting lists, with women frequently having to stand in a queue with their referrals from the early hours of the morning to be among the limited number accepted that day.

Even when women do manage to obtain an abortion in one of the public hospitals, they can expect to face a degree of discrimination and prejudice from hospital staff, doctors, nurses and administrative staff alike. This would be considerably lessened if the laws were repealed, and women would have other alternatives than to suffer this, by going to special abortion clinics etc.

In an article entitled "The demand for abortion" printed in *The Age* on January 16 Anne Riseborough, publicity officer for the Abortion Law Repeal Association in Melbourne was quoted as saying that she thought the average cost for an abortion in Melbourne at the moment was about \$180. Clinics like the one run by Dr. Bert Wainer charge a fee of around \$120. For a very great number of women this fee is prohibitive.

Many women and families cannot afford to pay into a medical benefit fund through which claims can be made for "legal" terminations. Many women have no independent source of income and are thus reliant on other people such as parents, husbands or boyfriends who may not favor an abortion. This means that the decision is not entirely in their own hands. Only if abortion laws are removed or at least substantially reformed can the cost of abortions be forced down so that they are within range of even the poorest women.

The legal precedents set by the Menhennitt and Levine rulings (of the cases mentioned earlier) are not an adequate basis on which to change the present situation. For a start they apply only in Victoria and NSW. In Queensland, for example, preservation of a woman's mental health is unacceptable grounds for a "legal" abortion and even preservation of a woman's physical health is seen as rarely acceptable grounds.

Until the laws are removed completely, many people will still profit from making abortion a privilege extended to women at a cost. Women will still seek out backyard abortionists or try to abort themselves. Women will still feel they are committing a crime. As an assistant at Bert Wainer's clinic in Melbourne told *The Age* reporter "All the patients when they first came, expected to be punished for what they were doing".

But most importantly women will continue to be denied one of their most basic rights — the right to control their own bodies and lives.

An International Women's Day Meeting

If men could get pregnant. . .

they would not tolerate the circumstances into which many women are forced. This is the theme of Myrna Lamb's play, which received acclaim in New York in 1969.

"BUT WHAT HAVE YOU DONE FOR ME LATELY?"

8:00

A feminist play on abortion by Myrna Lamb

THURS

Speakers

MARCH

A slide show on the history of women's struggle for birth control

7th

Admission \$1.00

TEACHERS FEDERATION HALL, 300 SUSSEX ST.

Women's Abortion Action Campaign, 25 Alberta Street, Sydney.

Melbourne

Women's Abortion Action Coalition

PUBLIC MEETING

speakers: Joan Cox sedge (ALP)

Dr. Janet Bacon

Bon Hull

Delys Sargent

**Thursday
March 21, 7:30**

Lower Melbourne Town Hall

A year after the defeat of the McKenzie/Lamb bill we are determined to fight for abortion law repeal

MARCH ON MAY 11

We demand the repeal of all abortion laws and freely available safe contraceptives

Subscribe

This is our second issue Let's hope it sells well. To help in this aim we would like people to subscribe. (The rate will be \$2 for 10 issues). This not only helps to ensure our continuity of production, but means subscribers will have the convenience of home delivery and will be kept up-to-date on latest developments at home and overseas in the abortion struggle. As we have more plans than money to carry them out, we are relying on our sales and subscriptions to continue the campaign.

I wish to subscribe to RIGHT TO CHOOSE.

I enclose \$ for issues (10 for \$2)

NAME

ADDRESS

Post to WAAC, P.O. Box J176, Brickfield Hill. 2000

BADGES

In the past badge selling has contributed a significant proportion of the finance behind the Women's Abortion Action Campaign. The biggest markets for these badges has been around city pubs and at functions concerned with women's liberation. Any group or individual who would like to sell some badges to help us raise money for the campaign ring Wendy on 660-1990. Badges may be bought in lots of 10 and over with a 20% discount or individually for 20c each.

The badges are red with black and white lettering and red "A Woman's Right to Control Her Life" and REPEAL ALL ABORTION LAWS".