

FILE COPY

# ABORTION IS A WOMAN'S RIGHT TO CHOOSE



OCTOBER 1979

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## Abortion and the Right to Life since Lusher

Having been convincingly defeated in the Lusher motion, the Right to Life have begun a new state by state offensive. In Brisbane at present, many women who need abortions have to come to Sydney to have them. Last month, Ed Casey, the parliamentary leader of the Labor Party and an executive member of Queensland's Right to Life, introduced a Bill into the House of representatives which attempts to close the Greenslopes Fertility Control Clinic, the only operating abortion clinic in Brisbane, and to make abortion available only when the mother's life is in danger and under similar conditions as those now applying in New Zealand.

This sort of legislation is a complete denial of women's rights to abortion and control over their own bodies and would result in women dying from dangerous and unhygienic backyard abortions and being forced to undertake unwanted pregnancies, often involving severe financial hardship and complete disruption of their lives.

Brisbane women have organized demonstrations and pickets against this move but they need our support. On 28th August 160 women attended a lunchtime rally in King George's Square and 60 attended a picket of the parliamentary offices against Ed Casey's recent moves. Solidarity pickets were held in Adelaide and Melbourne outside the Queensland Tourist Bureaux and in Sydney a rally in support of Queensland women was followed by an occupation of the Right to Life offices.

In other states the Right to Life tactics have concentrated on harassing women attempting to have abortions. In Sydney, the Right to Life have spray painted slogans alleging women having abortions are murderers and harassed women, by calling out slogans as they attempted to enter an abortion clinic at Arncliffe. In a similar vein, a South Sydney councillor



2903 3314

attacked the Control clinic at Balmain for malpractice but was forced to withdraw the allegations as they were libelous and had no basis in fact. In Melbourne Right to Lifers have occupied two clinics, sitting around operating tables and abusing women who have arrived to have abortions.

### Week of the Unborn Child

From 14th-21st October the Right to Life are going to be holding a "Week of the Unborn Child" in which they are going to attempt to get space on programmes with Don Lane, John Cootes and Mike Walsh, on talk-back radio programmes and place ads in papers. They are planning slide showings etc in shopping centres such as Roselands and will be putting out a number of press statements.

W.A.A.C. (Women's Abortion Action Campaign) is organizing a counter-offensive in the press leading up to the "Week" and a demonstration on Saturday 20th October - the end of the Right to Lifer's week. Press statements will concentrate on abortion as every woman's right and on extending the availability of abortion rather than just countering statements made by the Right to Life.

It is clear from the consistency of the Right to Life that we cannot sit back and be complacent. The demonstration will be a show of strength. If we are going to succeed in demanding freely available abortion we have to overwhelm the anti-abortion forces and make our demands heard. Show your support for women's rights to control their own bodies and come to the demonstration. 10.30 am Town Hall Squ Saturday 20th October.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO:

DEMONSTRATE: Meet 10.30 am Saturday 20th October at Town Hall Squ for a March and Rally.

Send telegrams protesting Ed Casey's move to  
ALP Headquarters,  
Ross St,  
Newstead,  
Brisbane.

and to

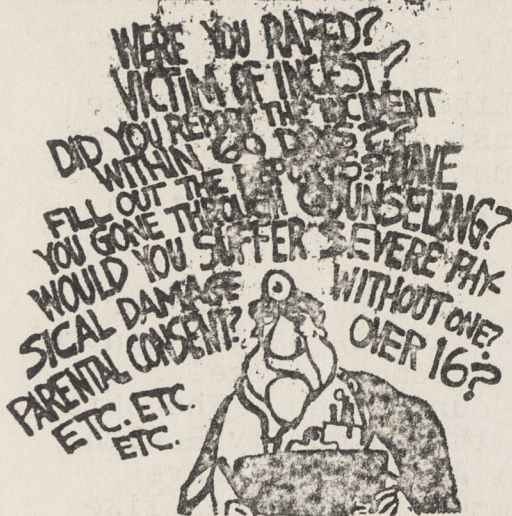


Justice Dept,  
comalco House,  
Cnr George and Ann Sts,  
Brisbane.

If you hear the Right to Life on the radio ring up and complain or phone into talkback shows and put the opposing argument.

Come and help organize the demonstration. WAAC meets 6.00 pm every Wednesday evening at Women's House 62 Regent St, Redfern.

QUESTIONS A POOR WOMAN  
MUST ANSWER TO GET AN  
ABORTION:



QUESTIONS A RICH WOMAN  
MUST ANSWER TO GET AN  
ABORTION:





Dear Sisters,

There have been many changes in W.A.A.C. over the past few months. We want to explain them to all of our past supporters.

As you know the large campaign against the Lusher motion was very successful and health funds continue to offer rebates for abortion. The demonstrations on March 31 were a success all around Australia. We were delighted with the number of women who came along to the organising meetings, painted banners, gave talks and cash donations.

However, the high of organising both a parliamentary campaign and a large public demonstration did not last. Just as we had begun to make active contacts with women in the ALP and the feminist health centres attendance at weekly meetings dropped off. Some of this is easily explained in terms of women with other political commitments who came along to help in an emergency. Other people left for various political reasons. For example, the S.W.P. has decided not to work in social movements any longer but to concentrate its activists in industry. Other women have disagreed with the general direction the campaign was taking.

For several years, Sydney W.A.A.C. has concentrated on actions around repeal of all abortion laws. In addition, we have produced a booklet in the six major languages spoken by migrants from Europe and South America. We saw these as important goals. We have also worked with groups like Gay Solidarity in opposing all laws regulating sexuality. At the same time, we established stronger links with the women's health movement in Sydney. The Women's Liberation Conference in February and the women's health discussion that grew out of it made it clear to many of us that we must broaden our area of concern beyond the simple demand to repeal the anti-abortion laws.

The attack on abortion funding posed by the Lusher motion shows how inadequate repeal of the laws is as the central focus of a campaign to gain reproductive freedom. Legal abortion is but one aspect of control of our bodies. The cuts in funding of Women's Health Centres and the Community Health Programme reveal more ways that the small gains women have made can be taken away. In addition, community services like the Family Planning Association are subject to "no growth" financing at a time when their services are under growing demand. Child care funding is subject to similar cuts. Women don't have many choices when abortion rights, contraceptive services, basic health services and child care are all under attack. Some of us see the need for a better analysis of what is happening to women during the economic crisis and what that will mean for the struggle to control our bodies.

Right now those of us who are still regularly attending meetings want to work on that kind of analysis and work out political action on a broader front than law repeal. We are working on a speakers kit on abortion rights. The Right to Life is planning a "Week of the Unborn Child" for 14-21 October. We have some pages duplicated and will send them on request.



We have decided not to use our meagre energies and finances to produce RIGHT TO CHOOSE in the newspaper format for the time being, hence this newsletter. We hope to again have the woman-power to produce the paper in 1980. We will instead work out a series of pamphlets to be used as a part of the broader campaign.

If you would like to join us and contribute your ideas and skills to developing a campaign, come along to a meeting. We will be meeting fortnightly at Women's House, 62 Regent Street, Chippendale, at 6p.m. on Wednesdays.

If you can't attend, send a letter with any ideas you have. For more information, you can ring:

REBECCA ALBURY - 665.3164 (h)  
692.2051 (w)

OR

ANITA BYRNES - 92.7018 (h)  
922.1822 Xt 252 (w)

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#### NEWS SHORTS

There is no doctor in Bathurst who will fit a diaphragm. Therefore women who choose this reliable and safe method of birth control must travel to Sydney to be fitted.



**FREELY  
AVAILABLE, SAFE  
CONTRACEPTION**

A woman from New Zealand reported that at the Epsom Day Clinic in Auckland, a woman seeking an abortion is required to say that she is aware that she is killing her baby before the operation is performed. That wasn't enough for that particular woman. She didn't fit into the quota and so had to travel to Sydney anyway.



## More News Shorts

A meeting was held in Washington, D.C., between anti-abortionists and people from various pro-choice groups on February 15. They discussed the issues of sex education and contraception for minors. However, a group called People Expressing A Concern for Everyone (PEACE) brought an aborted foetus wrapped up in a baby blanket. They displayed the foetus at the press conference following the meeting.

This is another example of the way in which anti-abortionists use emotional blackmail to gain their objective - the control of the lives of women. They brought in a foetus from a mid-trimester abortion, yet the vast majority of women have abortions in the first 10 weeks of pregnancy. We must beware that notions of 'reasoned' discussion will blind us to the political goals of anti-abortionists. In the Washington, D.C., incident no concern was expressed for the woman who for whatever reason had the later abortion with a drug (prostaglandin) to bring on labour.

In yet another example of the callous disregard they have for women, the Sutherland Branch of the Right to Life picketed the P.S.I. Clinic in Arncliffe on Saturday, May 26. They didn't care if distressed women might have to go through a picket line of self-righteous hecklers. Fortunately, the Clinic operators have more concern and closed the clinic for the day.

ABORTION  
a woman's  
RIGHT  
a woman's  
CHOICE

DEMONSTRATE NOW

SYDNEY TOWN HALL SQUARE SATURDAY OCTOBER 20 10:30

MARCH AND RALLY

OPPOSE THE SO-CALLED RIGHT TO LIFE WHO CARE  
NOTHING FOR THE RIGHTS OF LIVING WOMEN



## ABORTION IN N.S.W. - LEGAL AND POLITICAL STATUS

In N.S.W. abortion is covered by Sections 82, 83 and 84 of the Crimes Act which sets the penalty for 'procuring an unlawful miscarriage'. In 1971, Judge Levine defined 'lawful miscarriage' during the trial of medical workers from the Heatherbrae Clinic. He stated that the termination of pregnancy by a competent use of instruments in the hands of a medical practitioner is not an offence if the practitioner has an honest belief that reasonable grounds - economic, social or medical - make the operation necessary to preserve a woman from serious danger to her life, physical or mental health, provided the operation is not out of proportion to the danger to be averted. He ruled that the opinion of more than one doctor is not necessary under N.S.W. law. In addition, he said that the onus was on the prosecution to prove the unlawfulness of the termination, beyond a reasonable doubt. (From Abortion: The Unenforceable Law, Tony McMichael (ed.), Abortion Law Reform Association, Victoria, 1972, pp.22).

The opinion of one judge can be overturned by the opinion of another judge or by legislation. Since the Levine ruling there have been no trials and very few prosecutions under Sections 82, 83 or 84 of the Crimes Act. It would seem that a competent doctor who kept records to demonstrate the honesty of belief in reasonable grounds for an abortion would be safe from prosecution. An incompetent doctor might still face prosecution, especially following a botched abortion.

Politically it would be very difficult for the N.S.W. Government to engage in either a judicial or legislative attempt to prohibit abortion in the State. Premier Wran (ALP) has said in public the government will not permit Jim Cameron M.L.A. (Liberal) to present a private member's bill which seeks to restrict the availability of abortion. This means he is taking a stronger stand than Askin who allowed Kevin Harrold M.L.A. (DLP) to introduce a very restrictive law both in 1975 and 1976. However, even then the Liberals were unwilling to allow a second reading vote, preferring to allow the debate to be talked out.

The Australian Labor Party in N.S.W. is divided on abortion, with the dominant male Catholic machine unwilling to give up the conscience vote in favour of a party policy for the right of the woman to choose for herself. However, Labor Women and Young Labor are overwhelmingly in favour of repeal of Sections 82, 83 and 84 of the Crimes Act. That view is shared by some members of the N.S.W. Parliamentary Caucus and prominent N.S.W. members of Federal Parliament.

In addition to pressure within the party, the State ALP Government must act in a climate of public opinion more favourable to readily available abortion than ever before. On 15 May, 1979, The Bulletin reported a Morgan-Gallup survey which found 73 per cent of Australians believed that abortion should be legal. Half of those gave as a reason for their opinion 'it's a woman's right to choose'.



This question was asked following the debate in Federal Parliament on the Lusher motion which sought to gain parliamentary support for withdrawing medical benefit payments for all abortions except those to save the life of the woman at risk from a physical disease. Lusher's supporters often used very repressive anti-woman arguments which revealed their motives to many people who had not thought about abortion politics before. Over and over women leafleting against the motion were told by women in the street, 'It's not right for men in Canberra to tell women what to do.' Many older women said they wanted to keep abortion safe, legal and cheap so younger women would be spared the worries and dangers they themselves had faced. Those women would also oppose any move by the State government to restrict the availability of abortion and Tran and the State ALP know it.

Tran signed the anti-Lusher motion petition at the ALP Women's Conference in March. Although the Right to Life is organizing for a 'Week of the Unborn Child' in October it is unlikely to alter the basic position of the State government. The government is unwilling to raise the abortion issue because of the strong controversy which it would cause. The de facto legality of abortion in N.S.W. seems safe and new clinics continue to open.

REBECCA ALPURY

Help with the campaign!

Subscribe to Right to Choose \$2.00 for 4 issues.

I enclose a contribution.

Send more information.

Send a speakers kit. I enclose \$1.00.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Return to : Women's Abortion Action Campaign  
62 Regent Street, Chippendale 2008

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