

WACC Newsletter

WOMEN'S ABORTION & CONTRACEPTION CAMPAIGN

Comune di Padova Biblioteche
Cod. Bibl. <u>OL</u>
BID <u>PUM40250</u>
INV <u>1058834</u>

Cost
4p

Postage
3p

Compiled by London WACC
14 Radnor Tce.
London, SWC

*See next to
last page*

Vol.2, No.1
Feb./Mar. 1973

'THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE' WACC CONFERENCE, LIVERPOOL
January 27/28, 1973

117 women came to WACC's first National Conference in Liverpool. On Saturday morning, three papers were given by Monica Sjoo (Bristol), Rose Knight (Nottingham) and Hilda Bartle/Katy Jennison (Ilford)

Monica's paper on the History of Women and Birth Control showed how the present attitudes to contraception and abortion developed in the West. She told us that contraception, abortion and infanticide have been practiced by women since the beginning of time--"Women have in all ages desired to and found ways of controlling their own fertility"--"so ..the myth we are told that ancient and 'primitive' women would have been continuously pregnant doesn't seem to be so and in fact the Victorian woman was far more ignorant of her sexuality and contraceptive methods than her sisters in the past. Perhaps never in history have women been so totally sexually oppressed and forced into yearly child-bearing as in 'civilised' societies!"

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3 issues (including this one)
@ 7p = 21p

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Comprehensive address list
@ 7p

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Monica pointed out that when private property and class society developed women lost control over their own fertility. She outlined what this meant for women - compulsory childbearing, death from abortion and punitive attitudes. She also outlined the growth of the birth control campaign and the Abortion Rights movement.

Rose's paper 'The Right to Choose' attempted to explain what we mean when we say we want the right to choose, and how this understanding should relate to future activities as a campaign. "Fifty years after the battle that won the vote we are still unequal people, our status has hardly changed at all. We are still tied to our homes, discriminated against at work, without adequate nurseries for our children. We have little choice in the matter of how we live. We live in a society which can send man to the moon, which has made technical advances, but which denies us self-determination as people.

Rose put certain proposals for future activity which were discussed together with office proposals in the second half of the conference.

Hilda and Katy's paper on "Moralistic and Punitive Attitudes to Abortion and Contraception" pointed out the variety of pressures on women that lead them to have such conflicting responses to abortion and contraception. They stress the need for a sensitive approach towards women who because of these pressures cannot accept that they have a right to control their own bodies.

Hilda said that we must be careful not to pressurise, rather we should encourage freedom of choice. "We do not want to become a moral pressure group instead of a political force for freedom of choice".

These papers were discussed by the women attending the conference. If you did not go to the conference, you can obtain the papers from the people who gave them:

Monica Sjoo, 47 Princess Victoria Street, Bristol 6

Rose Knight, 3 Dunlop Avenue, Lenton, Nottingham

Hilda Bartle, 28 Quebec Road, Ilford, Essex.

After lunch the conference split up into workshops to discuss the organising of WACC groups and successful local campaigns. (See separate reports).

Dr Alan Margolis's film of a woman having a vacuum abortion was shown. This film illustrates:

The importance of counselling before, during and after the abortion;

The simplicity of the vacuum aspiration technique;

The feasibility of doing it under local anaesthetic with the woman fully conscious and participating.

A discussion on the implications of this movie was led by Jane Leighton of the British Pregnancy Advisory Service and Sheila Abdullah of Merseyside WACC group.

Later that evening Liverpool group put on a magnificent party where we all had a chance to talk more informally to one another.

On Sunday morning there was a full session on future activities in which proposals were put and debated:

1. The first proposal put by Manchester was that we should go to Manchester on Mar 25th when the anti-abortionists are having their rally.

Everybody was in agreement that we should go to Manchester, and a date for a planning meeting was decided on (Feb 17). Manchester said we should all try and have publicity campaigns before March 25 around our demands for free contraception and abortion - a women's right to choose. Sisters generally thought local poster campaigns would help - Sally Bavage of Leeds WACC offered to organise sticker posters for WACC groups to use. The conference debated which slogans should be put on these posters and decided on the following:

ABORTION - THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE
FREE CONTRACEPTION - YOU KNOW IT MAKES SENSE

Sticker posters can be obtained from:

Sally Bavage, Flat 3, 35 Richmond Road, Leeds 6

2. Nottingham and Bristol proposed that we should mobilise women for the Womens Liberation Demonstration planned for March 10th.

There was general agreement that we march as a WACC contingent at this event, and that we should contact WACC groups with this in mind. It was decided that the planning meeting in Manchester should be used to co-ordinate March 10th as well as March 25th.

- C.P.
3. Tess Gill (London WACC) proposed that we should do something to show our support for the Lords Amendment to the NHS re-organisation Bill asking for a totally free contraceptive service under the NHS.

Everyone supported this proposal but there was a debate over how we should show our support. Some groups wanted a petition campaign - other groups felt that there were already two petitions going round and this was enough. Finally, sisters agreed that local groups should decide for themselves about how they show their support, but that the conference as a whole should work a petition heading that could be used. A working group produced the following petition heading:

"We the undersigned want free contraceptiva advice and supplies under the National Health Service available to all. We urge you to support the House of Lords amendment to clause 4 of the National Health Service Re-Organisation Bill."

The conference decided that if local groups decided on a petition campaign they should present petitions to their local MPs in time for the Second Reading in the Commons. Caroline Charlton offered to notify WACC groups of the date - see "Free Contraception - NHS Reorganisation Bill" at end of Conference Reports. It was also decided that, if possible, photostated copies of the petition sheets should be sent to London WACC and presented to Sir Keith Joseph. It was suggested that MPs should be lobbied, and other groups decided to write letters to their local MPs urging

them to support the amendment. The situation would be publicised at the same time on local radio and local press.

4. Nottingham suggested WACC should send a representative to the International Tribunal on Abortion, Contraception and Sterilization, May 10, 11, 12, and that the representative should take material with her to illustrate the British situation regarding abortion and contraception. They also suggested that later on the representative could travel round Britain telling groups about the Tribunal.

There was a lot of discussion over this proposal. Some sisters thought it was very important to send a WACC representative as it was an International Tribunal and not just an American Tribunal. Other sisters were against sending anyone at all, while others felt that a sister should go to give testimony as an individual working in WACC and not a representative. Rose read out the letter from WONAAC inviting WACC to send a representative, and after discussion sisters decided to send a representative from WACC. Hilda Bartle (Ilford group) was proposed, and everybody agreed as it was felt that as well as being a representative of WACC, Hilda had also been through experiences of abortion and sterilization. Sisters felt that they did not know enough about WONAAC; Nottingham said that they would write a short report on WONAAC for the newsletter.

5. Nottingham suggested that we should set up an ad hoc committee to look into the Abortion Act.

This proposal was agreed on after a discussion about our attitudes to the Act. Sisters felt that we could not plan a campaign against the Act and for a woman's right to choose until we understood the Act in detail and knew more about the legal procedures needed to change or amend it. Tess Gill (London WACC) agreed to convene the committee. Any woman who is interested in being part of the committee should contact Tess at:

164 Ramsden Road, London SW12
Telephone: 01-675 1489 (home) 01-407-2395 (work)

The committee will be reporting back to WACC groups through the newsletter.

6. Bristol proposed we should have our own tribunals in Britain.

This proposal was accepted after a discussion of when we could manage such an event. Sisters felt that we were not ready for a national tribunal, but that strategically placed local tribunals to draw women from local areas into the campaign might be best. WACC hopes to plan these tribunals in the autumn.

7. London proposed that we should have local action during population control week May 6th to May 12th.

London suggested that we should work with the Population Control as we agreed on so many points. One sister felt that we should ask for a platform during this week and make our views clear, and distinguish ourselves from and suggestion of 'control'.

8. Nottingham and Bristol proposed that we should take on the Right to Lifers and Population Control in public debate and also prepare material arguing against their ideas

This proposal was accepted by everyone. The March 25th demo will initiate this campaign.

Other proposals for a VD answering service, childrens festival, visits from women in similar campaigns in other countries, an abortion/contraception handbook, were discussed but not finally agreed on.

NEWSLETTER: The discussion on how to improve communications within WACC centred on the national newsletter. Rose presented a report from Nottingham in which she stressed the need for contributions from WACC groups, and also outlined some of the difficulties facing groups which take on the task of producing it. Finance presents one of the biggest headaches. £24 was owing to Nottingham for the last 2 issues; partly because 1000 copies had been distributed free at the Acton WL conference. It was agreed that the present issue would be the last mailed to women who had not paid subscriptions; and that costing would be carefully worked out so these deficits would not recur.

It was also decided to rotate the newsletter to different centres. Each centre would take responsibility for six months; in 1973 first London then Bristol would produce it. It was agreed that the newsletter would be produced 6 times a year if possible. Groups were reminded that regularity of production and interest level depended on their own contributions. Copy for No 2 must reach WACC, 14 Radnor Terrace, London SW8 by Monday 9th April.

FLOAT FOR WACC NEWSLETTER:

Antonio, treasurer of London WACC, has devised the following scheme. She thinks we should no longer have to hassle about money. Its okay perhaps for large groups who can afford to fork out advance subsidies for the newsletter - but what of small groups who may want to produce the newsletter but are put off by the initial outlay which may have to come out of their own pockets?

She suggests we donate a sum, a quid or five, or anything you or your group can afford to build a float of £20 at least which is handed over with the address lists etc to each succeeding newsletter publisher.

Cost of 500 mailed copies is £35.00 or 7p per copy. Your subscription for 3 issues in 6 months will be 21p. We don't expect to get 500 subscriptions so do make a generous donation towards (1) our cost of finding out who is staying on the mailing list and (2) the float.

A total of 50p would cover:

- 21p -- your first three issues of the newsletter
- 21p -- to float the following three issues
- 7p -- to pay for someone who gets this free
- (1p -- to add it up to 50p total amount).

If this works out, the newsletter will only cost you 21p every six months hereafter. Please use the subscription form on front page. We have also compiled a comprehensive address list based on information collected by Nottingham and London. The cost of one copy including postage is 7p. The newsletter includes sections on WACC groups and contacts; useful addresses and books; individuals in WACC--listed under towns alphabetically.

'THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE' WACC CONFERENCE, LIVERPOOL

January 27/28, 1973

REPORT OF SATURDAY WORKSHOP ON WACC ORGANISING

How to find sympathetic gynaecologists:

1. Talk with hospital social workers; they are usually at odds with other staff and administration over patients' needs and welfare. If they feel there are common interests between you (and that they are safe in talking with you) they can supply valuable information.
2. Hearsay
3. FPA list of doctors who have taken their course
4. Newspaper adverts.

Dissemination of information (leafletting, etc) on existing birth control facilities creates atmosphere of demand. Pressurizing for expansion of facilities force NHS to provide more services, higher quality service.

1. Local gyns, sympathetic and borderline GPs.
2. Hospital boards: these often give grants for research ie new abortion methods.

Many sympathetic doctors do not know of WACC or WL activities and may welcome support

Amount of support in proportion to public campaigning and discussion.

Specific actions for non-movement people to participate.

Regard for the value of each individual experience.

Collect testimony on forced sterilization.

Abortion is part of contraception since existing methods of contraception are inadequate.

Pressurizing for Outpatient Abortion Units free under NHS, free contraception, no forced sterilisation.

Problems with doctors:

1. Will alienating with abortion issues end good relations in other areas of treatment.
2. How can we cope with doctors of opposing attitudes?

Public demand.

Legal status of abortion:

1. Danger of relying on climate of pro-attitudes ie New York
2. Vagueness of 1967 Act does not guarantee continuing liberal interpretation.

BUT simply changing law will not provide more or better services.

'THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE' WACC CONFERENCE, LIVERPOOL

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REPORT OF SATURDAY DISCUSSION WORKSHOP

How many of the people who rally to the anti-abortion platform of SPUC and LIFE are also anti-contraception. Exploit their differences and awaken their support by splitting them (SPUC finance - examine: church, Angli~~c~~,^r Zamibian League, Monday Club)

Search out supporters of contraception - C of E hierarchy support BCC in some places; organisations like Catholics for Contraception.

We must use every opportunity for debate; bring out the illogicalities and emotionality of SPUC arguments - demoralizing effect.

One sister brought out that London PAS not doing abortions prior to 9 weeks on basis of incomplete terminations of early pregnancy by aspiration - what evidence?

Point of information - 50% married women having NHS abortions are sterilized as well; medical evidence shows that abortion/sterilization combination is physically dangerous. Also shows evidence of pressurization. Investigate enforced sterilization issue; check class breakdown of statistics.

Issue is people's choice to plan when/when not to have children. Usefulness of Karman method - no need to go to hospital - no question of sterilization.

Inconsistent attitudes towards vasectomy - sterilization of wife.

Need a questionnaire vis a vis sterilization, like WONAAC: personal and statistical evidence of enforced sterilization.

* * * * *

FREE CONTRACEPTION - NHS REORGANISATION BILL

The Second Reading of the NHS Reorganisation Bill is due within the next two weeks. Some groups at the conference undertook to organize petitions to their MPs - and will be informed as soon as the date of the Second Reading is set so that they can present the petitions and send a copy to London Group for presentation of the whole lot to Sir Keith Joseph. If you have not heard anything about the date by Monday March 12th and want to check, ring Caroline Charlton at 01-580-9360 (daytime).

For the benefit of those sisters who were not at the conference and want to pressure their MP to vote for free contraception, the enclosed letter from BCC gives masses of useful information. Please write to your MP - there is very little time left - we are very close to getting free contraception for everybody and we mustn't blow it now!

Conference report gives details of the discussion and plans made for action on free contraception (see item 3)

FOREIGN NEWS

UNITED STATES

The US Abortion Campaign was formed a year and a half ago. At that time there were a number of states which made abortion totally illegal, and only one state (New York) which had a restricted law similar to ours. The local abortion groups formed themselves into the "Women's National Abortion Action Coalition" (WONAAC). Their main demands were:

1. Repeal all restrictive Abortion Laws
2. Repeal restrictive contraception laws
3. End forced sterilization.

Many states had laws which made both abortion and contraception illegal. The demand to end forced sterilization is very important in a country of immigrant peoples: black, chicano and Latin women are often only given an abortion if they will also be sterilized.

WONAAC has had a tremendous battle with the "Right-to-Lifers" all over the US. In the State of Michigan in Nov 72 there was a referendum on the question of whether to allow legal abortion on request up to 19 weeks. An organisation called "Voice of the Unborn" spend \$200,000 in a massive publicity campaign to defeat the referendum; slides, filmstrips and pamphlets maintaining that abortion is murder were issued to schools, colleges and churches and they even went from house to house with their material. A group called "Lawyers for Life" did a lot of advertising on busses and streets. The state police raided the Womens Health Centre and arrested a black doctor who was outspoken supporter of legal abortion. As a result of this aggressive campaign by the Right-to-Lifers the referendum was defeated. These groups work in all states and their main aim is to deny a woman her right to decide if and when she wants a child.

Some referenda have been successful and led to changes in state law. The most liberal change was in New York in 1970 when the state government voted to replace the 1865 anti-abortion law with a liberalised law. On January 22 this year the Supreme Court declared abortion legal in all states up to the 24th week of pregnancy. This decision is a great victory for American women. It explicitly states that the 'fetus' cannot be considered a person in the constitutional sense of the word, and therefore has no constitutional rights. The "Right-to-Lifers" have already started to concentrate their battle on this part of the decision. The battle for our American sisters is not over.

Comments made by Dr Barbara Roberts in the recent WONAAC newsletter:

"The victory was not won working quietly behind the scenes. It wasn't won by refusing to confront our enemies. It wasn't won because a few influential people agreed with us, but because we convinced millions of people that we were right. We women took up a battle on our own behalf when we thought the unthinkable and said the unspeakable; then and only then would murderous laws crumble before the force of an idea whose time had come."

"I wish I could reassure you that our work is over, that the right to abortion is a reality, that we can pack up our podium and go home. Unfortunately...we're going to have to make sure that our right to abortion is implemented in all parts of the country. But the major battle is over; we have freed our sisters: we have freed ourselves."

WONAAC: 150 Fifth Avenue, Suite 437, New York, New York 10011.

ABORTION POLITICS IN NEW YORK

Extracts from an article by Madeleine Simms, in the New Statesman, 1st February 1973.

Last week the Supreme Court ruled that a women's doctor shall be the sole judge of whether to perform an abortion during the first three months of pregnancy. This momentous decision could now bring almost every other state's law into line with New York's.

In 1970, New York State passed one of the most liberal abortion laws in the world. Abortion was legalised at the request of the patient, provided she was less than 24 weeks pregnant, and that the operation was carried out by a licensed physician.

No sooner was the bill passed than it came under fierce attack from not only those against abortion but also those in favour of it. Militant liberationists wished to see the law not merely 'reformed' but totally 'repealed'. In 1971, an attempt was accordingly made to expunge the remaining references to abortion from state law. Despite some initial success, the Bill eventually floundered in committee and died at the end of the session. Meanwhile the Church was gathering its forces. In 1972, by mounting a political lobby on a scale never before witnessed in New York, it managed to bring in the Donovan-Crawford amendment, which would have restricted legal abortion on rigidly defined health grounds, setting the clock back 20 years. Governor Rockefeller refused to sign and the amendment fell.

Under the shelter of the existing reform remarkable things have happened in New York. In two years, more than 400,000 women have had legal abortions. Last year, more than 80% of all abortions were carried out within the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, and the abortion mortality rate fell to 3.5 per 100,000. The numbers of women admitted to hospital following illegal abortion, have "fallen markedly".

The radical nature of New York reform encouraged the formation of wholly new institutions to cater for the huge demand for legal termination that surfaced as soon as it was permitted to do so. These "free-standing" clinics...are specialist units providing day-release abortions for women less than 12 weeks pregnant, by local anaesthesia, and in nearly all cases by suction methods. But these clinics are not permitted to carry out late abortions, so that a poor woman who cannot afford private hospital fees, or a young frightened girl who has left it late, stands a possibly worse chance of obtaining a legal abortion than a British woman similarly placed.

Now a new possibility has appeared on the horizon, usually referred to as menstrual extraction in Britain, and as endometrial aspiration in America. This is a very simple suction device appropriate to the first week of suspected pregnancy, before pregnancy tests can be effective. A growing number of liberationists believe that this method is safe enough for women to be trained to use on each other, or even on themselves. No doctors, no clinics, no laws, no regulations, no money. The perfect method.

The supreme court, in striking down Texas and Georgia laws, did not completely prohibit state abortion laws. But, it has made it extremely difficult to interfere with a woman's abortion decision. This ruling will put new heart into reformers and repealers all over the United States.

ITS BAD IN CANADA TOO!

Canada has a restrictive abortion law like Britain. Women are only allowed an abortion if they are recommended by their doctor and go before a hospital committee of at least three doctors. The woman's own doctor can only recommend an abortion if her pregnancy "endangers her life and/or health". The hospital committees act as judges and only accept a certain number of the recommendations. They do this because most of them have not the facilities to cope with the demand for abortions. Many women never even get to the committees and are put on waiting lists. There is no law that forces hospitals to set up these committees - so many of them do not, and others do no abortions at all.

Many abortion repeal groups were formed in the autumn of '71 and the spring of '72. Last March they formed themselves into a nationally co-ordinated campaign whose main aim is to repeal all the anti-abortion laws which exist in different states. This March (15-18) they are having a national conference to plan an attack on the state laws. The Minister of Justice has refused to have a debate on the question of abortion in spite of an opinion poll which showed that 61% of Canadian adults agree that the decision on abortion should be made solely by the woman and her doctor. Abortion in Canada is still on the criminal code.

If you want to find out more about the Canadian situation, there is an abortion handbook available in paperback:

Abortion in Canada by Eleanor Wright PeKrine
(New Press 1972)

The Canadian repeal movement also produces a newsletter called "Spokeswoman". It can be obtained from:

The Canadian Women's Coalition to Repeal the Abortion Laws,
Box 5673,
Station A,
Toronto, Canada.
(7 issues for \$1.00)

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DOCTOR ARRESTED IN BELGIUM

Dr Willy Peers, a co-founder of the Belgian Society to Repeal the Abortion Law, is now in prison in Belgium, awaiting trial for performing more than 300 abortions in 1972. His arrest came after several months of harassment by the secret police, the District Attorneys and the Governor of the Province of Namur. Belgian abortion laws prohibit abortion except when the mother's life would be endangered by having a child. The law also provides a maximum of 5 years jail for women who undergo abortions and 20 years for the doctor performing them.

On Feb 1st 1973 a preliminary hearing was held in Liege, Belgium. The hearing upheld Dr Peers' arrest and detention, and since there is no bail system in Belgium, he can be held in prison up to two years awaiting trial. The arrest of Dr Peers has caused an upsurge of protest in his behalf in Belgium. Ten thousand supporters gathered in front of the prison of Namur on Jan 27 to demand his release and the repeal of Belgium's abortion law.

There was another demonstration in Leige on February 24th.

If you want to send letters or telegrams of support to Dr Peers, write to:

C/o Comite Willy Peers, 75 Rue Robert-Jones,
Brussels 180, Belgium.
Telephone 02-43-77-29

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WOMEN SPEAK OUT IN FRANCE

The following document has been translated to help you to see the legal situation of abortion in France and how determined the women are to fight.

A group of women from MLF (French Women's Lib) denounces the 1920 law on abortion: 'a man's law'

If Marie-Claire, the 17 years old saleslady who has been taken to the Bobigny court was not afraid of the judge and if public opinion has been so openly in favour of her acquittal, it is the result of the women's struggle. Individually we have always refused the intertiction of abortion since thousands of us have an abortion in France every day. We have come together for two years to struggle together against our oppression, the law against abortion being only one aspect of it. The manifesto of the 343 (in April 1971: I had an abortion: 343 famous women signed an abortion telling publicly that they had had an abortion), the international demonstration of November 20th and the days when crimes against women were exposed have contributed to expose the scandal of abortion....

The difference between "equality of sexes" which is announced so loudly and the reality we live as exploited people (in the factory, in the office, in the kitchen, in bed) is intolerably cynical. This difference between the reality lived by women and the male ideology is even reflected in the law. One million women have an abortion each year in France, 200 to 300 are convicted and sent home with suspended sentences. On the other hand, repression strikes those who perform the abortion, like the nurse from Belfort convicted in July to 2 years prison, a high fine and the interdiction to practise...

Why such a law? Because even when women are forced to have an abortion they must be frightened, ashamed and feel guilty. Money does not change anything; with 2000F abortion is more comfortable but you still have to go through the humiliating hunt for addresses; you have to cope with the feeling of strain and guilt they have put on our heads. If women could have an abortion without problems it would mean they are free to choose their motherhood and thus their life. It would mean it is no longer men who control reproduction, which is secured by us alone, women, for the sake of men's society, to fill better their factories and supermarkets.

Thus the reform they prepare will not change anything. It will force us to keep on inventing excuses to have an abortion. In this society abortion will never be free, it will only be liberalised. Because the society is convinced and has convinced us that the right to be a woman means the duty to be a mother..... We think you must have good reasons to have children. Who has

LET US HOLD AN INTERNATIONAL ABORTION TRIBUNAL IN EUROPE

A personal comment

I wanted to suggest an International Abortion Tribunal, but one held in the centre of Europe.

Being myself Swedish it always seems to me that in Britain people tend to think of themselves as apart from the rest of Europe, which of course is sheer nonsense. The oppression of women, particularly in Catholic countries, is abominable and we all know the Catholic Church's attitude to contraception and abortion.

In Italy, for example, there are as many back-street abortions as live births and thousands of women dying as a result of this. Even in Ireland, so close to England itself, the situation is the same.

In France, in Italy, in Germany, in Scandinavia, in Belgium etc, there are now women's movements growing and very exciting theory, action and ideas developing (see for example Italian Mariarosa Della Costa's "The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community") and everywhere women are struggling for the right to control their own fertility. (See the other reports in the Newsletter about developments in Belgium and France). I feel that surely we should now be thinking of thoroughly linking together all over Europe and start working very closely together and an International Tribunal in Europe would be a beginning.

Monica Sjöo - Bristol Feb 1973.

FOREIGN NEWS continued....

SWEDISH SISTERS HOLD EXHIBITION

Those areas of woman's life often hidden and kept secret will be prominently displayed at an exhibition on women organised by a small group of feminists in Gothenburg in March as the first exhibition of a new gallery.

Menstruation, child bearing, contraception, abortion and the menopause will be brought out into the open at this exhibition. Objectification, sexism, exploitation of women; their traditional role in society as minors, wives and mothers, in the home and at work, will be shown.

One of several media used to make people think about the above issues will be individual and group discussion.

Can't we do something like this as well?

BOOK REVIEW

WITCHES, MIDWIVES AND NURSES - A HISTORY OF WOMEN HEALERS
by Barbara Ehrenreich & Deirdre English: available from Health/
Pac, 17 Murray St, New York 10007 traces very clearly the devel-
opment in USA of the rise of a male, white, middle/upper class
"medical profession".

"PROFESSIONS ARE THE CREATION OF A RULING CLASS". A profession
attains and maintains its position by the protection and patron-
age of some elite segment of society which has been persuaded
that there is some special value in its work. (Elliot Friedson)

The popular health movement in the 1820's and 30's coincided
with the beginnings of an organised feminist movement. The
movement was a radical assault on medical elitism and an affir-
mation of the tradition of people's medicine. "Regular" licensed
doctors were attacked as members of the parasitic, non-producing
classes. Lay healers used mild herbal medications and dietary
changes while "regular" doctors in the early 19th century used
drastic methods more likely to kill than cure. Schools were
opened to teach medicine to the people: poor, women, blacks at
a time when "regular" institutions were closed to them.

Towards the end of the century, however, "regular" doctors went
back on the offensive and in 1848 they pulled together their
first national medical organisation, the American Medical Assoc-
iation. They relentlessly attacked lay-healers, women practiti-
oners and women in general: in a 1848 obstetrical text one could
read: "She has a head almost too small for intellect but just
big enough for love".

A profession is a group which has authority in law to select its
own members and regulate their practice; luckily enough for the
"regular" doctors, both the science and the patronage to do this
became available at the turn of the century. New medical schools
were set up which required 4 years of medical school following
4 years of college, and barred most working class and poor people
from medical training. Massive philanthropic foundations grew
up and high on their agenda was the creation of a respectable,
scientific medical profession. From 1903 foundation-money began
pouring into "regular" schools and a man, Flexner, was sent all
over the US to decide which schools should receive the money.
The smaller, poorer schools, which included most of the schools
for blacks and women weren't considered worth saving. Their options
were to close or to remain open and face public denunciation in
the 1910 Flexner report. Small medical schools closed by the
score as a result of the report; medicine was established as a
branch of "higher learning". New tough, licensing laws sealed
the monopoly on medical practice.

All that was left was to drive out the last hold-outs of people's
medicine - the midwives. In 1910 about 50% of all babies were
delivered by midwives, most were Blacks or working-class immigrants.
This was a threat to the new obstetrical speciality. State after
state passed laws outlawing midwifery and restricting the practice
to doctors who were more ignorant, unhygienic and very expensive.
For many women this meant worse or no obstetrical care; an increase
in child-mortality was the immediate result of the law. There
became a split in medicine between doctors and nurses - doctors
are now the bosses in an industry where the workers are mainly
women.