

Women and Therapy

Broadside:

The following is an open letter to Professional Development Associates, the organizers of the Women and Therapy conference being held in Toronto in November:

I wish to formally withdraw from participation in the upcoming Women and Therapy conference. I'm aware that it is quite late for me to withdraw and for that reason, and that alone, I apologize. My initial misgivings have given way to a growing sense of horror over this conference and I wish to publicly disassociate myself from it.

It has become clear to me that the conference is a big money-making proposition and that money is being made at the expense of women. In a Machiavellian fashion women are again being used, both as therapists and clients, as advertising for a commercial venture. The fees for two days of this three-day conference that range from \$135 to \$160 are ludicrously high. The fact that the first day of the conference, euphemistically labelled "pre-conference," costs an additional \$50 to \$65 is simply outrageous. The so-called reduced fee of \$90 for students (\$30 for the "pre-conference") is utterly impossible for the vast majority of students. It might as well be \$900. My guess is that a form that each participant was asked to sign regarding taping of the sessions and sales of the tapes also means that we

would be unable to allow students access to the conference by making our own tapes of the sessions. One cannot describe such an event as feminist since it is inaccessible to virtually all women. I'm tired of shamefacedly apologizing to classes of students, most of whom would like to attend the conference, and to feminist friends for participating in such an elitist event.

My realizations regarding these issues finally crystallized as I was preparing my notes for my presentation on The Empowerment of Women and Feminist Therapy. Women can never be empowered as long as such elitism is carried out in our names and in the absence of most women's voices.

I am not criticizing the other participants in the conference, many of whom are in private

practice or free-lancing, and who are, quite legitimately, being paid reasonable fees for their presentations. I am criticizing Professional Development Associates who are, by all indications, making a good deal of money on this event. If there is a next time, we can do it ourselves. Most of the participants in this conference are local. We could bring in a few people from elsewhere, pay honoraria to people in private practice and free-lancers, and still charge very nominal fees. Non-profit events of this sort are the rule rather than the exception.

My only regret in withdrawing from participation is that I will now be unable to attend the conference. It's too expensive.

Jeri Wine
OISE, Toronto

No Choice for Pro-Choice

by Eve Zaremba

Abortion has not been illegal in Canada since 1969, when the Criminal Code was 'reformed' to permit abortion under certain specified conditions.

Yet, just a few months later, in May 1970, the Abortion Caravan set out from Vancouver, "stopping in a dozen towns and cities en route to Ottawa," as Myrna Kostash reported in her book *Long Way From Home*, "holding public meetings and swelling their ranks with supporters anxious to add their bodies to the demonstrations planned for Parliament Hill. In Kamloops, Edmonton, Regina, Winnipeg, the Lakehead, Sudbury, Toronto, activists knew they were coming; they greeted them, billeted them, cooked up hot suppers. . . They travelled with a coffin, symbolizing the women dead from illegal abortions, and filled it, in one town after another, with petitions signed by thousands and thousands of women demanding the repeal of the abortion laws."

We knew then that the abortion law was a sham. It set out conditions which were (and are) discriminatory, demeaning and dangerous to the health of women. Much has changed in the intervening 14 years but this discriminatory, demeaning and dangerous law remains on the books.

Like all unjust and inequitable law, the Canadian abortion law must be made ineffective until it can be repealed. That is, means must be found to spare women its worst effects. Free-standing clinics are such a means. These should ultimately be women-run, but until that becomes possible any free-standing clinics are a challenge to the law and a boon to women who need them.

Due to the perseverance of Dr. Henry Morgentaler, who at considerable personal cost won a series of legal battles, free-standing abortion clinics operate in Québec as part of the provincial health care system. Like it or not, Québec remains constitutionally a part of Canada and the Criminal Code is operative there. These clinics can operate in Québec only because test cases were won.

Having established this legal precedent, it was Morgentaler who moved to set up clinics in Manitoba and Ontario. No other doctor was

either willing or financially prepared to do so. It takes money, dedication and guts for a doctor to so challenge the established system. Morgentaler has all three.

As was fully expected by anyone not totally naive, each of the clinics outside Québec was raided and closed. Morgentaler and the staffs of both clinics have been charged under the Criminal Code with 'conspiracy' to perform abortions without fulfilling the required conditions. The Winnipeg case's trial date will be set soon; in Toronto hearings are to start November 21 at Old City Hall.

These are important test cases. Regardless of their initial verdicts, both will go to appeal, all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada. It is going to be a long, hard and at times discouraging process. We must be prepared to carry on for years to come. For the issues are clear: it is not Morgentaler, or even his clinics, it is women's reproductive freedoms which are at stake. *Lest we Forget!*

Abortion holds a special position in our Liberation Movement, largely because of the nature of the anti-abortion forces. On no other issues central to the liberation of women do we face such well organized, well financed, vocal and focused opposition. There is plenty of resistance to women getting access to better job training, better jobs or better pay, but let's face it, thousands do not come pouring out of rented buses to demonstrate against equal pay for work of equal value or for affirmative action.

This kind of thing only happens on the issue of abortion. That is what makes this a different and uniquely difficult area to work in. It is difficult to plan future actions in the glare of media publicity. It is hard to discuss internal problems or resolve strategic differences knowing that our opponents are watching and waiting to take advantage of our open consensual ways of organizing.

They have no such constraints on their efforts. Quite the reverse. They organize from the top down. Via the church-run school system they have access to the minds and bodies of young Canadians, to captive audiences in church pews, and to millions of tax-free dollars. Mighty and influential institutions, like the Roman Catholic Church, are working



It all started here! Henry Morgentaler (centre) with supporters (from left) June Callwood, Michele Dore and Judy Rebick at OCAC meeting in Toronto, November 1982.

against the sexual and reproductive self-determination of women; no wonder our chicken-shit politicians are afraid to buck them. They would like the abortion issue just to go away. Perhaps we will forget the whole thing if sufficiently discouraged, they think. Perhaps the moon is made of green cheese.

It should be clear to anyone who cares to hear us that access to abortion is part of an historic drive by women throughout the world for reproductive freedom. At a minimum, this includes universal access to safe birth control, freedom from coercive sex and from forced sterilization. These are the indivisible prerequisites for our liberation. Therefore, sexual and reproductive issues such as abortion are ultimately non-negotiable.

Since we are going to be in this fight for a long time to come, let's be smart about it. It's time to evaluate our strategy. We know the strong points of our opponents; let's not play into them. For instance, we have seen their ability to put on an impressive show of numbers when allowed the lead time to organize. We know that they far outstrip us in material resources. Sending women out into the streets was a useful tactic when the objective was to focus attention on the issue. But that has long been well and truly attained. To get into head-count competition now with the

anti-choice forces is an inefficient use of our resources. The time and energies of activists must be deployed to best advantage, not dissipated pointlessly. The issue is in the courts; we need to be present there consistently and persistently but not en masse. There are other issues and struggles to work on as well.

An interesting possibility is to try to turn the very abilities and strengths of the Church-led anti-choice forces against them. How do Canadians feel about the use of our tax-supported separate schools to propagandize our children on a one-sided political issue? How safe is any religious, cultural, sexual or racial group when a powerful minority can have its 'moral' standards legislated and made mandatory for the rest of us? How do we like the sight of those buses from Buffalo and Detroit full of people recruited in the States to swell the ranks of the anti-choice, anti-clinic demonstrators in Toronto? There are people and groups which may not be pro-choice on abortion, but which would be very much disturbed by such manifestations. Let's get more publicity on this. The federal election looming in 1984 provides an opportunity to get after all three parties on these highly political issues, as well as on abortion alone.

There is much to do. We need not get stuck with stale old strategies. ●

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