

Re: Abortion Strategy

Dear Sisters:

Vancouver Women's Caucus is trying to co-ordinate a national campaign, together with other Women's Liberation groups across Canada, against Trudeau's so-called 'liberal' abortion laws. This letter is an attempt to lay out how we see the campaign building, the political objectives of that campaign and the kind of organizing we hope to do. We see the demand for the right to control our own bodies as a necessary part of the fight for the control of our own lives. Women will not be liberated until they have this, among other, basic rights.

Women who have a consciousness of their oppression must lead this struggle. Through this campaign women can begin to understand the power they have when they act collectively. Abortion is a human right for women. When in Ottawa we must demand that all mention of Abortion be taken out of the Criminal Code. Each woman's right to decide whether or not to continue a pregnancy must not be limited in any way by law.

We cannot tolerate compulsory sterilization or birth control any more than we can tolerate compulsory pregnancy. Compulsory sterilization has been seen as a solution to the problem of poor, black and native women in this country. The government has raised the spectre of overpopulation in relation to our poor women and people of the third world. It is necessary to accumulate facts and arguments on this to make clear our position is to give women control of our own bodies, not to enable a minority to control women through compulsory abortion or birth control.

Abortion links into many aspects of the oppression of women. These links must be made throughout the campaign if we really hope to change the situation of women.

Abortion is inseparable from birth control. The campaign should include attacks on the priorities of a social system which makes it so difficult for women to obtain safe birth control and abortion; the lack of birth control information in the school system; the lack of serious scientific research to develop birth control devices which are both safe and effective; how the profit motivation of the drug industry distorts research priorities (the pill as a million dollar industry, etc.); the racism involved in research - i.e. only poor women or members of racial minorities are used as guinea pigs. We hope to have a demonstration against a local drug company to protest the lack of research readily available to women. Women have died from birth control pills because doctors have not taken adequate precautions. This information must be made public.

Birth control is the right of any and all women after puberty. Contraceptives and information on birth control should be made available to all girls in high school. We must challenge the counselling system in the schools which do not provide this information. To be effective, the campaign must be prepared to deal with questions of sexual morality. For instance, even if birth control information is available, women in high schools feel guilty using it because of the false morality, the double standard surrounding dating. In order to begin to change this, we must do some organizing with high school women around the Abortion campaign. Guerilla theatre, leafletting high schools, and speaking in classes can be used as ways of organizing high school students.

Just as research on birth control is biased against poor and non-white women, the present law makes it impossible for poor or working class women to obtain safe abortions. These are available for those who can pay (legal abortions in Britain or Japan and safe illegal abortions in Vancouver cost about the same.) Research should be done into problems relating to welfare mothers and medicine. The class biases in medicine reflect the class interests of doctors and the profit motivation in medicine. The medical profession seems to be controlled by a small group

of doctors at the top who determine policy for the medical profession relating to entrance into medical school, training of doctors, standards of practise, and hospital policy. The majority of doctors know little more than we do about how decisions are made within their profession.

It is important to do research on the structure of the medical profession (the College of Physicians and Surgeons, the Medical Association, etc.) and alternative methods of medical organization other than the free enterprise, fee-for-service method. We hope to raise the demand for community-controlled clinics (e.g. the experience in Saskatchewan with community controlled clinics) which provide birth control information and contraceptives to women, abortions, pre-natal and maternity care. These clinics should be publicly funded with community control over the hiring and firing of doctors. Abortions in the first twelve weeks do not require hospitalization. It is a very simple operation that can be performed in a clinic or out-patient ward of a hospital. We must raise this demand to the Medical Association and to the provincial government. We hope to either get an open hearing in Victoria and/or go to a meeting of the Medical Association in Vancouver to challenge the priorities of the system and raise our demands. We see this as a part of the building action for our national campaign but this work must continue after May 10th.

We also hope to bring to the attention of the government and public the role of hospital boards and the hospital abortion committees. The present law makes the whole process of abortion far more costly and complicated than is necessary. The money spent on women who enter hospitals with infections and complications from illegal abortions (20,000 women in Canada per year) could be much better spent on a more rational abortion system. Hospital boards in B.C. are not elected, but are made up of businessmen appointed by the government. The public has little direct control over hospital policy.

When in Ottawa we hope to maintain the links built into the local campaign. We suggested to Ottawa and Toronto that we demand open hearings with the Dept. of Justice and the Dept. of Health and Welfare while in Ottawa. The advantage of hearings is that you have a chance to publicize your position. It would also be good if each women's liberation group could put pressure on the federal representatives from the Dept. of Justice and the Dept. of Health and Welfare located in their area. Perhaps we could have mock hearings, or a public meeting to challenge the federal representatives, along with local support demonstrations.

It is our hope that we can utilize the abortion campaign not only to build toward better communication and more solidarity with the women in B.C. but across the country as well. This could only be accomplished with the help and participation of ALL women's liberation groups.

We are considering sending a representative, well in advance of the caravan, to talk with W.L. people across the prairies and, so far as time and money allows, to help women begin to organize in areas where they have been unable to do so up to now. In this way, we could anticipate the possibility of completing the Ottawa action with the beginnings, at least, of a truly national movement.

A caravan of well decorated cars — the first with a roof rack carrying the coffin — will be leaving Vancouver around May 1 in order to reach Ottawa by May 9 for the action. We are hoping to make brief stops in all major cities to do guerilla theatre, soap box on street corners, at parks and/or campuses (where local groups have made arrangements), camping each night at previously publicized (again, by local W.L.s) locations where people can gather for rap sessions, songs, etc. If we have done our work well, cars will be joining the caravan from each city.

We don't have much time and in order for our plans to become a reality, we'll all have to start working right away. By sharing our research, ideas, addresses etc. we can hopefully avoid a lot of duplication. We'll send you our information as it becomes available and hope you can do the same. We are really excited about building, with you and all our sisters, our first national action. Let's make it a good one!

In solidarity,

Vicky Brown .. Marge Hollibaugh  
Dawn Carrell .. Betsy Meadley

Vancouver Women's Caucus  
Campaign Co-ordinating Comm.