

## ABORTION: A HUMAN RIGHT FOR WOMEN

### THE CHOICE OF THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT

Every year in Canada 2,000 women die from hack abortions. Twenty thousand more are hospitalized. Less than one percent of those women requesting abortions in B. C. are able to go through the therapeutic abortion system.

The Vancouver Women's Caucus set up a clinic to help women obtain safe abortions and confront the cruel out-rageously inadequate abortion system with their very real needs for abortion. Of the 200 women who have gone through the clinic only eight have obtained therapeutic abortions. Well over a hundred women were told by at least one doctor that they had no hope of getting a therapeutic abortion. The situation remains serious: obviously Mr. Trudeau's Just Society laws have done little to alleviate it.

Under the British North American Act the Provincial Government is responsible for the health and welfare of people within the province. Due to the fact that the Criminal Code of Canada, Section 237 is not conducive to the health of women and, in fact, causes a number of women in B. C. to die each year the medical rights of women continue to be denied.

### WHY THE PRESENT SYSTEM DOESN'T WORK

OVERCROWDING: Abortions have been defined as a non-priority operation because of the serious problem of overcrowding in the hospitals. Yet Dr. Folkes, Medical Director of the Royal Columbian, estimates that it would take a 500 bed hospital working 365 days a year to look after the 20,000 Canadian women who enter hospitals with complications from hack abortions. The minor surgery required for legal abortions could be done safely in a doctors office or a clinic at a fraction of the present cost, and without putting further pressure on the overcrowded hospitals.

RED TAPE: Only one of the four major hospitals in Vancouver will do any therapeutic abortions. Of the hospitals who will do them, each hospital has different proceedings. At Vancouver General Hospital it is impossible for patients and even difficult for doctors to find who is on the abortion committee, when it meets and how to present a case to them. The closed committee system at Lions Gate Hospital make it appear that the procedure was designed specifically to prevent any abortions from being done.

ORGANIZATION OF THE MEDICAL PROFESSION: The present system reinforces the doctors control over patients. The Medical Act and Code of Ethics protect the rights of the doctors so that the patient has no recourse when a doctor imposes the moral, political and religious values of the medical profession. Women get little help when they go to the doctors seeking legal abortions. and yet in a survey done by Women's Caucus it appears that the majority of doctors favor more liberal abortion laws. Doctors tend to act conservatively not only for personal reasons, but because of the enormous power of the college of physicians and surgeons. The code of ethic adopted by College of Physicians and Surgeons specifically prohibits the dissent of individual doctors. They are only allowed to present to the public opinions which represent "what is the generally accepted opinion of the medical profession." The Code of Ethics states regarding abortion: "The only justification is that the continuance of the pregnancy would imperil the life of the mother." A position which is more conservative than even the present federal law. The College is a semi-judicial body and has the power to punish by fines, reprimands and suspensions doctors who do not follow its dictates.

## WHAT THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT CAN DO - DEMANDS

APPEAL TO THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT: Because the Provincial Government under the British North American Act is responsible for the health and welfare of women within the province, and due to the fact that the Criminal Code of Canada causes a number of B.C. women to die each year, we ask that the Government of B.C. Appeal to Ottawa to remove abortion from the Criminal Code.

ADDITIONAL FACILITIES: Under 237 of the Criminal Code, the Provincial Health Minister has the power to approve additional facilities for doing therapeutic abortions. We would like to see the Government take initiative in setting up community controlled clinics all over the Province by providing grants for the establishment of such facilities. This is a part of our program of demands for community controlled and publicly funded clinics which provide birth control information, pregnancy testing, therapeutic abortions, maternity care, sterilization and vasectomy. Besides easing the overcrowding of hospitals, these clinics would eliminate the overwhelming amount of red tape now involved in obtaining therapeutic abortions.

MEDICAL PROFESSION: The medical profession is under Provincial jurisdiction (ref: the B.C. Medical Act). The provincial government has the power to amend the Medical Act and make the medical profession more responsible to the public. We recommend that these amendments be in the direction of decentralized power and community involvement by making the College of Physicians and Surgeons hold open meetings with more doctors and lay people involved in decision making.

Women of B.C. will no longer tolerate this situation. The Government must begin to take up its responsibility in order that women can obtain the medical care that is their right.

We wrote a letter to Health Minister Loffmark, dated March 10, asking for an open meeting within the next three weeks. He did not reply. We sent him a night letter March 19, and again he did not reply. Now we have come to Victoria to make our demands in person.

We want the government to take steps to implement our demands immediately!

WE WANT THE GOVERNMENT OF B.C. TO BEGIN TO SERVE THE WOMEN OF B.C.