

Abortion—a woman's natural right

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1970

I remember being carried from the treatment room to a pleasant, sun-filled living room as I regained consciousness. The doctor carefully tucked a blanket around me and presented me with a smile and a cup of tea and asked how I felt.

I could hardly believe that I'd just had an abortion and remember the multiple crash of feelings I experienced at that moment—relief, tenderness, despair. The relief was due to the fact that it was over and that I was free again to make plans, to take up my life where I had left it, and that through the whole thing I had been treated with simple human dignity.

The tenderness was for my surroundings not a back-alley chamber of horrors and not a grey, alienating, fear-inspiring hospital, but the private office-home of my Doctor, where she and her husband (also an O.B.) and their children lived, worked and played. The despair I felt was for my sisters back home in America.

As I was a student in Poland, a country where abortions are legal, I was provided the luxury of a safe, painless, guilt-free experience while they were subjected to the butchery of quack abortionists and the righteous “morality” of a system which clearly regards pregnancy as a means of controlling, oppressing and punishing women.

In those first few moments of post-anesthesia I understood clearly and angrily that abortion is a woman's basic, natural and inalienable right. Without it, she has no control over her own body or her own destiny.

This experience led me to testify before a recent state senate committee hearing on proposed changes in Michigan's abortion laws and stimulated a deep personal interest in Michigan's growing abortion movement and the issue of abortion itself.

The hearing was not without its crazy, funny-sad moments—a doctor waving about a 3-month fetal specimen in a mason jar and trying, at the same time to establish the humanity of the unborn fetus; the black Baptist minister, who, Bible in hand, chauvinism up front, preached a foot-stamping, down-home sermon about how woman was created for man and wasn't entitled to any rights that God (and Man) didn't give, her; another doctor who charged that abortion was part of a gigantic communist plot, etc., etc.

As I listened to the weighty testimony that fell on the side of legalization, however, several disturbing things began to emerge. They surfaced again a week later at the March 7th conference on abortion sponsored by MORAL (Michigan Organization for the Repeal of Abortion Laws).

First, although the issue of abortion speaks to the oppression of all women in this society, it is clearly a middle-class struggle, waged by middle-class women (largely white) who are generally inclined to deal with abortion as a single, isolated issue without linking it to the fact that poor women, black and white, could not afford abortions if they were legal and are not only denied access to safe, legal abortions, but are without adequate health care of any kind for themselves or their families, have no day-care facilities, etc.

The demand for legalized abortion, therefore, remains generally meaningless to a poor woman unless accompanied by the demand for free abortions and better health care generally. She is too busy doing daily battle with more immediate and pressing problems of food, shelter, illness and harassment from police and city agencies to take up a struggle which will lead her nowhere.

Failure to respond to the real and pressing needs of poor and working class women will mean that the abortion movement, if successful, will have brought about privileged reforms for the privileged few without really solving the problem of the black abortionist or eliminating the arduous deaths of his victims and will not have focused attention on the total pattern of the oppression of women in this society.

There is a problem for black women, even with respect to the demand for free abortions, a problem many of the white women at the conference were completely insensitive and indifferent to—the problem of genocide.

The story of Detroit's Mom's and Tot's Center (an inner-city family and day-care center) is a typical example of how "family planning" for instance, is being forced on blacks. It is a center that evolved from a community's needs, was planned and in part paid for by that community (bake sales, fund raising, etc.) and is now facing a severe cut-off of Federal funds unless it junks its day-care center, pre- and post-natal child care classes, teen clubs, etc. and becomes strictly a birth control station.

Even more despicable is the routine sterilization (in many cases without prior consent) of black and Puerto Rican women patients in many public hospitals around the country.

If abortions were legal and free, it's not only possible but probable that women on welfare would be denied the right to have children. Given this country's racism, its growing polarization around the problems racism begets, and the recent emphasis on population control, genocide is a very real and valid fear for blacks. One way to implement it is to keep black women from having children.

I believe women in the abortion movement have, somehow, to relate to the issue of black genocide because there is a very real danger that we could bring it about in the pursuit of our own self interest.

Intimately connected with the problem of genocide is an argument supporting abortion reform that I found particularly offensive and one I think should be steered clear of—the ecology argument (i.e. abortion is a good means of keeping the population down). Aside from evoking the threat of genocide to blacks, such an argument co-opts the struggle of women for their own liberation.

Population control is not the issue. The issue is a woman's right to her own body and her own life.

The problems raised here in connection with the abortion issue and the movement surrounding it are not intended to suggest or even imply that the struggle should not be waged. The denial of abortions is one of the most brutal and blatant methods this society has developed for keeping women in line.

Forced to bear and raise children whether they want to or not, women become unsalaried "people producers", walking reproductive organs for the State, and then are denied any further support for the children they bear (such as day-care facilities, etc.), are prevented from seeking or attaining their full potential as human beings, and finally, are discriminated against in the search for jobs because they have children.

The right to safe, legal abortions must not be gained for middle-class women alone, nor must it be purchased at the expense of blacks, for whom genocide is a very real threat, nor should it be co-opted by any supportive argument which diverts attention from the real enemy—the system- and zeroes in on a nice, "safe", manipulative issue like overpopulation.

Abortion has to be dealt with, not as a single, isolated issue but should be dealt with as it relates to this system's total oppression of women, its deliberate disregard for people's needs in general (unless those needs can be turned into profit for the ruling class), and its ability to turn one group's gain into another's loss.

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<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/101-march-19-april-1-1970/abortion-a-womans-natural-right>
Fifth Estate #101, March 19-April 1, 1970

fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net