

Abortion must be...

Legal, free, on demand

Fifth Estate Collective

1971

...Legal

Michigan women will demonstrate in Lansing March 13 for one aspect of our liberation—the right to abortion. Our demands are: free and legal abortion on demand; no forced sterilization; repeal of all existing abortion laws.

Abortion should be a human right. To a woman who has no choice but to bear children, liberation is no more than a bad joke. When we can control our own fertility, we can each work and plan our future. We will be better able to fight against the other forms of oppression that we encounter. We must be free to govern our own bodies and it is for this basic freedom that we will march in Lansing.

The Bursley bill for abortion reform will be under consideration by the Michigan Senate when we move on the capitol. It is similar to the New York abortion reform.

Two reform bills have been defeated in Michigan, but with the growing movement for abortion reform this bill has a slightly better chance of passing.

If abortion becomes legal, fewer women will have to submit to the humiliation and danger of illegal operations. Organized crime in Michigan will take a substantial cut in its third most lucrative enterprise.

Now let's take a look at the shortcomings of this bill. It makes abortion legal IF performed by a licensed physician in a licensed hospital or clinic; IF the woman has been a Michigan resident for 90 days before the abortion; IF the woman is over 18 years of age, unless she has the written consent of her parents.

All of these restrictions serve to deprive some women of their right to abortion on demand. The licensed physician/ hospital requirement insists that the job be done by doctors in hospitals, when it could be shifted to well-trained technicians in special abortion clinics. It overlooks the future development of pills and procedures that would make it possible for women themselves to bring on a safe abortion. (Such methods are now being developed in England.)

The residency requirement effectively rules out the possibility of women coming from other states to obtain Michigan abortions. The age requirement leaves the choice of abortion up to a young woman's parents. Legalization must make abortions easily available to all women. There must be no more restrictions on who may receive an abortion.

It seems that we may get a legal abortion bill this year. But actually, what legislators are most concerned with when they consider a "liberalized" bill is whether it can be of advantage to their political careers. The abortion bill's chance of passing would drop sharply during an election year, when cautious senators would refuse to commit themselves on such a "hot" issue.

...Free

The first woman to die from a legal abortion in New York was Carmen Rodriguez—a Puerto Rican sister. She couldn't afford to go to an expensive hospital and ended up getting butchered in a public hospital where the conditions were terrible. Safe abortions are the privilege of the people who can pay for them. For those who can't, the choice is either an unsafe abortion or another unwanted child.

But abortions have always been available for the wealthy even when they were illegal. In Michigan illegal abortions cost from \$250 up to \$1000. Making abortions legal won't change the price much. Check out these figures:

Rumania: \$2.50

Poland: \$6.00

Hungary: \$1.00

Japan: \$10.00

New York: \$100 to \$300 hospital plus up to \$400 in doctor's fees

Why the difference in cost? It's because the American doctor is far more a prospering businessman than a dedicated public servant. Private hospitals see patients in terms of their potential profit. In order to have free or nearly-free abortions, doctors as a group will have to give up power, prestige and profits. And they aren't going to do that yet.

In Lansing we will be demanding that abortions be Free. Few women can afford them at the prices they are now. Most women just don't have several hundred dollars, which means the added humiliation of begging the cost of an abortion from husband, father or boss. Free abortion is impossible in the United States until medical care can be nationalized. That means not everyone will be entitled to medical care regardless of their ability to pay. Working women often fear that demanding free abortions means we want more money out of their paychecks. That's because most of the money the government now spends on its shoddy public facilities comes from working peoples' pockets. Those funds should come from the real money makers—the big businesses. Why not turn some of those businesses' profits, war expenditures, doctors' profits, into FREE ABORTIONS? An abortion reform alone will never put abortions within reach of the women who need them the most.

...On demand

Making abortions legal is not enough. It only means that decisions concerning abortion pass from the legislature, not to the women who are affected, but to the equally male-dominated medical establishment. The implication is the same: that the pregnant woman, even if she is being advised by a competent physician, is not to be considered responsible for making an ethical decision. Hospital boards and doctors will make the decision for her.

Doctors as a group are conservative. Many of them are personally repelled by abortion either as an uninteresting operation or as a moral issue. They won't suspend their personal prejudices when they sit as policy makers on hospital boards and in the AMA. They will insist on having the power to control our bodies.

Not only must we be free from the paternalism of the medical establishment but also from the idea that abortion is a criminal and shameful act. In California where abortion laws are more liberal, women sometimes still prefer the secrecy of illegal abortion to the risk of having their families find out about an abortion in a public hospital. They have to face hostile hospital boards and unwilling doctors who make them feel degraded. We must have the power ourselves to say whether an abortion is the best thing for us. Women are the most capable of making the difficult decision concerning abortion. No one should have the power to make it for us.

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Rip-off referrals

Now that legal abortions in New York can be arranged, a new group of men (besides doctors) are making money off us. They set up legal abortions in New York and tack on a good price for the "service." Businessmen like "Legal Abortions for Women, Inc." are rip-offs that can be avoided.

Women have set up their own free referral service for legal abortions. Women's Liberation Coalition has contacts through the Women's Abortion Project in New York. Their counselors have a ten-week course before beginning counseling. They spend the first two weeks just working on their own attitudes and hangups about abortions and women. They learn medical and legal facts, speak to women who have had abortions and done counseling, and investigate referral agencies and clinics. The counselors are now looking for more doctors to do free pregnancy tests and six-week check-ups following the abortions. There is still a need for more women to do counseling. If you need an abortion, or if you are interested in working with the referral service, contact the Women's Liberation Coalition at 962-8822.

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<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/126-march-4-17-1971/abortion-must-be>
Fifth Estate #126, March 4-17, 1971

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