

# Women March on Capitol

Cindy Felong

1971

“One and a half, two and a half, three and a half, four. You can’t control our bodies anymore!”



“Free our bodies—Free ourselves!” “Hey, Male Chauvinists, you better start shakin’. Today’s Pig is tomorrow’s Bacon!” “Sisterhood is powerful! Sisters Unite!”

Over 2,000 people, mostly women, marched and chanted from Durant Park to the state capitol in Lansing on Saturday, March 13, to demand a change in the state’s abortion laws. Spirits were high and it was clear that for most women there the march was as much a demonstration for women’s liberation as it was for a specific change in the law.

People came from many places—Detroit, Ann Arbor, Muskegon, Mt. Pleasant, Rochester and Warren were represented. People also came for different reasons. Most were there because they wanted abortions to be safe, legal and free on demand to all women. No forced sterilization was another demand that was often repeated.

The women's caucus of Youth Against War and Fascism distributed a leaflet pointing out that abortion referral agencies are making lots of money off women who don't know that there are women's groups that help set up abortions for free. They also pointed out that a change in the abortion laws is an important reform, but that until hospitals and social services are under community control, women will still be at the mercy of the profit-oriented medical institutions.

The march was also supported by a group called Zero Population Growth and the Sexual Freedom League whose slogan was "Don't let others tell you what to do with your body!"

During the march a young man was taken out of the line and arrested by the Lansing cops. At the rally, on the steps of the Capitol, one of the women announced that he had been arrested for making an "obscene remark." When she announced that the cops said anyone making obscene remarks or gestures would be arrested, over half the crowd shot up their arms in the famous middle-finger salute, shouting "Fuck You!"

Among the speakers at the rally was a black nurse who talked about what happens when a woman comes into her hospital hemorrhaging or suffering an infection from a bad abortion; the doctor's attitude is usually "It serves you right," and even some nurses feel that a girl should know better about getting "knocked up," and a bad abortion is a just punishment.

The Law, dressed in gray with a sinister paper-mache face, was one of the characters in the Women's Street Theater skit which ended the rally. The Law's response to the young woman needing an abortion was "This is the law: blah, blah, blah, blah, blah!" Turning to the Mother character in the skit, the girl is met with: "Shame, what will the neighbors say?" The Mafia figure was anxious to help the girl—for a price.

Having gotten the illegal abortion, the girl develops a serious infection and turns to the doctor for help. But she has to be interrogated by the cop first: "Who, what, when, where, why, how???" and "No obscene gestures." Finally she gets to the doctor who says: "You have only yourself to blame!" The skit ends with all the characters taking off their costumes and shouting "Free our sisters, free ourselves!"

After the scheduled speakers, the microphone was left open for anyone who wanted to speak. One young woman got up and said: "We don't want a bill that goes half way. We want a bill that lets us control our bodies so that we can begin to control our lives."

The bill referred to was the one which passed the Michigan Senate a couple of days earlier—a very conservative reform of the present law. The bill has a residency requirement of 90 days and also specifies that a woman who is living with a man must have his permission to apply for an abortion. Even this watered-down bill will probably have trouble passing in the House.

The Lansing rally was only a small demonstration of the people's demands. Women will no longer settle for anything less than complete control over their own bodies.

For abortion counseling in Detroit, call the Women's Liberation Coalition at: 962-8822—free.



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