

THE MYTH of Abortion Law Repeal

by Kathie Sarachild

A common tactic which the enemies of feminism use to stop women from fighting for full human rights is to try to convince us that we've already won the battle before we really have. If they're not telling us that we're already "liberated," they are assuring us that freedom is "just around the corner" and that they are "with us" in what we demand. As a matter of fact, they say, they will do the job for us, if we just wait...until the next election, the next revolution or whatever.

There seems no limit to the lies and confusion which upholders of male supremacy will sow in their efforts to convince us that a struggle for our freedom is unnecessary. From the first stirrings of female rebellion in recent years, an amazingly diverse assortment of men, from so-called revolutionaries and Black Nationalists to the U.S. government itself, have been assuring feminists that the "present system" will accommodate our claims and even benefit from them.

Nowhere has the doubletalk stage in this pacification program been more crafty than with the feminist demand for repealing (getting rid of all) the laws which now exist in every state limiting a woman's right to have an abortion. This is probably because of the demand of women for the right to control of our own bodies is so central to feminism and our bitter experience with criminal abortions and unwanted pregnancy has moved so many women to the warpath.

The right of a woman to determine the use (and non-use) of her valuable sexual and reproductive organs has been bitterly contested by men since the beginning of human time. In every society in the world the witch figure has existed as the woman who in some way has resisted her childbearing role, as the widely respected female anthropologist Margaret Mead points out in her book Male and Female. In every society men have hated and feared her. Sometimes she has been systematically persecuted. In the middle ages in Europe about 9,000,000 women were burned at the stake as witches over a five hundred year period. Frequently they were midwives charged with consorting with the devil to rip infants from their mothers' wombs (abortion) and "killing newborn babies," (Infantacide).

The myth that the present U.S. Establishment considers repeal of the abortion laws in its interests and is doing everything it can to secure this right for women...that "only the Catholic Church stands in the way of abortion repeal" is very widespread and very dangerous. It is only occasionally that the government reveals some clear cut evidence to the contrary and exposes its real position, as expressed in President Nixon's recent moral condemnation of abortion. On the surface, it has appeared that the government supports women's rights over their own bodies. The U.S. Commission on the Status of Women has released reports, for instance, recommending total repeal of all the state abortion laws. High ranking government and corporate figure sign full page ads in the fashionable New York Times warning of a dangerous population increase and implying support for abortion as one means of birth control. All this verbal Establishment support for abortion law repeal has had the effect of making the issue seem a little old hat for many. If you listened to all the "sophisticated" talk about the "archaic" abortion laws, you'd think the "dead" laws were still very much there merely because of some historic oversight. You'd think the women who continue to suffer from these "dead laws" were just tragic but unintentional casualties of change, like soldiers killed in the last days of a war.

Even much of the so-called radical left emphasizes that repeal of the abortion laws is a forgone conclusion. In undercutting the urgency and seriousness of an issue so fundamental to the oppression of women in this way, these false revolutionaries reveal their common male interest with the Establishment, although they disguise it in anti-Establishment rhetoric. Like the men at the top, they hope to continue to present worldwide system of male control of women, especially control of female sexual-reproductive capacities. With the unsurpassed guile of wolves in sheep's clothing, they warn feminists that by pressing for free abortion, we are being used by the government to do its work for it. They "council" women to drop this crucial demand so important to feminism and which affects so many of us in our daily lives (can you imagine how great it would be not to have to live in dread every time your period was late). "Work on other things," they tell us. We shouldn't bother with the very issue which has inspired so many of us to join together for power.

A Black Nationalist version of the myth, however, tops them all. Some Black Nationalists charge that the white power structure not only favors abortion law repeal, but is actually pushing it as a means of eliminating the black population, as well as all poor people. Of all the lies and moralism men have used to obligate women to bear more of their children, this one takes the cake. Not content with identifying a woman's freedom to terminate pregnancy with murder, as President Nixon does,

these black reactionaries hold the accusation of genocide over every black woman who wants an abortion and over feminists of every race who fight for this right. A black woman who has an abortion is not merely committing murder, they charge. She is participating in the murder of her whole people. These men are allegedly fighting the dangers of forced abortion and sterilization...but in a very sinister way. They are doing so at her expense...by denying her the basic human right to voluntary abortion and sterilization.

The so-called radicals, white and black, wouldn't believe a thing the government said about peace in Vietnam or racial justice here. Yet somehow, they take the Establishment at its word when it promises abortion law repeal and women's liberation. In their frantic efforts to stop the growth of the feminist movement, and seeing only their most short run advantage, the phony revolutionaries throw to the winds all of their own principles and theory which clearly describes the true situation: that it is in the interests of the men who rule to force the masses of people to breed. The laws limiting abortion which still exist in every state are the most obvious proof of this.

IT IS THE VERY WOMEN WHO CERTAIN BLACK NATIONALISTS CON-TEND ARE THE VICTIMS OF GENOCIDAL, COMPULSORY ABORTION AND STERILIZATION PROGRAMS WHO ARE, IN FACT, DENIED ACCESS TO LEGAL ABORTION. And, so far, if one examines the government's actual deeds instead of its words, there is no evidence indicating a change in this situation. Even the threat of sterilization, which many hospitals attach as part of a "package plan" to a woman's request for a legal abortion and is used against white women as well as black, is itself a club to frighten women out of having an abortion.

The much touted abortion "reform" bills passed recently in several states purporting to liberalize the restrictions on abortion are a hoax. In the best cases they have extended legal abortions to only a small portion of the women who want them. In most cases, the "reform" laws, contrary to the fanfare and publicity they receive have actually made abortions less available rather than more available.

In the names of reform, legislatures in state after state are actually passing new restrictions on women's reproductive rights. In California, Colorado, North Carolina and Maryland, where much heralded reform laws were recently passed, all abortions must now be performed in hospitals. This new requirement had made the few kinds of legal abortions now allowed by the new laws more expensive, and the hospital requirement has made the illegal abortions which most women must still resort to more difficult to obtain. The old laws in these states allowed doctors to terminate a pregnancy in their offices "in order to save the life of the mother." And in the privacy of their own offices many doctors were willing to interpret these grounds so generously as to help many more women than would now pass the hospital review boards set up by the "liberalization" or can pay for the un-necessary hospital procedures now required by the new laws.

The recent New York State abortion "liberalization," passed in the wake of increasingly militant feminist agitation, has been only one of the lot to make abortions available to many more women than before "reform". In the 8 months since its enactment, 97,000 women have obtained legal abortions in New York City, for instance. In the year before that, in the same time period, only sixteen hundred were able to. But this is only a small improvement, really.

A host of limitations encumbering the new law still effectively deny legal abortions to many women who want them, and the local ordinances on abortion rushed through in city after city soon after the reform statute was passed, closed off much of whatever leeway the state law left open. The state law, for instance, did not require that abortions be performed in hospitals or special clinics (although it did insist that only doctors perform them) But New York City, with half the population of the state instituted the hospital-clinic requirement almost immediately after the state reform went into effect. As a result, most of the women who have obtained abortions in the city in the one year since "liberalization" have been those who could somehow manage to pay the exorbitant prices set by the medical establishment. And, in most cases, the prices for legal abortions are as high as they ever were before the law (\$350 to \$500) and sometimes even higher. The women who obtain legal abortions under these circumstances are only the fairly 2311-to-do. Over 50% have been from out of state. This means that, not only can they afford to pay the high prices for private hospitals and clinics, but they are in the lucky and unusual position of having the chance to get away from their families and jobs for the time it takes to make the trip. This shows even further that most women who can get a legal abortion under the present "reform law" are in a very special, fortunate

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category. The city hospitals which handle welfare cases for the most part have each been averaging only about thirty four abortions per week. By the city's own figures, only 25% of recent New York abortions have been "war" or "service" cases for those who can't afford the going rate. And now the state, with the agreement of Establishment "liberal" Governor Rockefeller has cut off welfare money for abortions altogether. (It still pays for women to have babies, however.)

How can it be clearer that all the talk of Establishment support for free abortion is hollow claptrap. Even in New York, the state with the best reform (the state which, the press would have it has "almost" won abortion law repeal), the great masses of women are still denied the right to an abortion. The women who are not stopped from having an abortion by the accusations of murder, spoken and spoken, held over their heads and by the opposition of their men, are stopped by the remaining legal prohibitions, the terrible financial requirements and the dangers of the "criminal" alternative. Those who are not stopped by any of these, must often spend all their hard-earned savings or borrow their life away obtaining an abortion. Many in the great liberal state of New York still resort to the cheaper, illegal practitioners, not to mention coat-hangers and other dangerous gambles. City hospitals are still treating the victims of botched-up, back room jobs, although the number of these "incomplete" abortions, as the medical profession calls them, has fallen since the new law went through. According to New York City Health Service figures, they have only fallen by 50% which is far less than they should have, given the tremendous rise in legal abortions. Again this is further evidence that the new law discriminates against the less well-to-do.

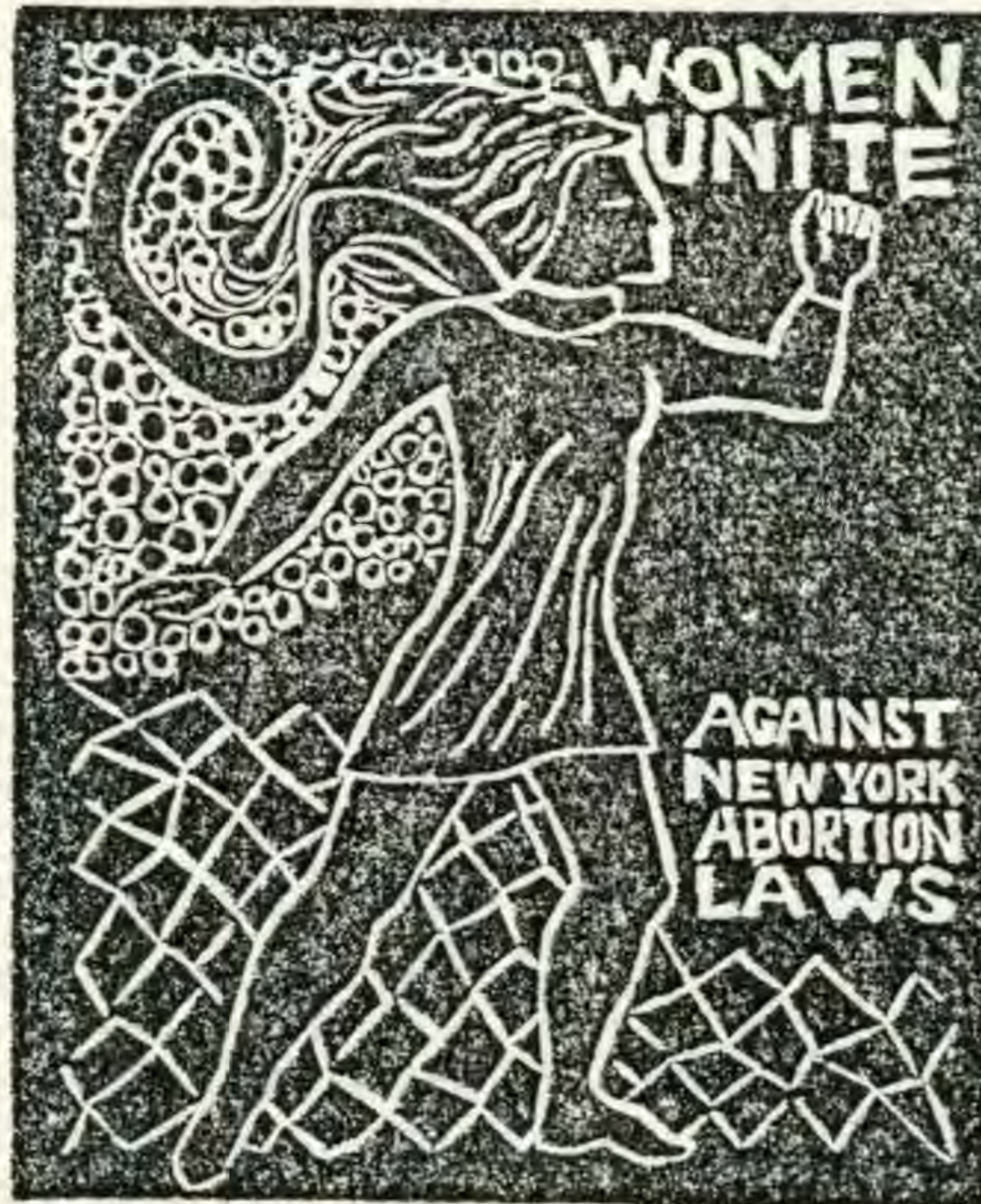
The present New York State abortion reform has helped many women, there is no doubt. But it is not repeal, as the press and the rest of the Establishment would have us believe. As part of the program of doubletalk, the press has been using the terms abortion "reform", "repeal" and "legalization" as if they were all the same thing. At the same time, the press has instituted a news blackout on the real repeal which currently is up for consideration in the legislature.

In the middle of a terrible doctor shortage, and when aid-wives and other paramedical personnel have been safely and cheaply doing abortions in many parts of the world, the present New York law, the reform which the press calls repeal, contains the requirement that only physicians can perform abortions. This effectively (and sneakily) imposes a drastic limitation on the number of abortions possible, excluding the great masses of poorer women. It is also hypocritical even in terms of New York City hospitals where nurses and mid-wives for some time now have been delivering babies in routing obstetrical cases which are much more dangerous than routine abortions.

Another limitation prohibiting abortion after 24 weeks of pregnancy, coming together with the doctor shortage and the inevitable bureaucratic red tape, has also excluded all the women unable to find a way to have a legal abortion "in time". Often these are very young teen-age girls or women for whom some sudden tragic circumstance has made even a late abortion desperately necessary. This time limitation, which is about to be reduced even further - to 20 weeks, also continues to hold the implication of murder over the heads of women who wish to terminate pregnancy, insulting the women and preserving the real male supremacist interest behind the phoney murder charge: the principle that the fetus, along with the rest of the female, belongs to men and the state. A respect for the woman's human right to self-determination would require, on the other hand, that the woman have the right to do with her body what she thinks best. As long as the fetus is part and parcel of the woman's body, her tissue and blood, in fact, it is that woman herself, not another human being. After it is removed from the woman's body, at whatever time, the doctors, the Catholic Church President Nixon and anyone else can try to help it to live, even keep it for themselves if the woman doesn't want it. But a woman should never be forced to carry the burden of pregnancy if she doesn't want to. Abortions under good, routine conditions are much safer than childbirth. A woman's right to life itself, as well as her liberty, are forcing her to take the greater risk. And even if certain kinds of abortion were more dangerous than childbirth, a woman should not be forced to continue pregnancy. She should have the right to decide herself.

Many of the men who pushed the New York reform bill through the legislature at a time when feminists were making it clear that anything less than repeal was more of the same old male supremacist garbage, claimed that they voted for reform because it was a step toward "eventual" repeal; a necessary compromise because of pressures from the powerful lobby of the Catholic Church. What looks far more likely is that the main purpose of all the recent state abortion law reforms has been to prevent repeal of the abortion laws rather than to encourage it. By some coincidence, the new abortion "reform" laws in state after state have gone through just at the time when their enactment thwarted women's best chance within the present political-economic system of completely overturning these "legal" infringements on our human rights through the courts. Many feminists had spent enormous amounts of time, energy and hard-earned money preparing court cases to challenge the constitutionality of abortion limitations. The passage of the "reform" laws automatically knocked all these test cases (knocked them out of the courts, in other words, because the cases testing the old statutes were no longer relevant to the new laws which had just been passed. One New York State legislator even openly argued for the reform law because it would prevent repeal in this way. These male law-makers were willing to extend abortions to some women as long as they could still force large numbers of women to bear children and preserve intact the principle of male legal control. By throwing some reform crumbs to the middle class women, they hoped to cool down the "ladies" from whose ranks most public feminists have so far come.

There is some chance that a sudden technological development may circumvent male supremacy and put the power to terminate a pregnancy in the hands of women without any risk to the woman's safety. Abortions are becoming simpler and safer each year. There is evidence that the "loop" will cause an abortion if you can get a doctor to give you this "birth control" device shortly after you are pregnant (pretending that you are having your period is one way to do this.) It also looks as if there will be a "morning after" pill soon, with which we women can safely, easily and cheaply give ourselves abortions. In the interest of making a huge profit, it may very well be men who discover the way, despite what the government does to slow down this development. Even with such a technological breakthrough, however, women may still bear children when we don't want to because of male social and economic pressures.



All the Establishment talk about population control means just what the term says...controlling the population, whether in the form of increasing it or decreasing it. The real issue is not population control per se, the pros and cons. That already exists and may have to always. The real question is population by whom. When the feminist revolution is successful, population control will be in the hands of those whose bodies bear the population. Right now, it - the population - and we - our female bodies - are in the hands of the men in power. And despite what the Establishment says, the present policy of the men at the top (and the men at the bottom, too, it would seem) is still to push motherhood, not to curb it. Its actions belie its real interests. The laws of this country still force the masses of women to have children. In

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Women's Liberation Center 991-1885
38 West 22 Street
Abortion consulting Monday - Friday 10 am - 10 pm
Call any time Saturday 10 am - 1-9pm

National Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion
55 Washington Square So
New York, N.Y. 10012
Phone 212 254-6314 9AM-12AM
(Eastern Standard Time)
Write or call to find out if someone is available in your area. Services run by groups of ministers and rabbis.
Calif.-Los Angeles-213 666-7600
Conn.-New Haven-203 624-8646
Ill.-Chicago-312 667-6015
Iowa-515 282-1738
Mass.-Boston-617 527-7188
Mich.-Detroit-313 964-0818
N.J.-Northern-201 933-2937
N.Y. & suburbs-212 477-0034
N.Y.-Ithaca area-607 272-7172
Ohio-Cleveland-216 229-4723
Penn.-Phila.-215 923-5141

France, whose birth rate (16.8 per 1000) is practically the same as that of the U.S. (17 per 1000), the government openly describes the birth rate as dangerously low and not only forbids abortions, but pays family allowances to encourage women to have children. Though not done openly, a similar policy seems to exist in the United States in the form of payments to welfare mothers combined with regulations enabling only the well-to-do to have abortions and the very low wages for working women which make motherhood for the state seem more desirable. The double talk on this issue is very difficult to break through. But, fortunately, in New York, the repercussions from the new abortion reform law have forced many men to reveal their true political positions. The Republicans, for instance, are among those who in the past have complained the loudest about the rising welfare loads due to women having so many "illegitimate" children. Yet it was they who instituted the wildly contradictory "budgetary measure" of cutting off medicaid payments for abortions, thereby insuring that plenty of "illegitimate" and unwanted children would continue to be born. Before this move, the state was already prohibiting medicaid for vasectomies and other forms of sterilization, at the very same time it continued to pay for women to have babies...further evidence against this version of the "genocide" theory. It looks as if the American ruling males are not afraid of being outnumbered by the poor and colored people of the world. They've been outnumbered for a long time, after all, and yet still manage to maintain their control in many places with sheer military force and by keeping the oppressed divided and fighting among themselves. This is what all the Establishment talk about "overpopulation" does. It confuses people, makes them think that the government is supporting abortion law repeal and even maybe trying to ram it down their throats. It also serves to shift the blame for the problems of this nation from the few rich who run it to the millions of poor. It fosters sexist and racist divisions among the masses of American working people who end up attributing their tax burden to black people and women for having too many children, instead of to the state, the real cause of unwanted children and unfair taxation. Meanwhile, the men at the top, using the time worn tactic of saying one thing and doing another, go ahead with all due measures to insure that the section of the population from which comes the bulk of their work force and military rank and file will continue to produce generations of cheap labor and human cannon fodder for the ruling elite.

As for the interests of some black male so-called revolutionaries in opposing abortion as a "genocidal government plot." They are clearly demonstrating that a black revolution in their lifetime is the farthest thing from their minds. They have decided to leave the burden of fighting a revolution to their children. That's why they want so many. If they were really serious about fighting a revolution, about seizing power now, about winning in their lifetimes, they would know that too many children would get in the way during the period of intense struggle (as well as burden women in present conditions, too) and tie down an important secto of the revolutionary forces in child care. The Viet Cong, for instance, are most certainly the victims of what genocide really is - mass murder, not mass birth control. And yet they call on their people to try not to have children during this war-time period. The Viet Cong caution their ranks with the following three "don't's". 1. Don't fall in love. 2. If you fall in love, don't get married. 3. If you get married, don't have children. Of course, the three don't's always get followed, but they are an attempt at a policy.

If these black nationalists aren't working for a revolution in their lifetime, they should call themselves reformers, not revolutionaries. But if they did this, they couldn't convince so many women black and white to have their babies in the name of "the revolution." Like so many other men, they cannot see beyond the ends of their pricks. They don't want their pleasure marred by any worry or both about birth control. They want to prove their "manhood" by making babies. They don't want their women getting too uppity and independent. And so they invent a political theory to justify their very short-term selfishness.

The phony white radicals, on the other hand, aren't so much concerned with their sexual pleasure or having families. Like so many white men, they are on such a master class power trip that they won't let themselves feel anything. Sexual relations for them is perhaps a little more stimulating than a twitch but not much more and so essentially boring they don't think to do it for love and they don't do it for pleasure either. They do it now and then just to prove to themselves that they can or maybe show "their women" who's boss. The reason these false revolutionaries wrongly claim that the ruling class is pushing for abortion repeal and even favors self-determination and liberation for women, is that these boys want to deny the necessity for women to form their own independent revolutionary movement.

Although limitations on a woman's freedom to terminate pregnancy are just one aspect of the sexual enslavement of female, this is no evidence to date that men will voluntarily relinquish even this area of their control in the name of "democracy," "communism," or any other humanistic false promise. If men are still in charge in a society, whatever kind of society they call it, a mere change in law will not guarantee a woman the right to an abortion, though it will, of course, give us some momentary relief from unwanted pregnancy and children. In recent times, the first nation in the world to allow women abortion on demand - Communist Russia - rescinded that right fifteen years later under the Premiership of Joseph Stalin, and then later, Russian Communists gave it back again.

Nothing short of a feminist revolution will give us real freedom and security over even this one aspect of our lives. Only when the masses of women organize to seize power for ourselves will women be able to end all abortion limitations and win full control over our own reproductive organs. It is this historic event which so many men of so many classes, races and nations now seem united around trying to prevent.