

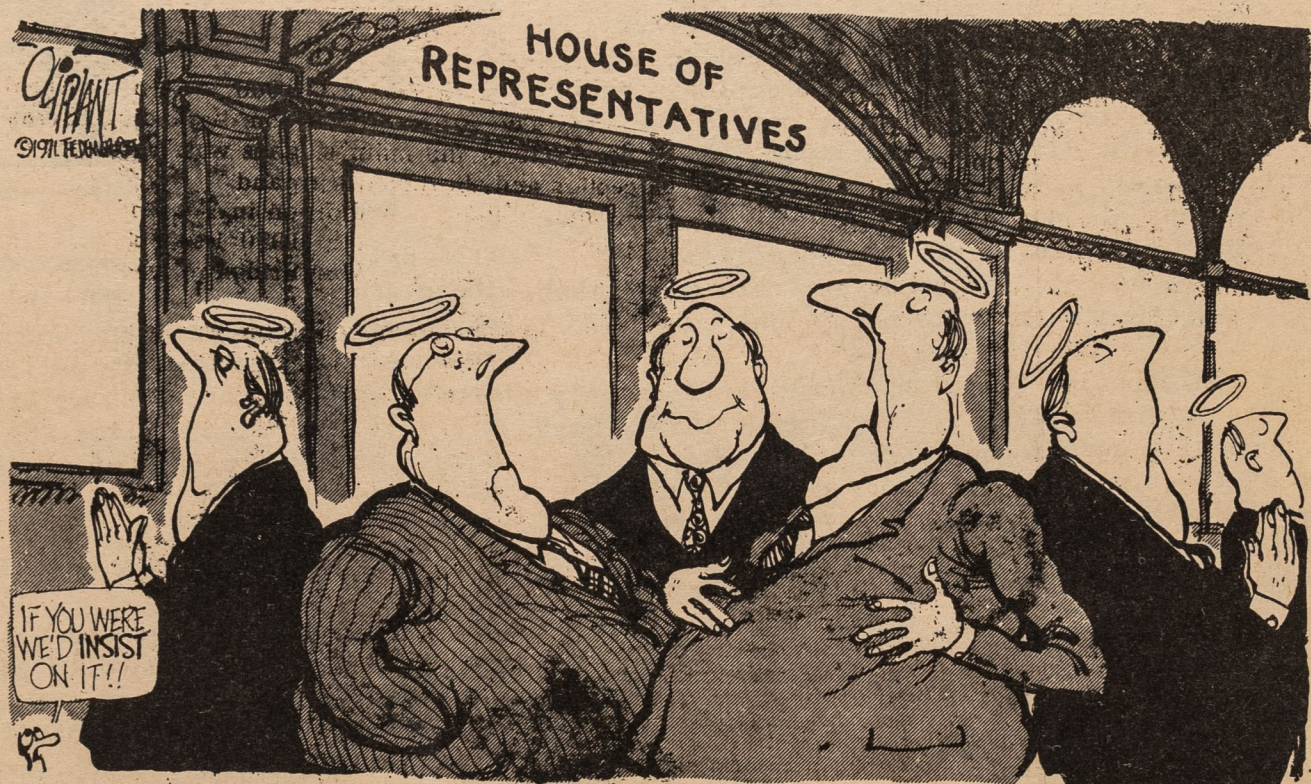
Abortion is a woman's

Right to Choose



EXTRA

JULY 1978



'WELL, IF I WERE PREGNANT I CERTAINLY WOULDN'T HAVE AN ABORTION!'

ABORTION — WHO DECIDES?

The gains made by women in recent years are under attack throughout the English speaking world. The growing right-wing protest against the right to choose abortion is but one example of the broader attack. In a sense, however, it is central to the attack because without control over their bodies, women cannot take control over any other aspect of their lives.

Abortion on demand and freely available safe contraception remain key demands of the Women's Liberation Movement throughout the world. Women cannot be free to use their talents and skills fully unless they know their lives will not be interrupted by unplanned pregnancy and child rearing. Yet vocal groups in Australia and overseas seek to prevent women's freedom in the name of morality.

These people do not think women can make decisions about their own lives. Instead, they seek to force their decisions onto others. Church members through organisations like the Right to Life seek to change laws to enforce their moral choices on all women, regardless of what the women believe. Doctors still withhold information about abortion services if they do not think women should have abortions.

Some doctors also refuse contraceptive advice to women who they think should not need it.

Parliamentarians still can legislate about what services may be made available to women. In New Zealand, parliamentarians have used this power to virtually prohibit abortion and to limit contraception. Parents and husbands seek to use their authority to limit the activities of daughters and wives.

The recently proposed changes to the medical benefits scheme conveniently serve the interests of those groups who wish to see women's freedom restricted. Church-related funds may be able to refuse to pay benefits for abortion on moral grounds. Doctors will be given increased power as bulk billing disappears. The parliamentarians are using their legislative powers to restrict medical services available to women. Fathers or husbands may be able to refuse to take out insurance to cover a possible abortion, thus leaving their dependant daughters or wives even more financially dependant in case of unwanted pregnancy.

You will notice that women are being refused power over their own bodies.

Each of these groups thinks that they can determine what is best for women better than women themselves can and so they work to maintain the present political position of women i.e. controlled by men. The current abortion debate is not about morality but about political power, power over women's lives. When women have no control over their bodies they can be denied other forms of power in society on the grounds of their uncontrolled fertility. It is in the interests of men to keep women at the mercy of their bodies. Thus the feminist demand for the right to choose abortion and contraception is a strong threat to the established political order of male power. The attacks we see becoming increasingly frequent today, are a response to this threat.

As women, we must continue to resist all attempts to further reduce our control over our lives. We must struggle together for the right to choose the direction of our lives. We demand the repeal of all abortion laws! We demand freely available, safe contraception! We demand the end of forced sterilisation! We demand the right to control our bodies!

Common Arguments Against Abortion.

When the subject of abortion is discussed, opponents of a woman's right to choose offer one or more of the following arguments. All can be answered. We present some answers below - there are, of course, many more.

1. ABORTION IS MURDER

This argument is based on the claim that a foetus is a "human being". However, the opponents of abortion do not agree when the foetus becomes a "human being". The Catholic Church says that the foetus is a human being at the "moment of conception", yet for centuries it held that if an unsouled foetus was aborted it was not murder. It was believed that a male foetus got a soul forty days after conception and a female foetus got hers eighty days after conception - unfortunately there was no way of telling the sex of the foetus or the exact time of conception. Such arguments must, of course, be based on faith, not scientific knowledge. Science explains life as a continuum, with the process of conception merely a step along the way. Some proponents of the "moment of conception" theory do not oppose contraception nor do they advocate that the general use of contraceptives should be banned, yet to be entirely consistent, contraceptives must also be contrary to the "right to life".

Other opponents of the abortion campaign oppose abortion only after the foetus has become "viable". The time of "viability", however, is not generally agreed upon though 24 weeks is regarded by some as the time at which it is possible to maintain a foetus independent of the mother's body. Such attempts to provide a legal time limit to the right to abortion are based purely on theories and experiments and not on scientific and social reality. Embryonic human life has only the POTENTIAL to become a human being. It is at birth that we begin life as social entities and it is at birth that society regards us as human beings, counting our age from that point. This is the prevailing attitude and it is a perfectly rational one.

Many anti-abortionists are even willing to allow doctors to make decisions on the grounds of mental or physical danger to the mother before performing "legal" abortions. It is obvious that their main aim is to keep the decision out of the reach of women and not to stop the "murder" of the foetus.

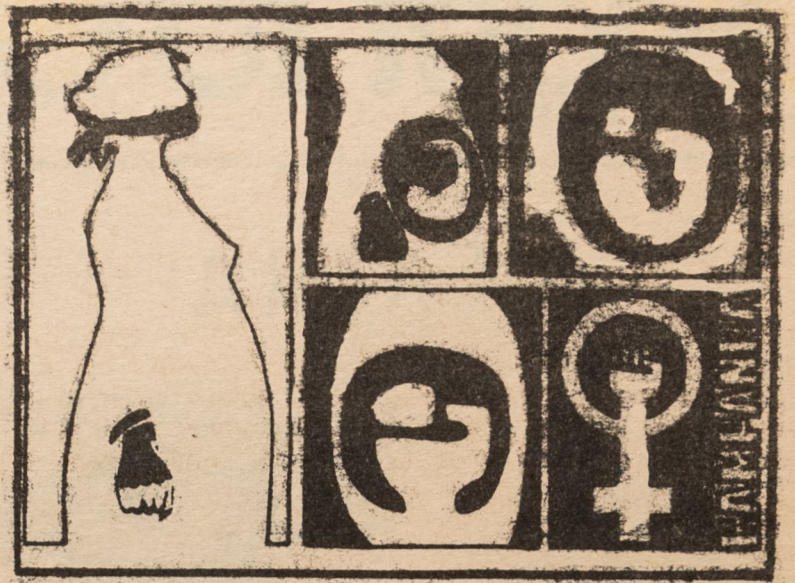
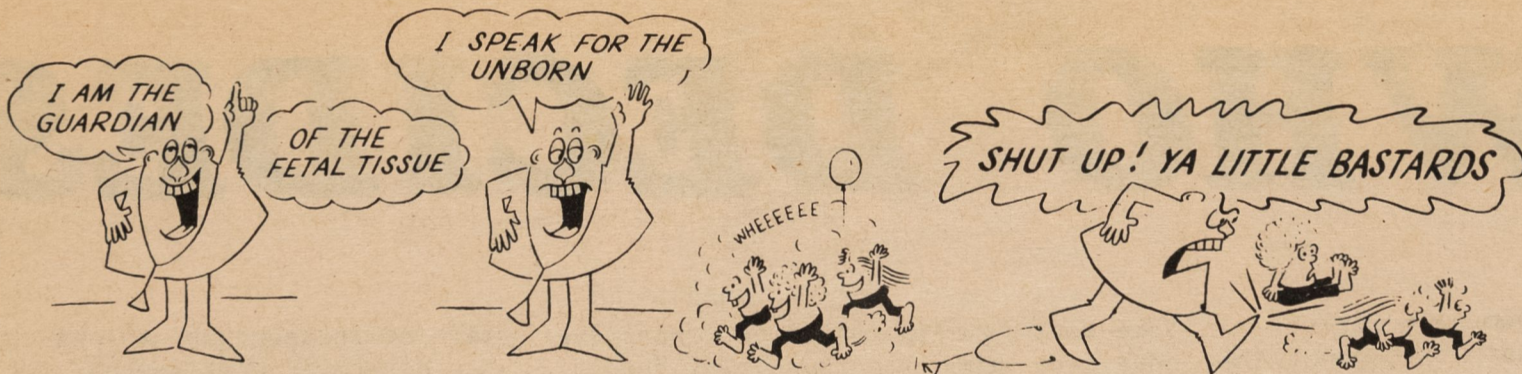


Illustration poster

from Britain show that more than half the legal abortions there are performed on married women. There are many reasons why women become pregnant unintentionally, not the least of them being ignorance of, or lack of access to effective contraception, for which we have these very moralists to blame. With all their concern for the unborn foetus these people show a surprising lack of concern for the unwanted children of enforced childbirth.

4. LEGAL ABORTION WILL LEAD TO ETHANASIA

What we are seeking is women's right to control their own bodies. We find it hard to see how people can associate this with the killing of the aged or infirm. The argument could equally be raised that legalised abortion would lead to a return of capital punishment, the possibility of which is equally remote as a consequence of legalising abortion. To give women the right to control their own bodies would be an act in no way associated with euthanasia or capital punishment. Some anti-abortionists equate abortion with genocide and other violent acts of totalitarian regimes. It is ironic when it was in Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia that the most repressive anti-abortion laws were instituted, the crime being punishable by death in Germany.



2. ABORTION IS DANGEROUS

Claims are made that abortion is a dangerous operation and therefore should not be allowed except in exceptional circumstances. Besides the obvious argument that the same logic could also be applied to such common operations as appendectomy or tonsillectomy, there are statistics which refute the implication that abortion is more dangerous than childbirth. New York, in a period following reform of anti-abortion laws, had 0.01 deaths in 100,000 abortions compared to 37.7 deaths in 100,000 childbirths. Professor P. Huntingford writing in the Australian Medical Journal of September 1971 said "Abortion in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy is 20 times safer than childbirth." The only way to ensure that abortions are carried out early and safely, is to make sure that women can get them when they want them - by giving them the right to choose.

3. LEGAL ABORTIONS WILL LEAD TO PERMISSIVENESS

This argument is brought up by the moralists who regard sex for any other purpose than procreation as sinful and pregnancy as the punishment for illicit love affairs. Moral persuasion against extra-marital sex being something of a lost cause, the self-appointed guardians of public morals try to discourage it with punishment. It is assumed that all unwanted pregnancies occur outside of marriage, but statistics

5. LEGAL ABORTION WILL LEAD TO POPULATION DECLINE

There are arguments raised in an underpopulated country like Australia that abortion should not be legalised because it would lead to a fall in the birth rate. This argument presupposes that women's rights should be subordinated to "the national interest". Women are regarded by such people as merely baby-producing units. If the "national interest" should require a drop in the birth rate would they then advocate compulsory abortion? If these people were so concerned about population decline they should be advocating an end to the "White Australia Policy" which keeps out so many prospective immigrants.

6. LEGAL ABORTION WILL MEAN OVERCROWDED HOSPITALS

Confinement and childbirth at present take up a lot more hospital time and space than abortion cases. The process of childbirth usually involves at least five days hospitalisation and the services of nurses, gynaecologists and anaesthetists. Abortions have been carried out successfully and safely overseas in clinics staffed by paramedical personnel without requiring any hospitalisation, and even in hospitals they require less than one day. Women's rights should not be denied simply because existing hospital services are inadequate. Nobody would advocate banning tonsillectomies because hospitals are overcrowded.

7. ABORTION ON DEMAND DENIES THE FATHER'S RIGHTS

This sort of argument also relegates women to the position of child-producing units. A man should not be able to force a woman to have his child through some sort of compulsory motherhood. Any legislation which requires a married woman to obtain her husband's permission, or a young single woman her parents' permission, to have an abortion directly removes her right to control her own body. A woman should be able to discuss the proposed abortion with her husband, family, doctor, or whoever she likes but the decision must ultimately be hers.

8. WOMEN WILL ABUSE THE FREEDOM TO HAVE ABORTIONS

This is like saying that people will deliberately get sick to take advantage of free medical care. British statistics indicate that women aren't rushing to tally up numerous abortions - only 2.5 per cent of women have had more than one abortion. Most women have abortions because of ignorance of, or lack of access to contraceptives, or failure of contraceptives. The best guard against "over-use" of abortion would be the supply of free, safe, and freely available contraceptives.

9. ADOPTION NOT ABORTION

It is a common argument of the anti-abortion groups that no baby can be "unwanted". There are, they say, many people who desperately want to adopt babies. They then point to the long adoption waiting lists as proof that all babies are "wanted". There are many flaws in this argument.

First, it should be remembered that adoption laws were made for children. They were not made for those wishing to adopt.

The "long adoption waiting lists" refer only to the waiting time for young babies. There is a much shorter waiting time involved in the adoption or fostering of older children, and other "hard to place" children such as those with certain handicaps. Why are these children unwanted? Is it only new babies that are so wanted by childless people?

By saying that there is no such thing as an "unwanted baby" the anti-abortionists are saying that a woman does not have the right to choose abortion because some one else wants a baby. No woman should be forced to continue a pregnancy and go through labour because some one else cannot, and wants a baby.



The fact is, of course, that every woman must be able to control her fertility if she is to control her own life. No person is required to donate a kidney to someone suffering from kidney disease, so no woman should be required to donate a baby to someone either. Each woman must have the right to choose when and if she will have a child.

10. ABORTION IS JUST ANOTHER FORM OF MALE OPPRESSION OF WOMEN

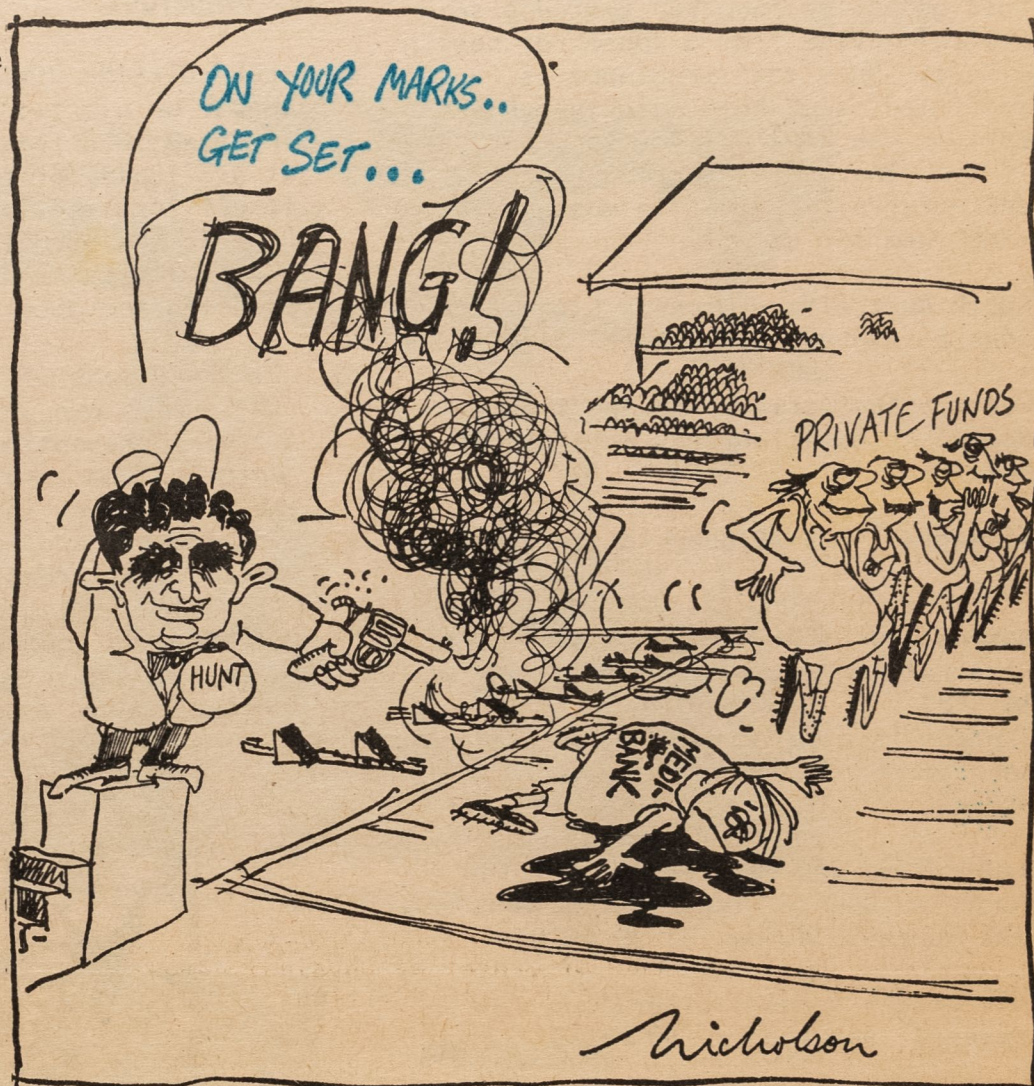
This is a new right-wing argument that tries to confuse women by suggesting that supporting the right to choose abortion is not feminist.

It suggests that a man can escape any responsibility in a sexual relationship by blaming a woman for an unwanted pregnancy. Thus, they say abortion "liberates" men from the fear of shotgun weddings and continues the oppression of women as sex-objects. However, the right to abortion is a central demand of the Women's Liberation Movement to prevent the kind of sexual exploitation in which men view women as objects. Women demand the right to choose abortion, not because they hate babies, but because they want to control their own bodies. The prohibition of abortion is a form of control over women and thus help to maintain the low status of women in this country.

Feminists do not seek power over men through unplanned pregnancy, but work for the possibility of sexual relationships between men and women as human beings who care for each other. The right to choose abortion as a solution to an unwanted pregnancy is an important part of that goal.

CONSCIENCE AND THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE

We recognise that some people sincerely believe that abortion is morally wrong. Some women for religious or other reasons would never consider abortion for themselves and we respect their right to make that conscious choice. But, no-one should have the right to force another into acting against their will and the dictates of THEIR conscience. Anti-abortionists have no right to force their brand of morality onto the rest of the population. Laws against abortion make something which is regarded even by politicians as a moral and "conscience" issue into a legal issue. What all the anti-abortionists try to deny is that abortion is a social and political issue. To deny women the right to choose whether or not to have a child is merely to reinforce and bolster the entire social repression of women.



WHAT IS W.A.A.C?

The Women's Abortion Action Campaign was set up in August, 1972 to fight for the repeal of all abortion laws and for freely available, safe contraceptives. From its inception WAAC has had as its aim the building of a women's campaign which would project through its activities the concept of abortion as a woman's right to choose. We saw the collective power of women as being the most important factor in winning repeal of abortion laws and in proving to the mass of women that abortion is not a subject of shame and secrecy but a fundamental right. Through demonstrations, public meetings and all kinds of educational material and activities we hoped to build up the consciousness and support of people on this issue.

It will be the collective efforts of women which will be decisive in forcing the repeal of the laws and not the good nature of politicians. Women have learnt over the years that patiently waiting for reform to be handed down has produced nothing. We have also learnt that it has been those campaigns which have reached out for the support and involvement of masses of women that have been successful.

We must remove all laws that make women criminals for exercising this control over their own bodies. Abortion and birth control clinics should be available in all communities for the service of all women. But repeal of the laws is the first step towards making abortion widely available for all. The principle behind our argument is that women have the right to determine what goes on inside our own bodies, a right to determine the course of our own lives. Winning this right will have far-reaching consequences as the opponents of the right to abortion, and women's rights in general, recognise. The denial of women's right to abortion is central to the oppression of women in a whole variety of ways. The fact that our childbearing functions are not under our complete control means that it is easier to be discriminated against in other areas of our lives. Gains in this sphere, however, will give impetus to women to fight for our rights in all areas.

KNOWLEDGE is POWER!

WHERE TO GO FOR HELP WITH AN UNWANTED PREGNANCY

If you suspect you are pregnant, obtain a pregnancy test from a chemist or the Family Planning Association. Sometimes an early pregnancy test gives a false negative - that is, it says you are not pregnant when in fact you are. Therefore if you do not have your period very soon after a negative pregnancy test go and get another test and seek medical advice from a doctor or health clinic. Once your pregnancy is confirmed, seek help quickly, the earlier you have an abortion, the safer it is. There are Abortion Counselling and referral services in most states - ring them for help.

South Australia - Women's Liberation runs a referral service - 51 6551

Western Australia - The Abortion Law Repeal Association runs a referral Service - 31 2425

Tasmania - Hobart Abortion Information - 34 8520

Queensland - Children by Choice is a referral and counselling service - 36 5580

Control is a referral and counselling service run by Women's Liberation - 521 444

Australian Capital Territory - The Abortion Counselling Service is run by the Women's Centre - 95 6919

Victoria - Women's Liberation runs a referral service - 66 2.1037

New South Wales - Control is a Women's Liberation referral and counselling service - 231 2777.

A counsellor will talk over your situation with you so that you can then decide what to do. If you decide to have an abortion, the counsellor will refer you to a clinic to suit your needs.



HOW TO HELP

I want to assist in maintaining a woman's right to choose.

- Enclosed is a donation for the campaign.
- I can distribute some leaflets.
- I would like to subscribe to Right to Choose. Enclosed is \$2 for one year.
- I would like to start a W.A.A.C. group in my area. Please send information about how to do it.

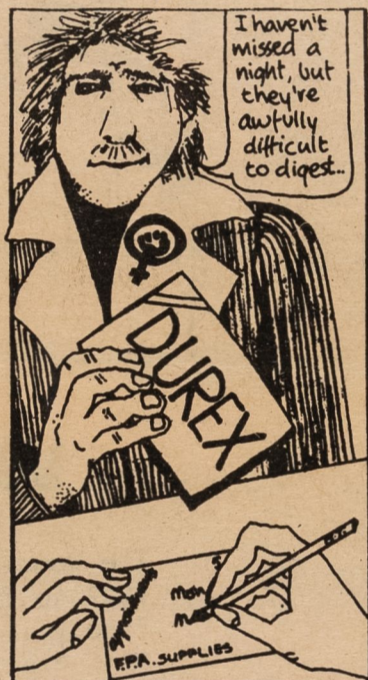
Name

Address

Send to: W.A.A.C.
62 Regent Street
Chippendale NSW 2008

METHODS OF CONTRACEPTION IN ORDER OF EFFECTIVENESS

1. BIRTH CONTROL PILL (THE PILL) works by suppressing ovulation. You must go to a doctor for a prescription and although it is statistically one of the safest methods of contraception, many women experience side effects which prevent them from using this method. Also, for some women the pill is dangerous.
2. INTRA-UTERINE DEVICE (I.U.D.) is a copper or plastic device which is inverted into the uterus. It makes it difficult for the egg to imbed itself into the lining of the uterus. Once it has been inserted by a doctor, it can usually be left in position for about two years.
3. DIAPHRAM made of soft rubber in the shape of a cup which fits over the cervix, preventing the sperm from entering the cervical canal. It must be placed in position before intercourse and must be used with spermicidal cream or jelly available from the chemist. Family Planning Clinics and doctors can fit a woman with a diaphragm and it should then be checked every year.



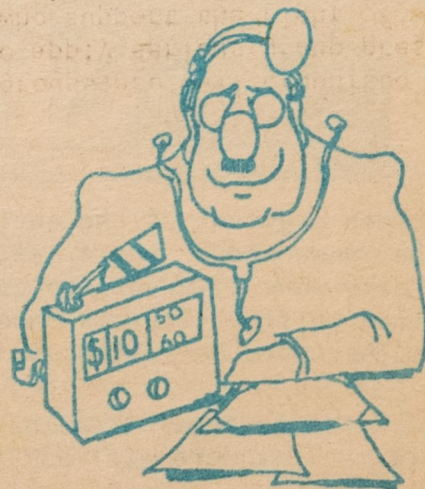
4. CONDOM (RUBBER, PROPHYLACTIC, FRENCH LETTER)
A sheath made of thin, strong latex rubber designed to fit over an erect penis to keep the semen from entering the woman's vagina. Used alone a good quality condom is 85-95% effective depending on how carefully it is used. By combining condoms with a spermicidal foam, cream or jelly, they are much more effective. Available from Family Planning Clinics or chemists. It is not necessary to see a doctor.

5. CHEMICAL METHODS (FOAMS, JELLY, CREAMS ETC.)
Not as effective as a diaphragm used with cream or jelly, or as effective as a condom. If it must be used alone, two full applicators should be inserted, as close to the time of intercourse as possible. Available from chemists.
6. WITHDRAWAL
Withdrawal of the penis far away from the vagina just before ejaculation, so that the semen is deposited outside the vagina. Withdrawal is not very effective because the drops of fluid that come out of the penis right after it becomes erect can contain some

sperm, at least enough to cause a pregnancy.

7. RHYTHM METHOD (SAFE PERIOD)

Intercourse is avoided at the time when a woman is most likely to become pregnant, that is, during ovulation. Not very effective for most people because a woman can become pregnant at any time during her cycle because she does not ovulate at the same time during each cycle.



Medibank cuts threaten WOMEN

Family Planning Clinics have always bulk-billed. With the abolishment of bulk-billing, and a reduction in rebate payments, these clinics will have to charge more for contraceptives. This means that many poor women, often with large families, will be reluctant to attend these clinics for contraceptive advice and many unwanted pregnancies will occur. If a woman does become pregnant and wants to have an abortion, this too may cost her far more than at present.

The new changes to Medibank mean that health funds can refuse to insure women for abortions if they so choose. One private health funds, Hibernian, has already done this and there is no guarantee that other health funds, under pressure from anti-abortion groups such as the Right to Life, may not follow suit.

It is a known fact that more than 50% of women who have abortions are Catholic and yet Catholic groups continue this hypocritical stand against abortion. These groups are well organised and are able to apply serious group pressure. Those who support the right of women to choose when and if they will have children should also apply pressure to the private health funds to continue to pay rebates for abortion which is, after all, a normal medical procedure like any other. They should also lobby the Federal Government to bring back bulk-billing so that the Family Planning Association and Women's Health Centres do not have to charge directly the very women who most need their services.

DON'T SIT BACK AND TAKE THESE ATTACKS ON A WOMAN'S RIGHT TO CONTROL HER OWN BODY. ACT NOW!



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