

plastic fetuses, literature and gold foetus foot print badges.

Meanwhile, the kaleidoscope of NGOs had its own problems. Because this contains a great diversity of organisations there are many power balances that don't even out. Whilst the formality of the UN requires endless negotiation, committees, working parties etc., NGOs tend to have their own agenda. Some of the bigger, more experienced groups are very organised and may have access to both sections of the conference whilst others feel very peripheral. There is a noticeable difference between access possibilities for large western groups and small groups or those from developing nations. Whilst the NGO is the place for democracy this is difficult if access is patchy. Previous instances of obvious antagonism does seem to have mellowed however, with a greater consensus about the importance of analysing global forces when considering reproductive concerns.

Differing views were expressed by this diverse conference about many issues and debates were interesting. Some people felt that nothing had really changed since Cairo and that there was a desperate need for implementation and not just definitions. Some felt that reproductive rights were being used in name only by both governments and agencies. Others disagreed and pointed to a redirection of funding away from the restrictive obsession with family planning.

Others thought that while organisations were changing, it was often in a very fragmented way. There was also, a fair amount of criticism directed to the UN Fund for Population Activities which was felt to be in a static state.

Overall many discussions were framed in the language of human rights including those about reproduction. and the final statement contained key points on sex, rape in war, women in power, female inheritance, the family, peace-making and violence. Conference secretary, Gertrude Mongella said in conclusion "The real work...is only just beginning. Let us carry the torch forward".

Conference Quotes

It is a violation of human rights when women are denied the right to plan their families - and that includes being forced to have abortions or being sterilised against their will.

Hilary Clinton

Lesbians and prostitutes! Talking about heir way of life openly! Surely such things exist in all countries, but to speak about it, without shame! This for us is a very shocking thing.

Chinese Communist Party

Monitor

It was wet, but the Chinese had an explanation for this. Chinese culture interprets events and life in terms of opposites - yin and yang. The feminine is associated with wet things. Their view was that 40,000 women in one place upset the balance of the weather.

British delegate

Quotes and more Quotes....

[Christians must] take up the sword to overthrow the tyrannical regime that oppresses them.

Operation Rescue's own Randall Terry

Polls are interesting, but they do not alter the word of God and the sixth commandment still stands firm.

Peter Smith, SPUC on the MORI poll

MANY THANKS to all those who have already completed and returned the questionnaire NAC sent out recently. We've had a good response so far but **SOME OF YOU HAVEN'T REPLIED YET!** Please don't waste the only pre-paid envelope you're ever likely to get and tell us what *you* want to do, and what you want *us* to do!

CONTRIBUTORS: Ann Furedi,, Anne-Marie Keary, Rayah Feldman, Lisa, Ruth Garside (editor)

NAC Newsletter

ISSUE 5 ONLY 40P

SEPTEMBER 1995

NAC CONFERENCE

The NAC conference "Widening Choices - Abortion Issues in the 90's" is all set for Saturday November 18th At the Wheel In London. It will take place from 1-5pm, it is an open meeting.

The line up of speakers is looking impressive and we are still awaiting a few more confirmations. So far we have **Germaine Greer** author, **Bonnie Johnson** Director - Planned Parenthood Canada, **Anna Raeburn** Broadcaster, **Madeleine Simms** veteran British Pro-Choice Campaigner, **Marge Berer** Editor - Reproductive Health News, **Ann Furedi** Director - Birth Control Trust and our own **Karen Newman** Vice-chair National Abortion Campaign.

Abortion in Britain will discussed in terms of feminist issues and we wil also be looking at the campaign for request and its relevance to late abortions, politics, especially with regard to the Labour party and abortion and minority women.

We have also invited representatives from other relevant groups to attend and to make contributions from the floor. We hope to have representatives from Trade Unions, Women's Groups, Student's Unions, The Labour Party, AIDS Awareness, Southall Black Sisters Women Against Fundamentalism, Disability Campaigning Group, Pro-Choice Alliance, Abortion Law Reform Association, Doctor's for a Women's Choice on Abortion, BPAS, PAS, Marie Stopes, Brook and many others.

Due to the obvious costs involved we have to charge an entrance fee which is £3 to NAC members (further details on the enclosed registration form). The conference hall only has capacity for 150 so it is important to request places in advance, it also enables us to make adequate preparations. A BIG thank you to all members who made donations as a result of the

appeal which went out with the questionnaire we received over £420 which has made the whole event viable.

The focus of the event will be on raising awareness for the need for a mass public campaign in Favour of Abortion on Request. The calibre of the panel already ensures that we will have very stimulating and interesting debate, our task now is to ensure that we generate the necessary publicity to ensure that people are aware that this issue is one which needs attention. It is very pertinent that our conference comes in the wake of the MORI poll undertaken by the Birth Control Trust which revealed such clear public support in favour of the principle of abortion on request -66% agree.

So don't forget to put **NOVEMBER 18TH** in your diaries, fill in your registration forms, tell your friends and we will see you there on what promises to be a fascinating event.

NAC Constitutional Review

At this year's **AGM** which will take place on Saturday **9th December** the Management Committee of NAC will be proposing some constitutional changes to reflect the changes NAC has undergone in the last two years.

The aim of the review is to acknowledge the strategy that was agreed at last year's AGM and to recognise it as part of the constitutional aim of NAC. It is also necessary to ensure constitutionally that any work undertaken on behalf of NAC by the office or the MC is accountable to the membership of the campaign. We also want to ensure that the constitution reflects the principles of equality which is crucial to the overall success of the campaign.

Another proposal which will be up for discussion is whether or not we should change NAC's name. This has arisen as a result of the

need to have a name which reflects the actual work which we do. Frequently when we lift up the phone and say National Abortion Campaign we are asked if we are for or against abortion, which is hardly useful for our campaigning efforts. Also, there are some people who find our name off-putting, as if we are advocating enforced abortion for all!! At the recent Management Committee where this was discussed, there was much disagreement about possible alternatives some of the options which we raised were Woman's Choice on Abortion, Abortion Rights campaign amongst others, whilst some members felt it was unnecessary to change at all.

Obviously there are disadvantages to changing our name as NAC is the name associated with our identity and our achievements over the last 20 years, we have a lot to be proud of which we do not want to undermine through this process. On the other hand we must not be sentimental or afraid of change if the overall benefits help us in fulfilling our aim to improve abortion rights in this country.

What is most important is that we get your views on this matter there will be a separate mailing about the AGM and the changes being proposed in early November but we would appreciate any comments or contributions which members may want to make on the issue before then. So get your thinking caps on and let us know your views.

GUEST ARTICLE - GUERNSEY WOMEN FIGHT FOR CHOICE

by Ann Furedi

If pro-choice activists in Guernsey succeed in changing their law to allow women to end unwanted pregnancies on their own island it could have important consequences for those of us here in Britain.

The 1910 Guernsey Abortion Law, which criminalises abortion on the island, is currently under review by a Board of Health Working Party and is the subject of intense public debate. A public meeting organised in July by pro-choice activists was attended by more than 600

local people (the total population of Guernsey is just 60,000), the letters pages of the local papers are dominated by the discussion and already pro- and anti-choice groups have been established. The Guernsey Right To Life Group (affiliated to SPUC and run by Cynthia Kennedy, a former leading light in the American right to life movement) have organised showings of the Silent Scream and distributed leaflets condemning abortion as murder to all the homes on the island. In response a Guernsey Women's Group have established a pro-choice campaign, the first meeting of which was attended by 70 would-be activists.

As we go to press there is no clear indication of how exactly the law might be reformed or even what the recommendation of the Working Party might be. There is an emerging consensus (outside of the anti-choice lobby) that the current situation where 100 or so women travel each year to obtain abortions in British clinics is unacceptable and that the 1910 Abortion Law under which pregnant women attempting to obtain an abortion, and those who help them, could be sentenced to life imprisonment, is both draconian and unenforceable.

Some people have argued that a change in the law will not materially affect the lives of women in Guernsey. The anti-choice lobby claim that no woman has ever been sentenced for trying to obtain an abortion in Guernsey, and even some of those who support choice think that if abortion were available legally the vast majority of women would rather travel to protect their privacy. This may be the case, but it does not detract from the need to establish the principle that women should have access to legal abortion. Laws which criminalise abortion reinforce a climate in which abortion is seen as 'wrong' - an illegitimate solution to the crisis of unwanted pregnancy. This means that women who need to travel often carry an additional baggage of guilt. And of course, not all women can arrange or afford a trip away from home, especially if they want to keep their abortion a secret.

The determination of pro-choice activists to raise and resolve the issue of their antiquated law send an important signal to parliamentarians and health officials in the UK. It seems likely

that, in line with the recent legal review in Jersey, there may be a recommendation for abortion on request in early pregnancy, and if the Channel Isles move en bloc in that direction it will further throw into light the anomaly of UK law - which still denies women abortion on request at any stage.

The pro-choice movement in Guernsey is just a few months old, but there is already an important lesson we can learn from them - they have set the agenda by raising the problems that their law causes for women, we need to set the agenda here too.

BOOK REVIEW

Women and the Health Industry: An unhealthy relationship? by Peggy Foster

An interesting and clearly written account of modern medicine and its treatment of women, this book covers many controversial aspects of sexual and reproductive health. This review concentrates on the chapter dealing with contraception and abortion.

Foster points out that contraceptive prescribing habits have done much to benefit doctors and pharmaceutical companies but have questionable effects on women. The pill is the easiest to prescribe and doctors now receive a fee for contraceptive advice and implementing. Foster regards it, however, as "the largest uncontrollable experiment in human carcinogenesis ever". Caps, diaphragms and condoms are usually only suggested for the "highly motivated" (whoever they may be) and those in "stable" relationships.

As a controversial solution to the inconclusive but growing list of possible side effects of the pill, Foster advocates barrier methods "backed up by demedicalised early abortion" as a safer and more controllable fertility control method. She advocates the "demedicalisation of suction abortion in women centred clinics staffed by predominately non-medical staff and offer women one-stop counselling, termination, and after termination support".

The author argues that decriminalisation offers a way out of the current medical power

monopoly over abortion. She regards the introduction of RU486 as a fallacy of choice as it simply offers another form of medicalised and supervised service. Also, she says, the health risks are currently unclear. As it is not necessary for a "doctor's skill" to be obtained to carry out a safe and successful suction abortion, this is a much better way of giving women real choice over their reproduction.

It is distressing that the author cannot envisage such a future for abortion services with the current strength of the anti-choice lobby in Britain.

Her dismissal of RU486 may be rather short sighted. A report by Henshaw et al (1993, see review NAC Newsletter 2) showed that some women felt more in control when they decided to use RU486 and preferred this to the "cattle market" of abortion clinics. It also showed that active choice, whether for medical or surgical abortion increased women's satisfaction with the procedure.

Other studies (Petchesky, 1984 & Aubery, 1993) have suggested that for some women seeing the products of abortion after using RU486 is a positive part of their own reassuring and healing process. A far cry from the victim images so beloved of the anti-choicers. Indeed if, as she advocates throughout, Foster wishes to improve women's access to services and choice of services, these experiences of RU486 should not be ignored.

Whilst we should be concerned over increasing medicalisation of RU486 and, as with the pill, need to ensure that the facts about possible risks are investigated and publicised, we must also ensure that women are fully informed about their options, warts and all.

S*NEWS*NEWS*NEWS*NE

BRITISH NEWS

No Extra Help....

LIFE have a sponsorship deal with the Halifax Independent Advisers Limited, (HIFAL) a subsidiary of the Halifax Building Society. They are offering an introduction arrangement with

LIFE. This means that 40% of any commission earned by HIFAL on an arrangement with a LIFE member, goes back to increase LIFE's coffers.

For unknown reasons a previous and similar arrangement with Bradford and Bingley has given way to this new effort with the Halifax.

If your money is tied up with the Halifax we suggest you move it and send a letter to the manager explaining why you won't keep your money with those who support the anti-choicers.

Pro-Choice Poll

The results of a MORI poll published earlier this month shows that 66% strongly or tend to agree with the principle of abortion on request. Only 15% strongly disagreed, with another 9% tending to disagree.

Younger people, those from higher social classes and women were more likely to support abortion on request. Whilst 70% of Anglicans agreed, as many as 44% of Roman Catholics also supported abortion on request.

Political parties should take note of the fact that of those who supported abortion on request and expressed a voting preference, 72% would vote Liberal Democrat, 70% would vote Conservative and 62% would vote Labour.

BlaBla Blair

The *News of the World* recently expressed its concern about the Catholic Tony Blair's "desperate moral dilemma over the abortion issue". Pro-choice groups are more concerned that on this issue, as on so many, "New Labour" is rushing headlong into perpetuating the status quo by trying to appeal to the middle ground. As the above MORI poll results show, this is not where the middle ground rests in the case of abortion.

The Labour Party has made no promises to improve abortion rights, but offered oddly "the possibility that one doctor rather than two might be authorised to approve abortion up to 12 weeks." Even this change, Labour shadow minister for Women Clare Short, claims would require legislation and "no government can be certain how the House of Commons would vote on such a proposal." This is certainly true if abortion remains an issue of the leader's conscience rather than party policy within the

Labour Party and it is noteworthy that the party's latest Health Policy document contains no mention of either abortion or family planning

Given the problems of doctors' "conscience" rights to refuse women abortion, NAC will continue to call for nothing less than abortion on request, fully funded by the NHS.

Bye Bye Mr A.

David Alton, the anti-choicers choice and Liberal Democrat MP for Mossley Hill has announced that he will be quitting Parliament at the next election.

This good news is followed by bad and the announcement that he plans to bring (another but final) Private Member's Bill to try to tighten abortion laws as a supported of the Movement of Christian Democracy. His methods include trying to make it a criminal offence to "cause pain" to the foetus or by requiring women seeking abortions to give permission for such "pain" to be caused. A spokesperson for the Birth Control Trust said the bill "relies on bad science and is clearly intended to introduce an element of guilt both for doctors and women seeking abortions" For the myth of foetal pain see NAC Newsletters passim.

Abortion Trauma Myth

Recent research published in the *British Journal of Psychiatry* shows that women who have abortions are no more likely to suffer from mental problems than women who give birth. The idea that women who have abortions suffer a post-traumatic type of disorder, sometimes years later, is a myth often perpetuated by anti-choice groups in their fight against women's rights.

Ann Furedi said "this research confirms that where abortion is legal and relatively freely available there is no evidence of significant psychiatric after-effects."

Redwood strikes again

Not content with upsetting the leadership apple-cart, John 'the Vulcan' Redwood has taken to issuing dire proclamations on the threat to civilisation that single mothers pose. His latest target are teenage mums who, he maintains should give up their children for adoption. He

is obviously unaware of the potentially damaging emotional and social ramifications of such a strategy (as women forced to give up their babies in the 40s and 50s will testify).

Redwood's style and tone is indicative of the kind of narrow-mindedness and ignorance that seems to afflict so many members of the Tory government. What is particularly galling to many lone parents is the way in which they are represented in such tirades as an homogenous group. Lone parents are the products of various circumstances - divorce, separation, death, desecration. The feckless, ill-educated teenage mum is, by and large, a creation of the tabloid press, and the social evil that 'she' personifies has been wholeheartedly embraced, and found to be in need of eradication, by the Conservative prophets of doom. What we really need is better sex and contraception information and full support for young women whether they chose to terminate a pregnancy or wish to have their baby.

Young Needs Increase

Brook Advisory Centres have reported a 40% increase in the numbers of under 16s using their services over the last year. Increased attendance began in 1991 and coincided with the first fall in the numbers of under 16s becoming pregnant. Brook hope that this further increase in attendance will further decrease the conception rate.

They attribute the increase to four main factors, the increase in numbers of advisory centres in response to government initiatives to review and improve services for young people, more appropriate opening hours, publicity increasing young people's confidence about the confidentiality of such services and a wider discussion of sex and contraception because of HIV/AIDS and safer sex messages.

Abortion Drama

Showing at the Royal Theatre in Northampton (15-30 September) is the critically-acclaimed *Keely and Du*. Described by William Morgan of 'Time' magazine as the "...most important and surely the most harrowing American play produced outside New York city this year", *Keely and Du* centres around the familiar issues of the 'pro-' and 'anti-' choice debate, yet

promises to offer a new, refreshing angle. The pregnant rape victim, Keely is kidnapped on her way to an abortion clinic and held captive by militant anti-abortionists, who have a 'divine mission' to fulfil and are intent on making an example of the hapless Keely.

For further information call 01604 24485.

Congratulations...

.....to Ann Furedi who was recently featured in 'Company' magazine as a nominee in the 'health and medicine' category of the 'Movers and Shakers' award. Awards go to 'brilliant' young women who are leaders in their respective fields. The article on Ann mentions her commitment to the pro-choice movement and her involvement in the campaign to keep the contraceptive pill available on the NHS.

GUERNSEY NEWS

At present there is a very restrictive law in operation in Guernsey. Abortion is illegal under a law dating from 1910. This means that a woman convicted of obtaining an abortion could face a sentence of three years to life imprisonment. Every year over a hundred Guernsey women are forced to travel to clinics in Britain for a legal abortion. The need for travel seriously increases the cost of an abortion and even if this can be afforded, adds to the mental stress the amount of disruption to the woman's life.

The law could be about to change though, as a working party set up by the Guernsey Board of Health is now considering proposals for change in order to meet the real needs of local women. The proposed legal changes are to be discussed next year but already the anti-choice lobby is hard at work. Using funds from the USA as well as Britain, they have already distributed literature to every household on the island. These pamphlets denounce the pro-choice groups and make false medical claims about the risks of abortion.

Unfortunately pro-choice activists, although not lacking motivation or support, do lack funds. Women in Guernsey need to lobby their representatives to convince them to vote for choice. This will take meetings and debates in order to discuss and expose the misinformation

campaign of the anti-choice lobby. Pro-choice leaflets, factsheets and briefings have to be produced and distributed.

Donations, cheques, postal or money orders to:

Pro-Choice Fund for Guernsey
c/o 16 Mortimer Street,
London W1N 7RD

EUROPEAN NEWS

New research by Unipath revealed that doctors in Europe think that only 1/6 of women are satisfied with the current range of contraception available. 76% of doctors also believed that women need to know more about their own fertility.

DENMARK NEWS

The 22nd Anniversary of free, legal abortion available in Denmark was marked by the country's first anti-choice demonstration. 23 vested priests marched to protest.

A survey in March of this year showed that 90% of the population were pro-choice.

POLISH NEWS

After the 1993 changes legal abortions were restricted to grounds to rape, incest, threat to the mother's life or serious foetal abnormality.

Officially reported legal abortions have declined from about 31,000 in 1991 to 777 in 1993. However, reported miscarriages have risen by 1,225 from 1992 to 1993. Border regions report greater numbers of women have been treated for complications following abortions abroad and greater numbers of abandoned babies have also been recorded.

Whilst it is difficult to estimate the numbers of secret abortions obtained, birth rate figures do suggest that fewer women are actually becoming pregnant.

A doctor who has performed abortions since the 1993 regulations is currently on trial and faces a maximum 10 year sentence if found guilty.

CHINESE NEWS

China's new law on "improving the quality of the new-born population" came into force in June. The original version had been criticised by human rights lobbies for its controlling, eugenics tone. Although the final version continues to require doctors to "advise" abortion in the case of defective foetus or serious genetic disorder, the women concerned must now give express consent. Rules about marriage "postponement" in the event of parental mental disorder, serious hereditary or infectious disease being discovered at an obligatory prenuptial medical still apply. Unless that is, the couple agree to lifelong contraception or sterilisation.

China's birth rate was the lowest ever last year, with less than 10% of families containing more than one child.

AMERICAN NEWS

Clinic Closure

A Brooklyn Planned Parenthood Family Planning Clinic was recently forced to cease performing abortions for three weeks. The reason was not anti-choice intervention, but because the sole doctor willing to carry out the procedure was ill.

The lack of willing doctors is becoming a major problem in the States. While some doctors in training may even refuse to learn how to perform an abortion, others will not utilise this knowledge because of fears of harassment or violence - violence which has resulted in the injury and death of some of those involved in providing abortion services.

Medical Students for Choice, formed after Dr John Britton and his clinic escort were murdered in Florida in 1993, continue to push for increased abortion instruction at every level of medicine.

Roe vs. choice?

Norma McCorvey, named as "Jane Roe" in the seminal *Roe vs. Wade* case in 1973 which ruled that a women's right to chose over-rode any state imposed restrictions, has recently been

championed by the anti-choicers as their newest convert.

She was quoted as being moved by the sight of empty swings in a playground and thought "the playgrounds are empty because there's no children, they've all been aborted" (a free T-shirt to the member who can name that film scene in one...)

The anti-choicers have been celebrating McCorvey's conversion to both a Baptist church and their own cause. However, her position seems to remain confused as she has said that she still supports a woman's right to abortion in the first trimester but is also said to support Operation Rescue. Reports that she had been harassed by anti-abortion neighbours on her move to Dallas have been denied.

As a convert to the anti-abortion cause she may be forced to give up her relationship of 21 years standing with a woman who still works for A Choice for Women.

Katie Michel man, president of National Abortion Reproductive Rights Action League said "McCorvey has exercised her right to decide on this personal issue...the *Roe* decision isn't about any individual woman - it's about the decision of all women to make the choice free from government intervention"

CONTRACEPTION NEWS

It's twenty years since the search for a safe, effective and reversible method of hormonal contraception for men began. Injections with testosterone enanthate have been used in trials in many centre worldwide and there are now hopes that a new product could be ready for introductory trials by the year 200 providing trials continue at full scale.

Beijing Report

The 4th World Conference of women in Beijing took place this month with an official arm of government representatives and "official" agencies and a Forum for NGOs (Non-Government Organisations). It was the biggest international conference on women ever and had

a brief to produce guidelines and policies concerning women.

Problems were caused by the separation of the main conference from the NGO Forum which was located an hour's drive away. This prevented conference participants from interacting between the two locations as they always had to decide whether to commit time to one or the other. The NGOs were regarded as making an extremely valuable contribution in Cairo when they were just 5 minutes away and some delegates thought that it was the more exciting of the two places to be - packed with workshops with a wide and rich agenda and containing a kaleidoscope of women form all over the world. The problem with a UN conference is that it is a UN conference!

The basic problem with the "official" conference at Beijing as a "Platform for Action" was the poorness of the document to be agreed, perhaps because "women" is just too diffuse a subject for such a conference to focus upon. Clear ideas and policies were lost in the process of transforming a jumble into reasonable language.

As far as reproductive rights were concerned, it was hoped that Cairo's recognition of reproductive health would allow the reproductive rights lobby to move away from the small arena of women's health and move into the larger one of women's rights. Unfortunately (if predictably) the Vatican was only interested in rolling back the achievements of the Cairo conference. This led some strong governmental delegates (such as those from Nordic countries) to worry about defending the results from Cairo rather than being able to open out the issue. Nevertheless it was positive that sexual rights were on the agenda even if the final document failed to mention sexual orientation.

Control over fertility was linked in the document to women's empowerment. However, the square bracket monster raised its head again and this issue was squared in all over the document. It is a shame that something this basic should continue to be a bone of contention.

The Vatican was out in force and very well organised. Anti-choice stalls were literally "manned" and on hand with a selection of