

Selections from Redstockings Archives for Action

The documents collected here are drawn from materials related to a February 1969 New York State Joint Legislative Committee Hearing which was disrupted by members of [Redstockings](#), a women's liberation group of the 1960s, and the group's first Abortion Speak-Out held the following month.

The selection includes:

- a leaflet distributed by Redstockings at the hearing;
- a list of the hearing's scheduled speakers;
- newspaper reports of what happened published the next day; and
- background quotes from activists and advocates on different occasions between 1968 and 1973. The background quotes were prepared for a 20th Anniversary Commemoration of the Abortion Speak-Out.

The complete Archives for Action is available at:

https://www.redstockings.org/index.php/main/taking-stock#archives_for_action.

—*Hard Crackers* editors, July 2022

www.hardcrackers.com

WHO ARE THE EXPERTS?

Today a panel of clergymen, doctors and other professional "experts" is picking apart the abortion law. They will tell us, in their usual daddy-knows-best manner, just how much control over our reproductive processes we should be allowed to have.

We say:

THE ONLY REAL EXPERTS ON
ABORTION ARE WOMEN!

Women who have known the pain, fear and socially-imposed guilt of an illegal abortion. Women who have seen their friends dead or in agony from a post-abortion infection. Women who have had children by the wrong man, at the wrong time, because no doctor would help them.

Any woman can tell you:

Abortion laws are sexist laws, made by *men* to punish women.

LET THE EXPERTS TESTIFY.
SUPPORT CONSTANCE COOK'S
BILL — REPEAL ALL ABORTION
LAWS.

JOINT LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE ON THE PROBLEMS OF PUBLIC HEALTH

HEARING ON POSSIBLE CHANGES IN THE ABORTION LAW

125 WORTH STREET, NEW YORK CITY

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 1969

THERE WILL BE A 30 MINUTE BREAK FOR LUNCH AT APPROXIMATELY 1 P.M.

1. The Honorable Charles W. Froessel, Former Judge, New York State Court of Appeals, Dean of New York Law School and Chairman of the Governor's Commission on Abortion Reform
2. Frank J. Ayd, Jr., M. D., Psychiatrist, Baltimore, Maryland
3. Zad Leavy, Former Assistant District Attorney, Los Angeles County, California
4. Father Charles Carroll, Chaplain, University of California at Los Angeles
5. The Honorable Percy Sutton, President, Borough of Manhattan
6. Senator Wilfrid J. Ullrich, Member of the Indiana State Senate and Vice-Chairman of Committee to Study the Indiana Abortion Law
7. Irvin M. Cushner, M. D., Director of Center for Social Studies in Human Reproduction, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine
8. John Noonan, Professor, University of California at Berkeley, School of Law
9. The Honorable Milton Helpern, M. D., Chief Medical Examiner, City of New York
10. Robert M. Byrn, Professor, Fordham University School of Law and Member of the Governor's Commission on Abortion Reform
11. Irwin F. Sclar, M. D., Psychiatrist, Boulder, Colorado
12. Jules Rivkind, M. D., Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, St. Vincent's Hospital, New York City
13. Louis Z. Cooper, M. D., Director of Rubella Birth Defect Evaluation Project, New York University Medical Center
14. Sister Mary Patricia, Director of Kennedy Child Study Center, New York City
15. Representative Kenneth B. Bays, Member of the Indiana State House of Representatives and Chairman of Committee to Study the Indiana Abortion Law

WOMEN BREAK UP ABORTION HEARING

Shouts for Repeal of Law
Force Panel to Move

By EDITH EVANS ASHURY

A group of angry women broke up a legislative hearing on abortion reform here yesterday, forcing it to move to another room and continue behind closed doors as the women continued to shout outside.

Charles W. Froessel, former judge of the State Court of Appeals, had just finished addressing the Joint Legislative Committee on the Problems of Public Health when a young woman in the audience stood up and shouted, "All right, now let's hear from some real experts—the women."

The white-haired Mr. Froessel and the committee members at a long table on the platform of the auditorium of the City Health Department, 125 Worth Street, stared over their microphones in amazement.

"Repeat the abortion law, instead of wasting more time talking about these stupid reforms," cried the young woman, who later identified herself as Mrs. Kathy Amatnick.

A dozen other women arose and began to shout at the members of the committee as its chairman, State Senator Norman Lent, Republican of Nassau County, sought to restore order.

Among the words that could be distinguished above the din were:

"Why are 14 men and only one woman on your list of speakers — and she a nun?"

An Unwanted Baby

"We've waited and waited while you have held one hearing



NO ENTRY: A police captain blocking a group of vocal women demonstrators trying to enter a closed session of a legislative committee hearing on abortion reform. Earlier, the women had disrupted a public hearing of the committee.

The New York Times (By Don Logan Chalk 5)

after another. Meanwhile, the baby I didn't want is 2 years old."

Mr. Froessel, who had just outlined for the committee recommendations of the Governor's Committee on Abortion Law Reform, went over to Mrs. Amatnick and tried to persuade her that "you're only hurting your own case."

"This doesn't get you anywhere," he said.

Senator Seymour Thaler, a Queens Democrat, called out from the platform:

"I am entirely in sympathy with these women, the law should be repealed, in my opinion. We have had enough hearings. You are quite right to be impatient."

Loud applause broke the pattern of the noise briefly, but the angry female voices continued to ring out.

Senator Thaler left his seat on the platform and went down into the audience, pleading:

"I am on your side. This is the legislative procedure. We have to get on. Anarchy is no substitute for the orderly procedure of law."

About a half hour after the noisy outbreak began, Senator Lent announced that the hearing would move to another room and continue as an executive session closed to the public except for the news media.

Publicity Called Aim

"What they really want is more publicity," shouted Mrs. Gloria Nelson as the committee left the platform. She is chairman of the League for Abortion Reform of Nassau County.

Assemblyman Albert H. Blumenthal, a Manhattan Democrat who has campaigned for abortion-law reform for two

years, tried vainly, on the way out, to pacify some of the angry women.

As he left the auditorium he commented: "They can't make me mad. We've been trying to get them to hearings for years."

Before the outburst began, Mr. Froessel told the committee that his commission had urged amendment of the law to permit legalized abortion where pregnancy endangered the physical or mental health of the mother, created substantial risk that the child would be grossly malformed or seriously abnormal mentally or physically, or if the pregnancy was the result of rape or incest.

In addition to these recommendations, which are in a bill already proposed by the Governor, Mr. Froessel urged that abortion be legalized where the woman already had four children and didn't want any more.

The state's abortion law, which has been unchanged for

86 years, allows abortions only when necessary to save the mother's life. Efforts to liberalize it were fought strenuously when Assemblyman Blumenthal and then Assemblyman Percy E. Sutton, now Manhattan Borough President, began them two years ago.

However, Senator Lent, in his opening statement yesterday, said his committee recognized that the present law was "widely disregarded and infrequently enforced" and that there was public sentiment for reform.

485 Doctors to Be Drafted

CHICAGO, Feb. 13 (UPI)—The Department of Defense plans to draft 485

Friday, February 14, 1969

Newsday



'I happen to agree with your opinions, but I have never met such rude people.'

—State Sen. Seymour Thaler



'It is wrong for men of great age to decide this matter. We want repeal.'

—Mrs. Kathy Amatnick

Newsday Photo by Dick Kraus

Newsday Photo by Dick Kraus

Women Invade Abortion Hearing

By Brian Barrett and Lewis Grossberger

New York—A state hearing on abortion reform turned into a battle of the sexes yesterday when a group of women disrupted the proceedings of an all-male legislative committee to demand that anti-abortion laws be repealed outright.

"It's obscene to think of all those men sitting up there deciding on the law when it's the women who have the abortions," one woman shouted. The women, about 15 of them, broke up the hearing of the Joint Legislative Committee on Public Health by loudly informing the legislators that as men they had little right or knowledge to discuss the subject, let alone legislate on it.

"This meeting is designed not to measure public opinion of which we are already aware," said the committee chairman, State Sen. Norman Lent (R-East Rockaway), in a vain attempt to restore order, "but to gather information and evidence from ex-



Norman F. Lent

perts." That brought cries such as: "What better experts are there on abortion than women?" and "Do you have to be an expert to become pregnant?"

The women angrily protested the list of "expert" witnesses chosen by Lent and the committee's lawyer, which consisted of 14 men and a nun, and they demanded a public hearing. Lent finally adjourned the committee to an executive session "because of this disgraceful conduct on the part of the ladies," but he allowed four of the demonstrators to go in and address the group.

One of them, Mrs. Gale Greenwood, a 27-year-old nursery school teacher, urged repeal of New York State's tough anti-abortion statute rather than passage of the reforms being considered. "Ten years ago, I had an illegal abortion at 17 years old," she said in a soft, strained voice. "I'm not going into the gory details; it was an illegal thing. Today, I would not want a child, but if I were to become pregnant, I would not be covered by the law, and I wouldn't be covered by the reforms. I'm not insane, I'm not physically damaged. But I'm poor, I don't have the money, I would have to find a quack somewhere."

Mrs. Greenwood said that she and her husband do not want a child because they do not have the space, the money or "the psychological preparedness." Staring fixedly at Lent, she added: "Men have no right to decide these questions."

Two prominent physicians who testified agreed with Mrs. Greenwood, but on medical grounds. One of them, Dr. Irvin Cushner of Baltimore's Johns Hopkins University, asked the committee to ask itself, "Why not repeal, since this would in essence put abortion within the same legal and professional framework as all other surgical procedures."

But other witnesses opposed modification of the abortion law. An Episcopal chaplain accused abortion proponents of proposing a first step that would lead to excesses similar to the genetic practices of Nazi Germany, and a law school professor at Fordham University said that he could not make a distinction between abortion and infanticide.

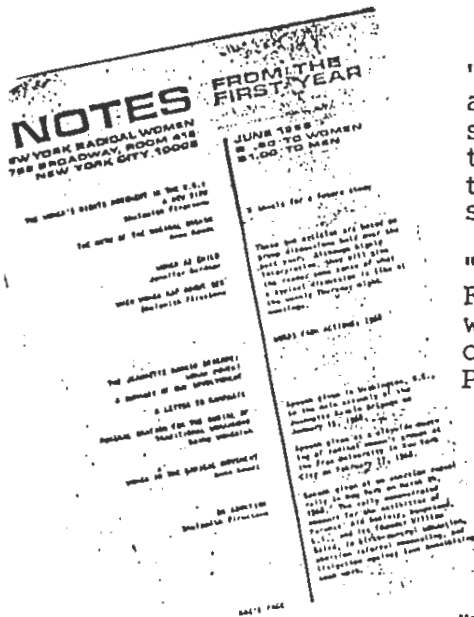
But what stood out most clearly in the memory of those present at the long hearing was the early shouting match. One of the shouters, Mrs. Kathy Amatnick, said: "It is wrong for men of great age to decide this matter. And if we have to, we will force doctors at gunpoint, and we might even hijack airplanes to get this." State Sen. Seymour Thaler (D-Queens), told the women, "I happen to agree with your opinion but I have never met such rude people." Earlier, he had quipped, "I would bet that all those ladies (the demonstrators) are mentally disturbed and shouldn't be allowed to have a baby."

One of the women observed, "The only way these people will listen to us is if we disrupt their meeting."

1968-1969: Women's liberationists begin standing up and speaking out about abortion and contraception, as legal defiance and demystifying action.

Background quotes for the 20th anniversary of the Redstockings Abortion Speak-out and Tribute to all the public truth-telling about women and birth control launched by the women activists and women's liberation organizers of the '60's

from the radical feminist journals of 1968:



"I would like to address this speech, to those women, and there are few enough here, who had the guts to show up at this rally. There are many many more out there who could not make it. Many who are afraid to take a stand on an issue as important as their own self determination.

"... But I didn't come to excoriate other women. For I must confess that even I after months of work in women's liberation, had my fears about coming out openly for free abortion. Before hundreds of people? Perhaps to be quoted? God, what would my father think?

-- Shulamith Firestone
Speech at Rally for Bill Baird
Notes From the First Year, June 1968
New York Radical Women

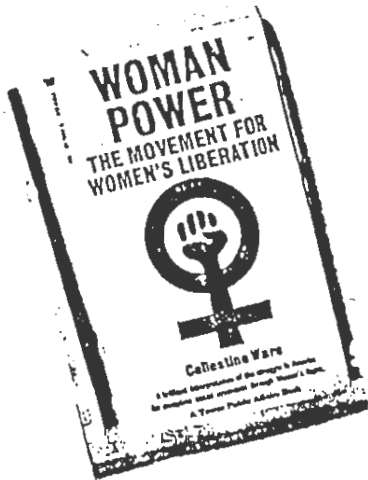
"Poor black sisters decide for themselves whether to have a baby or not to have a baby. . . . Now a lot of the black brothers are into a new bag. Black women are being asked by militant black brothers not to practice birth control because it is a form of whitey committing genocide on black people. Well, true enough, but it takes two to practice genocide and black women are able to decide for themselves, just like poor people all over the world, whether they will submit to genocide. For us, birth control is freedom to fight genocide of black women and children.

... Like the Vietnamese have decided to fight genocide, the south American poor are beginning to fight back, and the African poor will fight back, too. Poor black women in the U.S. have to fight back out of our own experience of oppression. Having too many babies stops us from supporting our children, teaching them the truth or stopping the brainwashing as you say, and fighting black men who still want to use and exploit us.

-- Mount Vernon, N.Y., Sept. 11, 1968: Patricia Haden, Sue Rudolph, Joyce Hoyt, Pricilla Leake, Rita Van Lew, Catherine Hoyt, Patricia Robinson
Lilith, Dec. 1968
Women's Majority Union, Seattle, Wash.

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from Woman Power: The Movement for Women's Liberation by Cellestine Ware, 1970



"The action for which the early REDSTOCKINGS received the most publicity and which made the group known throughout the Women's Liberation Movement was the demonstrations at the New York legislature's 1969 abortion reform hearings. REDSTOCKINGS invaded the hearings for the abortion laws at a time when liberal legislators were trying to pass an abortion reform law. . . .

"REDSTOCKINGS broke up the sessions because laws that defined women's choices were being made by men. Once again, the lives of women were being bound and ruled by men. REDSTOCKINGS then held a consciousness-raising session that was open to the public in which sisters testified about their personal experiences with abortion before an audience of both men and women. This was the beginning of REDSTOCKINGS' agitation to open the topic of abortion to public debate. it brought the group approval from feminists throughout the nation. (pp. 38-39)

". . . Discontent with these results have brought liberals, radicals, and feminists to discard the goal of abortion law reform and to fight instead for repeal of all such laws. The character and form of the opposition has also changed. Previously opponents tried to change abortion laws through legislative means in the representative assemblies of their states; now their attack is focused on litigation to prove the unconstitutionality of abortion laws and the invidious discriminations inherent in the liberalized laws. . . . There are more than 300 plaintiffs involved in the several suits pending in New York. These women then testified to their experiences, professional or personal, with abortions. Their testimony is part of a deposition that was turned over to the three-judge Federal Court hearing the combined suits challenging the law. REDSTOCKINGS' protest, that abortion law reform was being undertaken without the consent and advise of women, would appear to have altered the procedures in handling the most personal of women's issues." (pp. 122-124)

from Abortion Rap by Diane Schulder and Florynce Kennedy, 1971:



"One of the *first times that abortion was rapped about publicly was in New York City in March, 1969, in a program organized by Redstockings, a Woman's Liberation group:

"Twelve young women faced an audience of more than 300 men and women and with simplicity and calm and occasional emotion and even humor, told of incidents in their personal lives which they formerly had consigned to the very

- MORE -

private. They rapped about their own abortions. (Susan Brownmiller, Village Voice, March, 1969)

... "The same article (entitled 'Everywoman's Abortions: The Oppressor Is Man') described an action that had taken place a month earlier, when the Redstockings had stormed a hearing of a New York State legislative committee studying abortion law reform and, predictably, had been rebuffed. The committee, they were told, was interested in the testimony of experts. The 'experts' had been fourteen men and one woman, a nun.

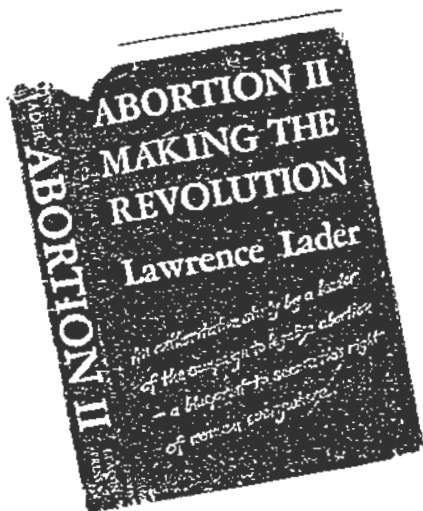
"These women then fashioned their own public hearing. As one of the younger women said, "We are the true experts, the only experts, we who've had abortions."

... "Thus it was that the women's movement began to reject the pall of guilt which isolates women in crises. It was this that triggered the idea in our minds to have women testify as women and as experts, in the Federal case to attack the constitutionality of the abortion law." (pp.3-4)

from Lawrence Lader's Abortion II: Making the Revolution, 1973 :

"For the first time, the feminists were speaking for themselves--facing the fact of their own abortions, no longer afraid to express their demands in strident tones.

". . . The turning point in mass anger took place at the Washington Square Methodist Church in New York City in March 1969 at a meeting of hundreds of women organized by "Red Stockings," a Women's Liberation affiliate. Women stood up to describe their abortions: the anguished search for doctors, the groveling before anyone that could *help them in their search, the dingy rooms of backstreet abortionists, the surgical cruelty, often without anesthesia, the degradation which affected them for years. For the first time a group of women had made the public confront their personal horror--names, faces, their most intimate secrets exposed to television cameras and the world.



Redstockings

of the
Women's Liberation Movement

255 Ft. Washington Ave. #33
New York, N.Y. 10032
(212) 777-9241



Real Women, St. Louis, Mo. 1971

20TH ANNIVERSARY PLANS FOR WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH IN MARCH '89

On the 20th anniversary of the first women's abortion speak-out

ABORTION: WOMEN TELL IT LIKE IT IS, WAS, AND OUGHT TO BE ... 1969-1989

A "history speak-out" on the 20th anniversary of the 1969 actions in which women, defying law and custom, first spoke out publicly about their abortions. In the same spot as the first Redstockings speak-out.

8:30 P.M. -- Friday March 3, 1989
Sanctuary, Wash. Sq. Methodist Church, 135 W. 4th St., NYC

\$ 6 donation at door

ARCHIVES IN ACTION: THE WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT.

An exhibit of documents, photos, posters, songs, and tapes of the "rebirth years" of struggle. Refreshments.

7:00 P.M.--Friday March 3, 1989
Basement, Wash. Sq. Methodist Church 135 W. 4th. St., NYC

ACTION AND ORGANIZING FOLLOW-UP TO THE ABORTION HISTORY SPEAK-OUT.

"Consciousness-raising" type discussion of 20 years of lessons in the relation between the struggle for full birth control rights and women's liberation. Women only. Childcare available when notified in advance. Call 212-777-9241.

1-5 P.M. --Saturday March 4, 1989
Penn South Community Room, 343 8th Ave., NYC

\$5 donation at door

REDSTOCKINGS' 20th YEAR. "Redstockings" was a name taken in 1969 by one of the women's liberation groups of the 1960's to represent a union of two traditions -- red for revolution combined with the "blue stocking" label used to insult 19th century feminists.

Redstockings today is a think tank established by veterans of the original group for defending and advancing the women's liberation agenda. For more info., send a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

analyze, organize, mobilize!