



ATF FIGHTS BOARD OF HEALTH REGULATIONS

It was a "stormy session" there at the June 20th meeting of the Chicago Board of Health, reported the Chicago Tribune. The ATF had come to present criticisms of the recent abortion clinic regulations. But, it became clear that Dr. Eric Oldberg, President of the Board and the Board had already made up their minds

of the Board and the Board had already made up their minds on everything. Our crowd of 51 became frustrated and disruptive, finally walking out of the meeting. The ATF had met with Dr. Oldberg several weeks before, to discuss objections to the regulations, and he agreed that the ATF's suggested changes were "reasonable" and said that he would work to bring the Board around. Though we had trusted him to be on our side, changes presented to the Board were minimal.

At the Board meeting, some of the arguments we presented for changing the regulations were the following:

1) The regulations required a 48-hour "think it over" wait for the woman between the physical exam and tests and the abortion itself. We objected to this as medically unnecessary and, from our experiences through ACS, psychologically unnecessary.

Most women have made up their minds firmly and carefully and do not need to be told to think it over again. This wait would also be a great handicap and expense to women from out of Chicago or with young children or working -- all those who historically have had great difficulty getting safe, inexpensive abortions. The Board changed the 48 hours to 24 -- we still objected but the Board was rigid.

During the discussion it became clear that the lay people on the board were just following the lead of the doctors, and certainly were not representing health consumers -- an least of all, women -- with any independent opinion. The Board members were able to treat our concerns casually because they are appointed by Mayor Daley for life, and have little to fear from us.

2) The regulations contained a requirement for a full pathological examination of the removed tissue. Again our experiences and medical consultants felt this was medically unnecessary and expensive (\$10-40). The Board seemed concerned about detecting obscure medical problems while there was no provision in the regulations for VD or cancer tests. The only woman on the Board came to support us on this point.

3) The regulations called for certain unspecified but extensive equipment be provided in each room where abortions are performed. The Board agreed with us that one set of this equipment was sufficient for a whole clinic, but refused to change the wording. They insisted that the real meaning was understood and that inspectors wouldn't be arbitrary about it. We continued to object because we know how city inspectors can hassle people around technicalities and vague rules.

We felt badly that we had been only partly successful in changing the abortion regulations. But we are determined to learn from this experience -- to mobilize our allies such as doctors to support us openly and to plan other meetings to better focus on the most important points and really fight for them strongly.

ABORTIONS ARE LEGAL, BUT..

Carol was pregnant--the pregnancy test at the Women's Union several weeks after her missed period confirmed her worries. But now that abortions are legal, Carol was confident that there would be no real problems and began to plan for an abortion. However, she didn't plan on the failure of the medical system to know what they are doing, to be up on medical matters, and to help people receive the best care possible.

Carol made an appointment with her own doctor the next week and he agreed that she was pregnant and, of course, congratulated her (we all want to have all the babies we can, right?) Because he said he didn't do abortions, he referred Carol to Planned Parenthood. The doctor may not have done foot surgeries either, but it seems unlikely that he would tell her to go off on her own to find someone to help her with a foot deformity.

Carol works and had to wait a week to take another day off to see Planned Parenthood. Planned Parenthood arranged for her to go to a local clinic the next week--her next day off--but suggested New York clinics had more experience and, if she had the money, she should go there.

That weekend the newspapers carried several horror stories about the clinic Carol was to go to, though the clinic has an excellent safety record. Sensationalism sells papers, but it doesn't help people evaluate the real situation. Carol and her husband became uneasy and Carol went back to her original doctor, and pressed him for someone to go to. He referred her to a doctor "with a vacuum aspirator under his desk," but that doctor said she was too pregnant for this technique. He said she should use "salting out," a technique he had never done but, he said, "there's always a first time."

Carol was not interested in being involved in such an experiment. With the weeks dragging on, Carol was a nervous wreck. She decided to go to New York. The advice was now "don't go too early they can't do it too early." Knowing there was a point when it would be too late, Carol felt torn. She decided to take the risk of a second trip, and arranged to leave right away.

In New York, she was told it was just barely early enough to do the simplest procedure, the one she should have had done in Chicago. Carol got her abortion, but it was almost in spite of the Chicago health system.

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"...and then I began noticing injustices all over the place..."

Getting out from behind the "successful man's back" and actually becoming a successful person was the idea that launched me into the women's movement. Growing up with three brothers on the southwest side of Chicago taught me that they (males), were no better than me (female). I could never deny that they were different, but we were all different from each other. Also, I can really remember all those times that my mother and I entered in battle as a team against the boys and "their" father. It would really aggravate me because my mother would say that it was the women of the family who did the work, while they would continue to watch baseball, football, or whatever was the season's sport.

When I was still pretty young I told one of my uncles that I was going to be the first American pope (just to be cute), but oddly enough the thought of becoming a priest grew up with me. I didn't tell too many people because everybody knows women aren't priests, they're nuns. I knew that I didn't want to be a nun. (Heaven forbid!) As late as senior year in a Catholic all girls high school, the interest in becoming a priest still nagged at me. While talking to somebody about my possible "vocation", they asked me if I was doing it to prove a point about women's liberation. At the time, which was early in 1971 I flatly stated that I was doing anything that I was doing because I was personally interested in doing it. That was all. Just two years later, I'm not embarrassed or afraid to say that my possibly wanting to be a priest has a lot to do with women's liberation.

I realized that there was no good reason why a woman couldn't become a priest or anything else she wanted to be.

After four years of an all girls school, it was a little difficult to get adjusted to a normal situation. But that's when it began to happen...sure, going to school with all girls had been unreal, but sometimes reality isn't always the easiest thing to face. Now it dawned on me it was the only good thing about my time in high school. It gave me a chance to really learn to respect my "fellow" classmates (how come there is no word for female colleagues?). I also learned how aggressive and self-sufficient I had become working-only with other women and not having to deal with all that "masculine ego building" common to mixed groups. It began to irk me when some guy wanted me to take notes or type something up because it was real stereotyping.

But still, I began noticing injustices all over the place. And let's face it; there is no such thing as a "minor" injustice. Any injustice means a complete loss of freedom, for you can't have partial freedom either.

Well, about the same time all these injustices were springing up around me, I had been attracted to the Southwest area YWCA (3134 W. Marquette) through a Youth Conference co-sponsored by the local YMCA and them. I didn't know what the Southwest YW offered. It surprised me that they didn't have a pool, or gym or classes for that matter. I started getting involved by hearing things here and there about what the YW was doing. The programs were good, even great. There were discussion groups, the beginnings of a couple of tot lots, talk of a women's health committee, and the YW had only been around for around ten mos. Then I got a job at the YW, working 20 hours a week. Interest and involvement turned to commitment. In the year I've been employed, I've seen lots of background work and enough changes to convince me I wanted to work for women. The health committee blossomed, starting a free immunization program at Marquette Park once a month and securing women's cancer testing at a private community hospital. The tot lot program has expanded, and an ecology club for young girls was formed as well as a consciousness raising group for high school students. Then the Southwest College Women's Union was founded. The SCWU came out of a particular frustration junior college women feel. In addition to the general discrimination aimed toward women plus the usual educational inequalities, women attending a 2-yr. city school have problems. The reasons for going to a jr. college are lack of funds, and needing to work and/or living at home. Many families don't consider their daughter's education as important as their sons so many are hassled by all three reasons. Also, jr. colleges offer the opportunity for older women to finish school, but the school makes no attempts to ease the return. That's basically why several women attending Southwest Community College got together in January, 1973 to discuss the idea of a women's organization on campus. The idea sounded so good that the SCWU appeared at the beginning of the Spring semester.

The SCWU's first major activity was a day long celebration of International Women's Day. Other events included a leadership training workshop and dance with the Chicago Women's Liberation Rock Band. Three liberation school courses (given by the Chicago Women's Liberation Union), - self-defense, introduction to women's liberation and women and their bodies- were offered free to students at the college. The SCWU also met with women from other jr. college groups in the city to work on some projects together. The discussions themselves did a lot to give support and ideas to everyone. It seems like the possibilities are limitless for the things we want to see happen in the future.

What the Southwest College Women's Union is doing is important to me; I'm committed to it's work, and the Southwest YWCA and the Chicago Women's Liberation Union. I believe they're all vital for the survival and advancement of women and for all people. These organizations will mean a world of difference. A world changed significantly by the women who will demand their rights, unify to get control over our lives and a better way of living for everyone and create the alternatives needed for a liberated society. The women's movement means a future where a woman can use her talents to add a new dimension to "success"...where it won't matter so much that a woman prod men to success, but that she herself achieves freedom and happiness by doing what she wants to, trying what she'd like to try, even if she wants to be a priest.

