

Abortion: A woman's right to choose

Thursday 17 May 2007, by [Bradstreet Katherine](#) (Date first published: 11 May 2007).

Women's unqualified right to control our own bodies remains a critical question for feminists. An unwanted pregnancy can have a massive impact on all aspects of a woman's life — her financial situation, employment, mental and physical health, and relationships.

For a woman to even begin to have control over her life, she must be able to choose if and when she has children. Because no contraceptive is 100% effective, having control over reproduction means always having the option of a safe abortion.

The fact that abortions are available at all in Australia and elsewhere is only because a strong women's liberation movement fought for it. Without decades of active campaigning for abortion rights, women needing to terminate a pregnancy would still be left in the hands of "backyard" butchers or to their own devices.

Yet abortion is still included in Australian states' Crimes Acts and a concerted campaign by the anti-choice forces in the US has significantly eroded access to abortion.

In 1973, the US Supreme Court's Roe vs Wade ruling recognised women's constitutional right to abortion. Since then, however, state and federal governments have cut funding to family planning clinics, and legislated to further limit the stage of pregnancy at which an abortion can be performed and make women attend compulsory counselling, often provided by anti-choice religious organisations.

Parallel to these legal attacks, right-wing organisations have run scare campaigns to intimidate women considering an abortion. This has included physical attacks on medical staff and clinics where abortions are performed. And this has not happened only in the US. In 2001, anti-choice activist Peter Knight walked into the East Melbourne Fertility Clinic and shot a security guard.

The "pro-life" argument is that the foetus is an unborn child whose rights are the same as every person. Yet, the argument continues, the foetus' "rights" should always be put above those of the pregnant woman.

Another argument is that people who support women's right to choose are "anti-motherhood". In fact, a popular slogan in the pro-choice movement is "Every child a wanted child". That is, motherhood is a valid role for women, but it is not the only valid role.

To consistently support human rights, we must campaign for a world in which women are not imprisoned by a culture that dictates that their "natural" — and primary — role is to be mothers. Freedom from that prison requires freedom of choice in abortion.

P.S.

* From: Comment & Analysis, Green Left Weekly issue #709 16 May 2007.