

# "We have had abortions"

These 53 American women invite you to join them in a campaign for honesty and freedom

Last year, 343 prominent and respected Frenchwomen were willing to sign a public manifesto declaring that they had undergone abortions. This *acte de révolte* dramatized their individual determination to take their lives and liberation into their own hands. It also showed their willingness to stand with and to speak for their less well-known sisters, who were forced to suffer unwanted pregnancies or illegal abortions in silence.

To many American women and men it seems absurd, in this allegedly enlightened age, that we should still be arguing for a simple principle: that a woman has the right to sovereignty over her own body. Still, there are tragically few places in the country where a woman can obtain an abortion without the expense and deception of conforming to inhuman laws, or the expense and physical danger of going outside the law. (Organizations offering information on the laws and on abortion availability are listed on page 126 of this issue.) The vast majority of abortion laws in this country are remnants of obscurantist attitudes and medieval prejudices.

In fact, at least one of every four women in the United States has had an abortion. Until the recent legal reform in two states, all of those had to be either therapeutic or illegal. Given the difficulty of securing a therapeutic abortion, the great majority of abortions endured by American women have been illegal—and therefore dangerous. This has caused untold suffering, especially on the part of poor women who must resort to self-induced or butchered abortions. Some idea of the lives to be saved by repealing abortion laws is suggested by the recent drastic reduction in deaths from childbirth, a statistic that includes deaths from bungled abortions, in New York City alone. During the first nine months of the new legal abortion program, "deaths from childbirth" dropped by at least 60 per cent.

To save lives and to spare other women the pain of socially-imposed guilt, 53 respected women residents in the United States have volunteered to begin the American Women's Petition by signing the statement below. Our purpose is not to alienate or to ask for sympathy, but to repeal archaic and inhuman laws. Because of the social stigma still wrongly attached to abortion, many women in public life, or with husbands in public life, have felt unable to join us. We are mostly women active in community work, or in the arts. But we invite all women, from every walk of life, to help eliminate this stigma by joining us in this petition, and signing the statement below. The complete list will be sent to the White House, to every State Legislature, and to our sisters in other countries who are signing similar petitions for their lawmakers.

Barbaralee D. Diamonstein

The attitudes and laws against abortion in this country are causing untold suffering. Approximately one million American women had "illegal" abortions in 1971—many of them self-induced or performed by the unqualified, some of them fatal.

I have had an abortion. I publicly join millions of other American women in demanding a repeal of all laws that restrict our reproductive freedom.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Identification: \_\_\_\_\_

Send to: American Women's Petition, "Ms," 370 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017

Eve Auchincloss  
Sunny Aurelio  
Lorraine Beebe  
Joan Bingham  
Patricia Bosworth  
Kay Boyle  
Adelyn D. Breeskin  
Susan Brownmiller  
Hortense Calisher  
Jaqueline Michot Ceballos  
Lucinda Cisler  
Shirley Clarke  
Judy Collins  
Mary Cunningham  
Anselma Dell'Olivo  
Karen De Crow  
Barbaralee D. Diamonstein  
Susan Edmiston

Nora Ephron  
Lee Grant  
Gael Greene  
Nancy Grossman  
Barbara Barrie Harnick  
Lillian Hellman  
Dorothy Pitman Hughes  
Elizabeth Janeway  
Lucy Jarvis  
Jill Johnston  
Billie Jean King  
Maxine Kumin  
Irma Lazarus  
Viveca Lindfors  
Marya Mannes  
Dorothy Millstone  
Marcia Colman Morton  
Anaïs Nin

Grace Paley  
Beverly Pepper  
Eleanor Perry  
Frances Fox Piven  
Letty Cottin Pogrebin  
Mary Rodgers  
Naomi Ellen Rubin  
Nora Sayre  
Anita Siegel  
Marcia B. Siegel  
Anne Sexton  
Ruth P. Smith  
Susan Sontag  
Gloria Steinem  
Lena Tabori  
Barbara W. Tuchman  
Shirley Ann Wheeler

Barbaralee Diamonstein is a freelance writer who was Director of Cultural Affairs for New York City. Her book of interviews with 94 women, "Open Secrets," will be published in February.