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by

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Nova Scotia Women's Action Committee

The N.S.W.A.C. is a voluntary women's group which, through political action, is working towards the full and equal participation of women in all aspects of Nova Scotian society - politically, economically, educationally, culturally and socially.

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THE CHANGES, THE REFORMS WE SEEK, WILL BENEFIT
WOMEN, YES, BUT THEY WILL BENEFIT SOCIETY AS
WELL AND IMPROVE THE HUMAN CONDITION, REGARDLESS
OF SEX.

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We are responding to the article written by Mrs. Moir last week in which she discussed the stance and treatment of the Nova Scotia Task Force on the Status of Women with regards to abortion. We want to make it quite clear that we are writing in defense of the Task Force's actions on this matter and not in defense of abortion.

Like every citizen, Mrs. Moir has the right to argue as persuasively as she can in favour of her cause, but not at the expense of truth. Facts must not be distorted, nor should one group be so ready to malign another group, namely, the Task Force, with whom Mrs. Moir may share many common goals. Regardless of how one feels about abortion, it is only one recommendation out of a total of 95 made by the Task Force. It is therefore unfair for her to condemn the whole report on the basis of this one issue. To say that "the women of Nova Scotia deserve better than that" is to limit the women's movement to the question of abortion. So, it is unfair for her to state that the report does not "further the cause of women's rights".

Point by point clarification is therefore warranted, beginning with Mrs. Moir's statement "the submissions made ... by representatives of large numbers of women who are strongly opposed to indiscriminate killing of unborn children were the only submissions the Task Force would not allow to be discussed at the public hearings. In each case, after a brief expression of thanks, discussion was prohibited and the topic was dismissed."

Obviously Mrs. Moir did not take into consideration the fact that on June 26, 1975, in Baddeck, Nova Scotia, the Task Force spent two and a half hours on this topic. At that hearing, a submission made by the Cape Breton Right to Life group was fully discussed. The topic of abortion was also discussed in the Antigonish hearings, on June 5, 1975. In addition, the topic was mentioned at various times by other groups, e.g. in Halifax by the Catholic Women's League. It was discourteous towards the person chairing the public hearings, namely, Dr. Mairi St. John Macdonald, for Mrs. Moir to overlook the fact that several times before, during and after the presentations during the day the Task Force sat in Halifax, that apologies were made by the chairperson for the lack of time, and that this was also included in the "brief expression of thanks" cited in Mrs. Moir's article.

It is a matter of public record that there was only one other presentation that evening in Halifax which received more time (according to the number of pages of transcript) than hers, namely, the brief submitted by the group Parents for Better Daycare. In no other case that evening did a formal presentation plus discussion time equal the time devoted to Mrs. Moir's presentation, if one examines the time allotment in a totally objective fashion, that is, by comparing the actual page count of the hearing's transcriptions. Indeed, Mrs. Moir was specifically requested by Dr. Macdonald to summarize her comments so as to allow time for public discussion by the audience. Due to the pressures of time, other groups - including the Manpower Needs Committee (in the afternoon) and a daycare

presentation (that night) were also cut off from on-the-spot discussion.

Mrs. Moir goes on to say that "obviously, the issue received about as much consideration from the Task Force in private as it did in public." If she means in terms of the private hearings held by the Task Force, we understand that Mrs. Moir herself met with some members of the Task Force. If she is referring to their deliberations, how can an outsider know how much consideration was given to any of the issues, in private?

Mrs. Moir's implication that the Task Force recommended abortion with no concern for other social issues such as "programs to promote sexual responsibility" is clearly contrary to published fact. The report states that "we are not promoting abortion as a method of birth control" (see page 45 of HERSELF) and advocates "supportive services ... to assist women in making the decision whether or not to have the operation Women undergoing abortions frequently need counselling These services should be available to all who need them" Therefore, the statement "it is much easier to use unrestricted abortion as a means of birth control than to undertake programmes designed to promote sexual responsibility" certainly does not reflect the stance advocated by the Task Force.

Similarly, section (7) from HERSELF which reads:

"The Task Force recommends that the provincial government study the implications on provincial health care and facilities of removal of abortion from the Criminal Code,

so that the province will be prepared to exercise its new jurisdiction over abortion"

does not propose that the province be "prepared to provide" any new facilities. We do not feel that Mrs. Moir's paraphrase "in clear terms, that means construction and staffing of abortion mills throughout the province" is at all correct. This is merely her own personal interpretation.

Moreover, nowhere does the Task Force recommend that anyone be "encouraged to abort" for any reason whatsoever.

While Mrs. Moir is correct in saying that none of the organizations with which she is allied were identified in the list of submissions published on pages 85 and 86 of the Task Force report, she should note that she is not alone. Several other organizations who submitted briefs - including the brief from our own organization, The Nova Scotia Women's Action Committee, were also left out. In most cases only the names of the individuals who made the report were listed, including those of Mrs. Moir from Halifax and Mrs. Cusack from Sydney. Hopefully these inconsistencies will be corrected when the report is reprinted.

On the subject of consensus, the report states that, while they could not agree on all aspects of the question (as demonstrated by the filing of a minority report), the Task Force did agree on certain aspects, namely, that "the present law ... is not working, is unjust, and must be changed", and furthermore that abortion should be removed from the Criminal Code. Mrs. Moir quotes only

part of the introduction to the minority report, which reads that one member "found it impossible to accept in its present form" recommendation number 68. It does not oppose the recommendation which would remove the question of abortion from the courts so that it no longer be considered a crime, but merely suggests that the government "appoint a medical-legal-law board to inquire into the present situation and to make recommendations ... before any request is made to the Federal Government to repeal the present law." The minority report then goes on to suggest medical research into artificial life support systems.

We would also take issue with the statements Mrs. Moir makes that the report doesn't reflect "the cause of Nova Scotia women" and that it goes against "the informed opinion of perhaps the majority of Nova Scotian women." Why? There has been as far as we know, no comprehensive study to define, prove or disprove the actual attitudes of Nova Scotian women on the subject. As the Task Force report states, at a women's conference held at Mount Saint Vincent University in the fall of 1974, the recommendation supporting the removal of abortion from the Criminal Code was accepted by almost 80% of the women voting. Of course, this does not prove that the women of Nova Scotia are pro-abortion. It merely points out that different sets of data show different things. In any case, should people who disagree with Mrs. Moir's views be accused of having uninformed opinions just because they disagree with her viewpoint?

Abortion is just one issue

It is only one recommendation out of a total of 95 made by the Task Force. It is therefore unjust to condemn the whole report on the basis of only one issue.

Regardless of how one feels about abortion, let's unite to combat the many injustices against women in our society.