

Class consciousness necessary in abortion rights battle

Capitalism exploits poor mothers

By Kevin Hornbuckle

"It's a class issue," she said, speaking of the threats to abortion rights. My friend, who has strong feminist values, tends to have more class consciousness than many people who are getting active around the abortion issue.

It seems to me that many people, both women and men, who were not otherwise politi-

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cally involved, are now mobilizing to preserve and promote a woman's right to terminate her pregnancy. There were many faces new to marching a few months ago when approximately 2,000 people in Eugene demonstrated their support for abortion rights. There were the familiar activists who regularly participate in the marches that oppose the U.S.-funded military dictatorships in Central America. But the majority seemed to be people who only recently feel moved to act out.

That they were doing so is the good news. The bad news is that it took a threat to their personal freedom to get them going. Although the Roe vs. Wade ruling allowing legal abortion has been on the books since 1973, immeasurable numbers of women are systematically denied the freedom to obtain abortion. They are the impoverished women who have not the means to exercise their rights. It is here where class consciousness is clearly absent in the activism of the middle class, mostly white demonstrators.

Freedom, after all, is measured by the number of options available. Thus, it's what poor people don't have, especially when it costs more than \$300 to exercise the "right" to a safe and legal abortion. So the question presents itself: just who has the right to abortion? Only those who can afford it.

Before abortion was legalized in the United States, wealthy

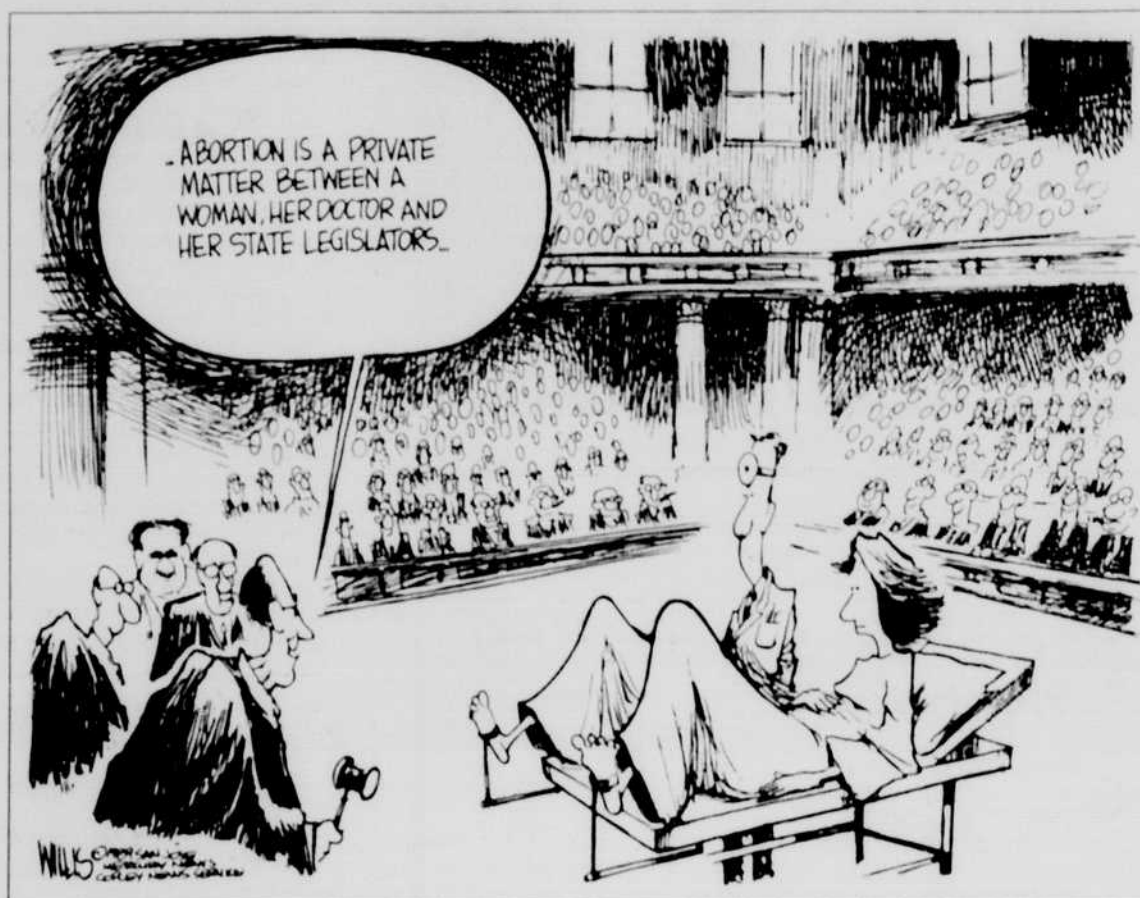
pregnant women would travel to Puerto Rico or Europe to obtain abortions. And they will go wherever abortion is available as the laws become more restrictive.

Irrespective of the mood of the U.S. Supreme Court or any other ruling body, poor women will remain where they've always been — chained to poverty and the welfare system, held hostage in a country that has no national health care or child care rights. They will retain their freedom to have their labor exploited by employers for \$3.35 an hour, should they find energy to work at something other than child rearing, which is not considered by our government to be work.

If the hypocrisy of the situation isn't already evident, a consideration of the most basic principle of capitalism will expose the inherent exploitation. For instance, a mother is paid \$3.50 an hour to work for an enterprise which sells her product for 300 percent profit. She gets none of it. But the stockholders who don't work "earn" their living this way. Because these stockholders employ many people they command the wealth to satisfy their typically never-ending materialist "needs" such as another house or car or vacation (perhaps to Puerto Rico or Europe).

In contrast, the working mother (or any person who works for a capitalist enterprise) pays the majority of her sustenance wages to the landlord and supermarket, which also typically benefits stockholders who do not work. They live off the labor of others. It is the class distinction: working class vs. capitalist. This class conflict is necessary because business success is defined by bottom-line profits. The less the workers are paid for their products, plus the more they are charged when purchasing, equals good business.

Business is good. As always, the entrepreneurs are looking for new markets. To do this



they define democracy as capitalism and attack any country that resists their efforts: Vietnam, Chile, Iran, Guatemala, El Salvador, Uruguay, Nicaragua, Cuba and on and on. If anything these days, "be all you can be" for young men and women means joining the entrepreneurial forces. That, or languish at the minimum wage working as an unskilled laborer.

Although I don't believe that restrictions on abortion are capitalist plots, the extra bodies will come in handy when it comes to installing "democracy" around the world. World War I protester Kate Richards O'Hare spoke with foresight in 1915 when she said, "The women of the United States are nothing but brute sows, producing sons to put in the Army to be made into fertilizer." She was jailed five years for anti-war talk.

Try as we did during the pro-

choice march in Eugene, me and a few friends couldn't get many of the new faces to join with us in chanting "George Bush is a bum, free condoms for everyone!" I'm hoping that it was only the protesters' social anxiety and not political disagreement that prevented them from sharing the rhythm. The anti-choice forces are eager to prevent abortions but not so eager to help provide the means to prevent pregnancy. To the contrary, they actively resist publicly funded sex education and pregnancy prevention.

Maybe our well-fed fellow marchers couldn't relate to the importance of access to birth

control education and devices. They're not the ones denied access. At least not yet.

As business improves the rich will continue to get richer and the poor will continue to grow in numbers and poverty. Unfortunately, those with the means to exercise their rights will wait until the exploitation and unfairness hits directly home.

My friend is right. The right to a safe and legal abortion is a class issue. The problem is that she is one of the few who recognize it.

Kevin Hornbuckle is a behavior therapist who lives in Eugene.

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