

Pregnancy for profit

by Beth Cumming and Brenda Beagan

The pill, artificial insemination (AI), embryonic transfer and "surrogate" motherhood are all forms of reproductive technology (RT), which, like any tool, is not neutral but can also be used as a weapon.

During a lecture at the Weldon law library last Thursday, Mary O'Brien attempted to bring reproductive technology beyond the realm of medicine and science, to the concept of "having babies as making history". Unfortunately, she left out poor and third world women. And so, some case histories from a forthcoming book by Gena Corea, author of *The Mother Machine* are included in this article to fill out the picture.

... legal paternity is considered more valid than biological maternity.

One piece of medical history drew a gasp from the audience. It was in the 1800s that the first attempts to control conception were made. The "best looking" in a class of (male) medical students volunteered his sperm to artificially inseminate an anaesthetized woman. Consent for the experiment was given by the woman's husband, while she had no knowledge of their intentions.

O'Brien sees birthing as a political as well as a personal matter. A recent U.S. court case involving Mary Beth Whitehead, who was under contract to produce a live baby conceived from her own ovum and donated sperm. Although Whitehead was under 30 and not in need of any prenatal diagnosis, she was required to submit to amniocentesis, essentially for quality control over the product she was producing. She bitterly resented this and did resist it, unsuccessfully. (The contract called for her to abort if the test found the product not up to snuff, the only part of the contract Judge Harvey Sorkow did not uphold.) After carrying the baby to full term, she decided she wanted custody. Needless to say, she lost the case. The verdict showed that legal paternity is considered more valid than biological maternity.

This notion of legitimacy, O'Brien pointed out, is also apparent, considering "children are named after the putative (supposed) father rather than the confirmed mother."

O'Brien says "paternity is a power status" and "RT passes the control from fathers to the law." This may sound far-fetched and science fiction-like, but the same type of selective breeding procedures carried out on pedigree cows were used to produce more blond-haired, blue-eyed citizens of Hitler's Germany.

Patty Foster: Surrogacy combined with sex pre-determination. Foster's sperm donor ordered that his sperm be split, separating out male-engendering and female-engendering sperm, and that Foster be inseminated only with the male sperm. He wanted not just any child — but a son.

Governments at various times have attempted to increase or decrease populations. Bonuses were given in

colonial French Canada for each living offspring after the tenth, payable to the male head of the household. In India, a new radio was given to each man who underwent a vasectomy. In Mussolini's Italy, women were asked in the name of patriotic duty to have more children.

Women in the Western world face growing availability of new reproductive technology, while access to abortion is restricted; in the Third world, women fight forced sterilization, unsafe contraceptives, sex selection, while abortion is freely available. This is global eugenics global population planning with quality control. Only the "right" women are encouraged (allowed?) to reproduce.

In 1984, John Stehura, of the Bionetics Foundation in the U.S., began advertising in the

... birthing is a political as well as a personal matter.

Orient for "surrogate" mothers. The plan is that the contracting couple would pay her travel and immigration expenses. She would be paid nothing. The "benefit" to her, according to Stehura, would be that she gets to live... many of these women, he says, face starvation in their own countries.

With embryo transfer, combined with surrogacy, the

eugenic potential is enormous. An egg and sperm from a white, wealthy couple (who may or may not be infertile) can be fertilized (in vitro) and implanted in a "surrogate" mother. It would be their genetic child, so her race wouldn't matter anymore — potential for women of colour to become "breeders" for white couples. Especially since they are more subject to economic discrimination and therefore more vulnerable to the financial incentives such as bribes and payoffs.

Alejandra Munoz, a 21 year old Mexican woman with a second grade education and no knowledge of the English language, was brought across the U.S. border illegally to produce a child for a man in California. She was told that she would be artificially inseminated and that, after three weeks, the embryo would be flushed out of her and transferred into the womb of the man's wife. She was familiar with the concept, knowing that that procedure was used on cows on farms near her home in Mexico. Several weeks into her pregnancy, she was told the procedure couldn't be done and she'd have to carry the child to term. According to Munoz and her cousin, she was kept in the couple's home and, for most of the pregnancy, not allowed to leave the house even for walks because the wife planned to present the baby as her own. When visiting her husband's family, she wore maternity clothes over a small pillow. Munoz, who had planned to be in the country for only a few weeks for what she thought would be a minor procedure, ended up undergoing major surgery — a cesarean section. She was offered \$1,500 — well below the exploitive \$10,000 fee generally offered white Anglo women.

Mary O'Brien states that "RT makes the marriage of patriarchy and capitalism fecund." That is, the labours of women

can be controlled for profit.

Costs to a couple contracting a pregnancy are about \$25,000 in the U.S. This excludes all but the middle and upper classes. Standard payment to the "surrogate" mother is \$10,000 in the U.S. This involves nine months of pregnancy, plus as much as nine months of testing, screening and inseminations. Ten thou-

sand dollars divided by eighteen months is \$555 per month. At 40 hours a week, that's way below minimum wage. This is direct exploitation of poor women in a society where they are unable to get decent paying work. In Britain, a couple paid a nineteen year old prostitute only \$5500 to bear a child for them.

O'Brien suggests an alternative to "sperms in space and wombs in workshops"; that women seize the means of re-production. Turkey-baster babies (conceived via self-artificial insemination) are living examples of RT controlled by women. But several court rulings in the U.S. make the sperm donor the legal father of an AI child — a real deterrent

for many women. In Canada, recommended legal changes would make self-insemination illegal. Since medical plans don't usually cover artificial insemination, only women who can afford the infertility clinics could get access to "turkey baster" babies.

Of course, the world that these children are being brought into must be changed as well, and O'Brien suggests that "radical cultural transformations" in birthing are required: "an ethos of care, a petty concern with everyday life, contempt for abstraction, distrust of the patriarchy, an economy of need rather than profit". In other words, the politics of reproduction must be collective.



DSA hires co-ordinator

by Ellen Reynolds

The Dalhousie Staff Association is hiring someone to represent 80 per cent of its membership — a women's rights coordinator.

"The purpose of the new position is to identify problems within the DSA. Something is wrong because women aren't getting involved," says Barbara Maynard of the DSA's Action Committee on Women's Issues. Currently, the DSA, the union representing Dalhousie's non-academic, technical, and clerical support staff, has a membership of approximately 730. The DSA executive is comprised of 5 men and only 2 women.

The position of women's rights coordinator, funded by the Secretary of State, starts in January 1988 and runs until June.

"We haven't hired anyone yet and haven't laid out a strict job description," says Maynard. The application deadline was Nov. 20. and the description advertised was for someone to initiate discussion among women about job-related issues, the potential role of the union, and coordinating a "think tank" to address common problems.

Maynard adds, "the job will include talking to women in the DSA on a one-to-one basis, arranging workshops, and acting as a liaison with local resource people."

Any findings and changes proposed by the new coordinator will hopefully be part of the DSA's next contract presented to the executive, says Maynard.

A small office space for the coordinator to work out of will be provided for nominal rent in the Dalhousie SUB.