7 Feminist Campaigns for Free, Safe and Legal Contraception in the 1970s

On 23 May 1971 at mass at Knock Shrine, in Co. Mayo, the Bishop of Clonfert, Rev. Thomas Ryan declared that 'probably never before, certainly not since the penal days, had the Catholic heritage of our country been subjected to so many insidious onslaughts on the pretext of conscience, civil rights and women's liberation'. In Ryan's view, 'It was no exaggeration to say that the mass media of communication in Ireland were being misused and were providing too easy a platform for those who seemed intent on attacking the Church and destroying our Catholic heritage'.[1] The subjects of Ryan's attack were members of the Irish Women's Liberation Movement (IWLM), who, one day earlier, had embarked on a trip by train from Dublin to Belfast to purchase contraceptives in order to highlight the hypocrisy of the Irish ban on contraception.

As Raewyn Connell has shown, women's liberation and gay liberation movements 'reflect crisis tendencies of a general kind, and are historically novel in the depth of their critique of the gender order and the scope of the transformation they propose'.[2] In addition to the ban on contraception, women living in 1970s Ireland suffered from a range of inequalities that had been in existence since the early twentieth century, including lack of equal pay for equal work and the marriage bar.[3] This chapter therefore explores the activism of feminist groups who critiqued these conditions, and particularly focuses on their campaigns for the legalisation of contraception in the 1970s. As well as examining the contraception campaign of the IWLM, I will also explore the work of two groups that have received much less historical attention, Irishwomen United (IWU) and their offshoot, the Contraception Action Programme (CAP). This chapter will illuminate the personal experiences of Irish

[1] 'Onslaughts on faith deplored', *Irish Press*, May 24, 1971, p.4.
[2] R. W. Connell, *Gender and power: society, the person and sexual politics* (London, 1987), p. 279.
[3] Hug, *The politics of sexual morality*, pp 79–82.

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feminist activists and illustrate the nuances of feminist demands for reproductive rights within the Irish case study. Moreover, as well as service provision, later groups such as IWU and CAP drew attention to the important class and geographic inequalities with regard to access to contraception in Ireland.

7.1 The Irish Women's Liberation Movement

The IWLM was the first Irish women's group to take a stand on the Irish government's laws on contraception, and in doing so; they not only took on the state but also the Catholic hierarchy. A largely middle-class group of Irish women including left-wing activists, trade unionists, journalists, and stay-at-home-mothers had formed the IWLM in 1970. The idea for the group started with five women: Margaret Gaj, the owner of a Dublin restaurant that often housed meetings of left-wing groups, Mary Maher, journalist for the *Irish Times*, Moira Woods, a doctor, Máirín de Burca, a left-wing activist who had been involved in Sinn Féin and the Dublin Housing Action Committee, and Máirín Johnston, a left-wing activist who had also been involved in the Dublin Housing Action Committee.[4] The IWLM soon expanded to include Mary Kenny, Nell McCafferty, June Levine as well as Nuala Fennell, Mary Anderson, Mary McCutcheon, Marie McMahon, Nuala Monaghan, and Dr. Eimer Philbin Bowman. The first meeting of the IWLM took place at Mary Maher's home in Fairview, Dublin, in October 1970, with another scheduled soon after at Mary Kenny's flat. Subsequent meetings were usually held on Mondays upstairs at Gaj's restaurant on Baggott Street.[5] Several of the founder members of the IWLM held prominent positions as journalists, while others had backgrounds in left-wing and republican politics. Dr. Eimer Philbin Bowman explained, 'They were a very exciting group of people because they were at the forefront of the … the editors of the women's pages in the three newspapers, Mary Maher and Mary Kenny and … Mary Maher was in the Irish Times, Mary Kenny was at the Irish Press and Mary McCutcheon who's sadly died, was in the Independent. They were an exciting group of people to be in touch with'. Their links with the major Irish newspapers meant that 'the small group had a considerable reservoir to draw on when seeking to disseminate feminist ideas and information in a country still quite insular in its social perspectives'.[6]

[4] Stopper, p.23 and p.49.
[5] 'List of activists in the IWLM', [RCAPA, UCC, BL/F/AP/1110/2] Stopper, p.41.
[6] Galligan, *Women and Politics*, p.52

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In their first publication, *Irishwomen Chains or Change*, published in early 1971, the group set out the key problems facing Irish women in the early 1970s. These included the legal inequities such as the fact that women could not be called upon for jury service. Additionally, under Irish law, a married woman was 'still regarded as the chattel of her husband'. Moreover, a husband could desert his wife for as long as he chose, but if a wife were to do this, she would forfeit all of her rights, including access to the marital home and to her children.[7] The document also drew attention to the inequalities faced by Irish women in the workplace. They were not paid equally for equal work and the Irish marriage bar meant that women working in the civil service, state bodies and much of private industry were forced to leave their jobs upon marriage.[8] Importantly, *Irishwomen Chains or Change* also drew attention to the plight of widows, deserted wives, unmarried mothers and single women, whom they labelled 'Women in distress'. In a deliberately provocative move, the pamphlet concluded with five reasons why it was better for Irish women to 'live in sin' than get married.[9]

Contraception became a 'unifying question' for the IWLM.[10] On this issue, Nell McCafferty explained in an oral history interview: 'Which would be fun since I was born gay but I knew enough to know the despair that women felt when they're pregnant'. McCafferty was also angered by the hypocrisy around the law on contraception in Ireland. She stated:

> And there's always an underground doctor to say he would give you the pill for what's it called to regulate your menstrual flow and we had, and this is a fact, the highest rate in the world of irregular menstrual flow. But you had to be a certain type of person, educated or middle–class, the working class wouldn't have known those things. And probably couldn't have afforded a doctor.

The Irish laws against family planning were critiqued in a section of *Irishwomen Chains or Change* entitled 'Incidental facts' which also noted the lack of childcare facilities, playgrounds and creches, baby-minding regulations, the option to divorce, and re-training facilities for women. The section on the family planning laws drew attention to the hypocrisy of the law in that it was possible for Irish women to get access to the contraceptive pill as a 'cycle regulator' and reported that '25,000

[7] *Irishwomen Chains or Change*, (Dublin: Irish Women's Liberation Movement, 1971), pp.1–4. [RCAPA, BL/F/AP/1139/15].
[8] *Irishwomen Chains or Change*, pp.5–9. On the marriage bar, see Hartford and Redmond, ''I am amazed at how easily we accepted it'.
[9] *Irishwomen Chains or Change*, pp.30–1.
[10] See: Connolly, *The Irish Women's Movement*, Ailbhe Smyth, 'The Women's Movement in the Republic of Ireland, 1970–1990', in: Ailbhe Smyth (ed.). *Irish Women's Studies Reader*, (Dublin: Attic Press, 1993), pp.245–69.

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Irishwomen use it, ostensibly under the guise of a medicine to regularise the menstrual cycle'. According to the authors, 'The moral question is not here under discussion: the fact remains that Irishwomen who do not adhere to orthodox Roman Catholic dogma are technically criminals, and when caught, are punished by deprivation of their right to plan their families as they wish.'[11]

Following the publication of *Irishwomen Chains or Change*, the IWLM began to receive more attention from the public. A dramatic appearance on the popular television programme The Late Late Show, hosted by Gay Byrne, in March 1971, where members of the IWLM became embroiled in an argument with politician Garret FitzGerald, resulted in increased media attention. In an article published in the *Irish Times* shortly after, founder member Mary Maher, stated 'We're not asking anyone to join us; we are just hoping that Irishwomen will start to join each other, to form groups in whatever situation they find themselves in – offices, factories, housing estates, high-rise flats – to discuss the concept of liberation and how it applies to them immediately'. Maher went on to express her hopes that the women's movement would take off in Ireland as it had done in other countries.[12] On 14 April 1971, the first major public meeting of the IWLM was held in the Mansion House, Dublin, with over 1,000 people, mostly women, attending.[13] According to founder member Máirín Johnston:

> We couldn't believe that the women of Ireland were… each individual was so aware of what was happening and what had happened to them and the situation, in the country, as regards women. Nobody ever spoke about it. This was a big, big open meeting and it was very, very good.

Women aired their grievances at this meeting and the movement grew into twenty-eight groups, largely based on geographical location.[14] Contraception was an important mobilising issue for the newly expanded IWLM. According to June Levine, one of the founding members, 'We certainly all agreed on contraception being a basic issue of women's liberation, most claiming it as the central issue. Out of that first meeting of delegates came the decision to do something "worthwhile" about it'.[15]

Archbishop John Charles McQuaid faced particular criticism from the IWLM after the publication of his pastoral on contraception in March 1971. As a dramatic act of defiance, the IWLM organised walk-outs of

[11] *Irishwomen Chains or Change*, p. 25.
[12] 'Women first', *Irish Times*, 9 March 1971, p. 6.
[13] Galligan, *Women and Politics*, p. 53. [14] *Ibid.*.
[15] June Levine, *Sisters: The Personal Story of an Irish Feminist* (Cork: Attic Press, new edition, 2009), p. 138.

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Dublin churches after the reading of the pastoral. Eight women and one man left the Pro-Cathedral in Dublin after the pastoral was read, 'in protest at what they described as blatant interference of the Church in State affairs and an attempt to deny civil rights to those whose consciences permitted the use of contraceptives'.[16] June Levine, who was Jewish, described how her anxiety the night before the walk-out manifested itself in a nightmare about the Archbishop.[17] She wrote that as she left the cathedral in protest she felt 'Eyes' on her back.[18] Mary Kenny and Máirín Johnston walked out of mass at Haddington Road Church. When the priest read the line 'any contraceptive act is wrong in itself' from the pastoral, Kenny stood up and said: "This is a wicked pastoral. It is disgraceful and contrary to *Humanae Vitae*. This is Church dictatorship." Máirín Johnston also rose and said "This is a matter that should be decided by women alone. Why should men dictate to us how many children we should have? We are leaving this church in protest".[19]

Not all mass-goers that day felt the same as Kenny and Johnston. Numerous letters sent to Archbishop McQuaid illustrate the polarised opinions of Dublin residents on the matter. One male parishioner, who had been present at Haddington Road mass wrote to Archbishop McQuaid to say 'I listened with admiration and gratitude to your pastoral letter this morning in St. Mary's, Haddington Road. My simple reaction was, thank God for a bishop who accepts and discharges his apostolic obligation to teach his people God's law'.[20] Another Dublin man wrote 'I have just heard on the 10 p.m. news of the protests made about your letter on "contraception", which was read at all masses today. I have no doubt that these protests will cause you great pain, because of your obvious concern for all of us, both spiritually and temporally. May I as a Dublin Catholic apologise for the activities of my fellow citizens and co-religionists. I ask you to adopt the patience of Christ who prayed for His enemies, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."'[21]

A demonstration outside the Archbishop's house was organised by the IWLM for the evening after the walk-out. According to the *Irish Examiner*, thirty 'picketers formed a 40-foot chain across the entrance to the Archbishop's House at Drumcondra, Dublin. They carried placards

[16] 'Women protest in pro-Cathedral: archbishop denounces contraception', *Irish Times,* 29 March 1971, p. 1.
[17] Levine, *Sisters*, p. 136. [18] *Ibid.*, p. 137.
[19] 'Women protest in pro-Cathedral', *Irish Times,* 29 March 1971, p. 1.
[20] Letter to Archbishop John Charles McQuaid, 28 March 1971. [DDA: McQuaid Papers, XX/82/4].
[21] Letter to Archbishop McQuaid, dated 28 March 1971 [DDA: McQuaid Papers, XX/82/10(1)-(2)].

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saying that the Archbishop's letter was dictatorial.'[22] The divisiveness of the contraception issue is evident by the reaction that one of the protestors, a woman from the north of Ireland, received from passers-by. She was allegedly told to 'get back to where you came from' and after revealing that she was a Catholic, was told 'Go back up there and shoot yourselves'.[23]

The IWLM later released a statement on McQuaid's pastoral arguing that he 'had gone outside his brief in making this statement. It is clearly an intolerable interference with the role of the State in the framing of civil laws. Furthermore, it denies the existence of the civil law'. The IWLM also drew attention to previous interference by the Church in the country's legislative and democratic processes, citing in particular, the Mother and Child scheme of 1951.[24] Notably, they highlighted that fifty-one Irish women had died as a result of pregnancy according to the 1968–9 Maternal Mortality report, arguing that most of these women were 'dependent on State medicine. For most of them pregnancy was already a serious medical hazard because they suffered from heart conditions, strain from too much childbearing, etc. These women, mainly working class, were in effect killed by lack of contraceptive aid. Many of them left large families motherless'. In their view, the pastoral letter was 'an attack on the integrity of the people of Ireland, North and South, firstly in its implication that the legislation of contraception would bring about widespread moral degradation, and, secondly, in that it tries to use its moral authority to prevent civil law being enacted'.[25]

The walk-out of mass at the end of March 1971 and the subsequent picket marked a new phase of direct action for the IWLM. On April 1, 1971, fifteen members of the group, along with a dozen children, marched outside Leinster House, the home of the Irish parliament, before bursting through the entrance, to the surprise of army and police security, who refused to allow them entry to the building. The women began singing 'We shall not be moved', later changing the lyrics to 'We shall not conceive'. The singing attracted the attention of curious members of parliament and senators. Three of the women, Máirín de Burca, Hilary Orpen, and Fionnuala O'Connor then entered Leinster House through a lavatory window and asked to meet with three senators. They were told that the senators were 'unavailable' but were met by one, Bernard McGlinchy of the Fianna Fáil party. Upon being escorted outside, the

[22] *Irish Examiner*, 29 March 1971, p. 7. [23] 'Women protest in pro-Cathedral', p. 1.
[24] For a detailed discussion of the Mother and Child scheme, see Earner-Byrne, *Mother and Child*.
[25] 'Archbishop criticised by women', *Irish Times*, 31 March 1971, p. 13.

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women met with the other members of the group. Hilary Orpen claimed she had been struck by a garda officer and the group went to Pearse Street Station to register a complaint.[26] Two days later, members of the IWLM picketed the Eurovision Song Contest which was taking place in Dublin that year. Leaflets were distributed to European personalities which informed them that contraception was illegal in Ireland, a fact that 'seems especially repugnant in view of the fact that Ireland as a member of the United Nations is not bound by this organisation's universal declaration of human rights'.[27] The following month, international members of the medical profession were also targeted. On 19 May 1971, twelve members of the IWLM picketed the Nineteenth British Congress of Obstetrics and Gynaecology in Dublin. With placards that had slogans such as 'Gynaes – be logical' and 'Ceart an duine is ea frithghinnuint' (the Irish for 'Contraception is a human right'), protestors confronted delegates at the conference and handed out leaflets.[28]

The most significant protest organised by the IWLM, however, was to occur later that month. On 22 May 1971, forty-seven members of the IWLM boarded the 8 a.m. train from Dublin to Belfast with the aim of purchasing contraceptives in the north and travelling back with them. According to Mary Kenny, reflecting on what became known as the 'Contraceptive Train':

> A stunt is often a good way to move political ideas forward: the Suffragettes had done it with their demonstrations – some of which were hair-raisingly violent, and environmental organisations like Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace have been imaginative in their various forms of direct action.[29]

For Nell McCafferty, the Contraceptive Train represented

> a chance to draw the eyes of the world to Ireland and its punitive laws against the use of birth control: we would go to Belfast, purchase contraceptives, show them to the customs officers in Dublin and challenge them to arrest and charge us, or let us pass, thereby proving the law both hypocritical and obsolete.[30]

Members of the IWLM were concerned by the fact that the contraceptive pill was often prescribed as a cycle regulator to Irish women, despite the fact that this may not have been the most suitable contraceptive for them, and sometimes produced side effects. Other contraceptives, such as the diaphragm, condoms and the coil were available to middle-class women

[26] 'Protest at Leinster House by 15 women', *Irish Times,* 1 April 1971, p. 1.
[27] *Succubus*, May 1971, (RCAPA).
[28] 'Gynaes – be logical' urge feminists', *Irish Times,* 20 May 1971, p. 13.
[29] Kenny, *Something of Myself and Others*, p. 152.
[30] Nell McCafferty, *Nell,* (Dublin: Penguin Ireland, 2004), p. 222.

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through family planning clinics or to women who were able to travel to the UK to obtain them. Writing in her memoirs, June Levine explained:

> The point was that the Contraceptive Law affected those who most needed contraceptives, the poor and women who could not take or get the pill. Anyone who could take the train to Belfast could have all the contraceptives they wanted. The customs people never bothered about them when they came back to Ireland. The idea of Women's Liberation was to show up the hypocrisy…[31]

The stunt was controversial among members of the IWLM and some, such as Nuala Fennell, did not go on the train. Being seen on the train could potentially have professional consequences. Dr. Eimer Philbin Bowman, for example, explained, 'The reason I knew I couldn't go on it was because I knew that any hope I had of getting a job, and I still was hoping to go back to medicine, would have been put at risk if I had been photographed coming back on the train'.

After arriving in Belfast, the group of women, followed by the reporters and cameras from the international press, went into a chemist shop. According to several newspaper articles, and IWLM members' memoirs, for many of the women it was their first time ever seeing contraception. Some women were reported to have had difficulty in choosing an appropriate contraceptive.[32] The lack of knowledge that many women on the train had about contraceptives was apparent. The chemist remarked, 'They certainly could do with a bit of education. You have to know something about the subject before you can buy contraceptives – it's usually the men who buy the kind these women bought. It's surprising how little they know'.[33] Many of the women did not realise that most forms of contraception required a prescription. Nell McCafferty recalled:

> And we got to Belfast and I lead them across the street there at the train station across the street to the pharmacy and went into the pharmacy and I was the spokesperson. And I walked up and I said 'Have you any contraceptive pills?' and he went 'certainly where's your prescription?' I went 'What do you mean prescription?' he says 'Give me your prescription' I says 'Well then I'll have the coil please' 'where's your prescription?' and I said 'I'll have to look' he says 'Where's your prescription?' and I thought Christ, if we go down South with condoms, there's two things wrong with it. One it's going to draw attention to the penis and two its giving men control over fertility. We are going to be wrecked.

Fearful of the stunt collapsing, McCafferty, had a brainwave: 'Uninformed I was, but stupid I was not. I did not fancy us returning to Dublin armed

[31] Levine, *Sisters*, p. 139.
[32] 'Women's Lib shopping trip tests law', *Irish Examiner,* 24 May 1971, p. 20.
[33] 'Innocents, too, on Pill train!', *Sunday Independent,* 23 May 1971, p. 1.

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only with condoms, which would have concentrated the mind of the nation on male nether regions; on sex; on anything but birth control. Unthinkable. So I bought hundreds of packets of aspirin'.[34] McCafferty dispersed these among the group, with women instructed to pretend they were birth control pills and to swallow them in front of the customs officials in Dublin. Other women purchased condoms and jars of spermicidal jelly. Máirín Johnston, for instance, who went on the train with her son and partner commented:

> The chemist was highly amused at the whole thing and he was putting all the goods out on the thing. I didn't want to be burdened with too much, so I just said I'll buy jelly. Spermicidal jelly. That's what I got.

As the return train approached Dublin, the women grew more worried. Several of the women reflected on their anxiety. Mary Kenny, in her memoirs, wrote 'I knew that this was something which had to be done, because it would make a point dramatically, sensationally, even historically. But I was also wretched about doing it. I knew how upset my mother would be – how mortified to see her daughter in the headlines, even identified as a ringleader, in a stunt which involved buying French letters in Belfast'.[35] Similarly, McCafferty wondered ''What would our mothers say? What would our editors say? Would we still have jobs?'[36] In an oral history interview I asked Máirín Johnston if she was worried she would be arrested. She replied:

> I was, yeah. Oh yeah, I was very worried about it because I was involved in a lot of things. I was involved in the Housing Action Committee, and we were beaten off the streets. I knew what it was to get the blow of a baton and I didn't want … Since I was pregnant, I didn't want to be dragged around by any policeman because they had a special branch, there was the heavy gang, the heavy gang they called them. They were vicious, absolutely vicious. I didn't like that. Still, I mean, I was willing to. Somebody has to do it. If you don't, if you're afraid all the time, you'll just …

However, as the train drew closer to the station, the women on the train became reassured after hearing a huge number of voices singing 'We Shall Overcome'. Levine wrote: 'I gave up the fear of spending even five minutes in a cell. We'd been scared, but now we'd see it through. The station was a teeming mass of people with banners, cheering. We unfurled our banner, with the Sutton group carrying it, and Colette O'Neill marching in front of it, mother of four, singing at the top of her lungs'.[37] Similarly, Mary Kenny remarked that there was 'an atmosphere of

[34] Nell McCafferty, *Nell*, p. 223. [35] Kenny, *Something of Myself and Others*, p. 153.
[36] McCafferty, *Nell*, p. 227. [37] Levine, *Sisters*, p. 144.

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Figure 7.1 Irish Women's Liberation Movement Contraceptive Train protest, 22 May 1971.
Photograph by Eddie Kelly. Courtesy of the *Irish Times*.

carnival at the Dublin railway station and that some of the activists began to blow condoms up like balloons.[38] The scenes at Connolly Station were ones of jubilance (Figure 7.1). The members of the IWLM were met by a 200-strong crowd of supporters, which had been organised by founder member Máirín de Burca. Men and women carried placards with slogans such as 'Men care too', 'Women are only baby machines' and 'Welcome home, criminals'.[39]

On approaching the customs officials, a woman was asked if she had 'any of those things with you?' She replied that she had and that she was wearing it. The customs official appeared not to hear her and told her to 'Go ahead'. The next two women to approach the customs officers declared their purchases but refused to hand them over. The third told the official she had twelve packets of contraceptives in her handbag and that she would not be handing them over. The customs officer declared 'I'm not interested' and the three women marched past the barrier.[40]

[38] Kenny, *Something of Myself and Others*, p. 154.
[39] 'Victory for women's Lib.!', *Sunday Independent*, 23 May 1971, p. 4.
[40] 'Victory for women's Lib.!', p. 4.

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Another woman declared her 'contraceptive pills' before swallowing them and stating, 'I have just asserted my constitutional rights. What are you going to do about it?'[41] According to a report in the *Sunday Independent*, a scuffle broke out between station officials, the Gardaí and a section of the crowd when a woman tried to push through on to the platform. No searches were made of any of the women.[42] As women marched through the barrier they chanted, 'The law is obsolete; we have enforced the Constitution'.[43] In Nell McCafferty's words: 'A woman shouted 'Loose your contraceptives', and 'packets of condoms flew through the air. As did packets of aspirin. And containers of spermicidal jelly. They landed beyond the barrier. The noise from there grew, and it sounded like a victory'.[44] The crowd then marched to Store Street Garda Station where they stood outside waving contraceptives and chanting, 'The law is obsolete'. No arrests were made.

Nell McCafferty read a statement to the crowd which outlined the views of the IWLM and the reasons for their protest. She explained that through their actions on the Contraceptive Train, the IWLM had enforced the Constitution and challenged the criminal law.[45] She further declared that the CLAA of 1935 which made the sale of contraception a criminal offence was 'repugnant to the Constitution and to the rights of man and woman, as guaranteed by the U.N. Declaration of Family Planning, which was signed by Ireland as a member nation'. Boldly, the IWLM accused the State of 'political timidity' in refusing to discuss or debate the matter in parliament and for being 'manipulated by forces outside of the electorate'. The Irish government was also accused of 'criminal irresponsibility' in permitting 26,000 women to use only the contraceptive pill because that was the only contraceptive available to them, despite the fact that the pill was in many cases 'medically unsuited and damaging to the woman who might otherwise, in all conscience, choose other methods at present illegal'.[46]

Moreover, the significant publicity that the Contraceptive Train raised meant that it stood out in the memories of individuals who were young men and women at the time. Many oral history respondents mentioned it in their interviews. Mark (b.1952) recalled: 'There was a train that came down from Belfast at some stage and a bunch of liberal women from the liberal women's movement back in the early 70s, people like Nell McCafferty, and people like that. Journalists, Mary Kenny and people

[41] 'Women's Lib. in station scenes', *Sunday Independent*, 23 May 1971, p. 1.
[42] 'Women's Lib. in station scenes', p. 1. [43] 'Victory for women's Lib.!', p. 4.
[44] McCafferty, *Nell*, p. 225. [45] 'Victory for women's Lib.!', p. 4.
[46] 'Women's Lib defy law on contraceptives', *Evening Herald*, 22 May 1971, p. 1.

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like that. They came down distributing contraception, contraceptives all around Dublin at the train station. I think they were all arrested and charged'. Evelyn (b.1940) stated, 'I think people thought it was great. It was a gas thing to do type of thing'. Some oral history respondents also misremembered Mary Robinson being on the train, likely because she was campaigning to have a bill passed on the issue around the same time. For example, Brigid (b.1945) referred to the contraceptive train as 'that famous train journey up to the north, Nell McCafferty and all of those people. Mary Robinson, and I can't remember who else was there'.

Others were less positive about the stunt. Nuala Fennell, one of the IWLM founder members, believed that the Contraceptive Train had been too sensationalist and she resigned soon after. Winnie (b.1938) recalled, 'I remember reading about these two women, Mary Kenny and the other woman from Derry. Uh, you wouldn't pay much heed to it now. But we just thought they were…Weird. You know? Women's libbers and makin' a fuss'. She added, 'I don't know what the whole thing was about. Just a bit of publicity'. Some citizens wrote to the Taoiseach to express their outrage. 'Three elderly Irish-born Sisters of Mercy who love Ireland dearly' wrote to Jack Lynch in May 1971 in relation to the Contraceptive Train 'to assure your government of the fact that thousands and thousands of Irish exiles throughout the world are praying every day that Ireland will be spared the unspeakable tragedy of contraception and abortion'.[47]

On the evening of the Contraceptive Train, Mary Kenny and Colette O'Neill appeared on The Late Late Show. The Late Late Show appearance clearly helped to further publicise the stunt. Mary Kenny held up some of the condoms bought in Belfast and showed them to the TV camera in order to make the point that 'the law had been successfully challenged, and no one arrested'.[48] The government, in particular, George Colley, who was then Minister for Finance, claimed that the contraceptives had been seized by customs officials on the day. However, in a reply published in *the Irish Times*, the IWLM claimed that contraceptives were still in the possession of its members and that their names were available to the Minister, writing: 'We have broken the law. We will continue to break the law'.[49] In Mary Kenny's view, the Contraceptive Train had been a successful stunt 'because it did help to lead, eventually, to an outdated law being rescinded, through the proper

[47] Letter from Sister M. Fidelis, Convent of Mercy, Greymouth, New Zealand, 31 May 1971. [NAI, 2002/8/459].
[48] Kenny, *Something of Myself and Others*, p. 155.
[49] 'Reply to Colley by Women's Liberation', *Irish Times,* 3 June 1971, p. 13.

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legislative challenges'.[50] Although the IWLM disbanded soon after, their contraception campaign had an important influence on feminist groups which followed them.

7.2 Irishwomen United

Following the disbandment of the IWLM in 1971, a new group calling themselves the Women's Liberation Movement, Ireland, emerged, which lasted for about two years. The Women's Liberation Movement, also called the Fownes Street Group, put forward a non-violent approach to activism, including methods such as boycotting, picketing, strikes, fasts, and civil disobedience, arguing that non-violence was 'the only method possible for women who hope to create a new society'.[51] The group published a monthly publication called the *Fownes Street Journal*. The Women's Liberation Movement held workshops on the theme of contraception monthly, with the first of these beginning in May 1972. These workshops included an educational talk on family planning and contraceptive methods as well as informal discussion, with meetings being open to anyone who wished to attend.[52] However, it was not until the formation of Irishwomen United (IWU) in 1975 that there was 'a women's liberation group of any comparable scale to the IWLM'.[53]

Although they used similar tactics to the IWLM, such as direct action and consciousness raising, IWU was arguably more politicised.[54] Looking back on the period of IWU's existence, former members of the group recalled the sense of optimism they felt in contrast with the disenchantment of the period from 1983 to 1990 which was characterised by 'severe repression, socially and economically'.[55] As Betty Purcell (IWU/CAP) explained:

> I remember the atmosphere of it very strongly, in that it was a very optimistic time and it was a very brave time. There was a lot of, 'We're going to do this'. You know? 'There might be only 40 of us in the room but we'll change that, let's just take that and change it'. There was a great can–do thing.

IWU had been founded in 1975 by activists who had been involved in socialist and radical politics, encompassing 'a diverse grouping of left-

[50] Kenny, *Something of Myself and Others*, pp. 155–6.
[51] 'Women and nonviolence', *Fownes Street Journal,* Vol.1, No. 2, June 1972, no page number.
[52] 'Women's Liberation Contraception Advisory Service', *Fownes Street Journal,* 1:1, (May 1972), no page number.
[53] Connolly, *The Irish Women's Movement,* p. 129.
[54] Connolly, *The Irish Women's Movement,* pp. 130–1. [55] *Ibid.*

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wing philosophies'.[56] This differentiated them from the IWLM and interviewees viewed IWU as being more radical and interested in theoretical socialist approaches. According to Ger Moane (IWU):

> They [IWU] came from political backgrounds like republicanism, trade union movement, civil rights. Whereas, IWLM were more from paternalistic … Women's rights without political analysis of patriarchy and systems, and wouldn't touch capitalism. You know? That system thing, it makes you more radical.

Anne Speed (IWU/CAP) acknowledged the importance of the introduction of free secondary school education in 1967 for this generation of activists. The 1960s was a period of significance and opportunity for many young people and, as Carole Holohan has shown, 'those with a secondary school or third-level education, benefited from a more diverse employment market often in Irish cities'.[57] For Speed, the civil rights movement and the American women's movement also had an important influence:

> The women who came to Irishwomen United came from the left and feminism, and we were all kind of, inspired by the Vietnam war, by the resistance to the Vietnam war. By the rise of the civil rights movement in the north. By the rise of the women's movement internationally, in the US in particular. A lot of young feminists who came through free education, which had been developed in the late 60s, 1967 I think it was introduced. So they got a chance to go to university, to reach beyond what might have been expected. These would have been women say of skilled working-class families or lower middle–class. But by the time they came out of university, they realised that the kind of Ireland they were entering to wasn't giving them any opportunity really. There wasn't equal pay and women were still very much discriminated against. They were radicalised by that.

Moreover, interviewees emphasised that their youth and experiences differentiated them from earlier women's groups. In 1970 the Irish government established the Commission for the Status of Women to report on the injustices facing Irish women. As Chrystel Hug as argued, however, 'there is little doubt that it viewed it with ambivalence and paternalism'.[58] The commission was viewed with scepticism by some IWU members. Taragh O'Kelly (IWU/CAP), for instance, explained:

> I knew we had a battle on our hands, I knew that it was up to young women. I felt like there was a great divide between the likes of the Irish … Most were professional university educated, doctors, whatever, or married to quite well to do men. They really had no … conception of what reality was, for the majority of

[56] *Ibid.*, p. 131. [57] *Ibid.*, p. 97.
[58] Hug, *The Politics of Sexual Morality in Ireland*, p. 89.

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women. The majority of young working–class women, who left school at 16 or 17, went to work in factories and got married and had far too many children.

Following their first public conference, in Dublin in June 1975, the IWU group agreed on a charter of demands and began to mobilise. Surviving minutes from meetings in 1975 show that attendance varied from nineteen women at a meeting in August 1975 to thirty seven at a meeting in October of the same year.[59] The IWU charter demanded the removal of all legal and bureaucratic obstacles to equality, the right to divorce, free, legal contraception, the provision of twenty-four-hour nurseries, free of charge, as well as equal pay for equal work, and equality in education.[60] Like feminist groups around the world, IWU activities included weekly meetings (in Dublin), joint action through pickets, public meetings, workshops (on issues such as women in trade unions, contraception, social welfare and political theory), and consciousness-raising groups.[61] IWU also produced their own magazine called *Banshee*, which had a rotating editorial board. Contraception was a 'pivotal mobilising issue' for IWU from its foundation.[62] Members wanted free legal contraception to be provided through state-financed birth control clinics, as well as sex education programmes and the right to publish literature on sex education.[63]

IWU differed from IWLM, in that lesbian women represented a significant voice in the former group and issues around lesbian sexuality were discussed. Although IWU used similar tactics to the IWLM, such as direct action and consciousness raising, it was arguably more politicised.[64] During its eighteen-month existence, IWU engaged in regular protests such as at traditionally male-only spaces including the Fitzwilliam Lawn Tennis Club and the 'men only' Forty Foot bathing area in Sandycove, Dublin. In October 1975, almost one hundred members and supporters of IWU held an hour-long, torch-lit picket outside the house of the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin in Drumcondra, demanding that there should be an immediate change in the laws relating to contraception in Ireland. The group chanted, 'Not the Church, not the State, women must decide their fate' and 'We demand the right to choose', while marching outside the main gates to the grounds and holding placards. In a statement

[59] Minutes of a meeting of IWU, 2 August 1975 [RCAPA, BL/F/AP/1175/1]; minutes of a meeting of IWU, 12 October 1975 [RCAPA, BL/F/AP/1175/15].
[60] IWU 'Women's Charter' [RCAPA, BL/F/AP/1111/1].
[61] 'Editorial' in *Banshee: Journal of Irishwomen United*, 1:1 (1976?), p. 2.
[62] Connolly, The Irish Women's Movement, p. 131.
[63] 'Contraception: the slot machine government' in *Banshee: Journal of Irishwomen United*, 1:1 (1976?), p. 5.
[64] Connolly, *The Irish Women's Movement*, pp 130–1.

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released by IWU following the picket, they argued 'Historically the interference by the Catholic Church in the legislative affairs of this State has been effective in blocking social and political change'.[65] The cheery atmosphere of the picket is immortalised in IWU member Evelyn Conlon's short story, 'The Last Confession' where a man recalls the atmosphere at the protest when he arrived to collect his sister, an IWU member:

> When I arrived more snow had fallen, it vainly tried to look white. It was so cold I could have cried. But the women were cheerful; they were up against such odds they laughed a lot.[66]

Betty Purcell (IWU/CAP) recalled of the demonstration:

> That was great, very exciting. Great shouting, great slogans, big megaphones and, of course, the gates and the walls of the Archbishop's palace are so daunting … An awful lot of it was in the best of spirits and good fun. To be honest, we kind of didn't really think about getting arrested. For those ones where we were out of doors, the guards never moved to arrest us.

Regular public meetings were held, including a meeting on 'Women in Trade Unions' in September 1975, and a contraception rally held in Liberty Hall in November 1975. In January 1976, IWU picketed and occupied the offices of the Federation Union of Employers and, in April, members protested at Irish government buildings over the contraception debate.[67] IWU members also challenged politicians who were publicly anti-contraception.[68] The group attracted media attention and their activities were regularly reported in Irish newspapers, however, interviewees reflected on their lack of experience. Considering the IWU charter of demands, Anne Speed (IWU/CAP) recalled:

> It was so ultimatistic [sic] in its aspirations and sure why not? We were young, we wanted to change the world. We didn't really have any sense or experience of how to build a broad front and you know, finding points of contact with groups of women that you wouldn't have that much politically in common with. But anyway, we took this charter and we started to organise a number of meetings.

[65] 'Archbishop's house picket by women', *Irish Press*, 30 October 1975, p. 2.
[66] Evelyn Conlon, "The Last Confession", in: *Telling: new and selected stories*, (Blackstaff Press, 2000), pp. 202–211, on p. 207.
[67] 'Activities of Irishwomen United – May 1975–May 1976' in *Banshee: Journal of Irishwomen United*, 1:3, (1976), no page number.
[68] Mary McAuliffe, '"To change society": Irishwomen United and political activism, 1975-1979' in Mary McAuliffe and Clara Fischer (eds.). *Irish Feminisms; Past, Present and Future* (Dublin: Arlen House, 2014), p. 97.

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However, in Joanne O'Brien's (IWU/CAP) words, 'despite the fact that we didn't necessarily handle the media in a sort of professional way, if you like, we kept them guessing. They didn't know what we were going to do next. We were a perennial source of fascination'.

While IWU also addressed a number of important women's issues in their campaigns and charter, the contraception issue represented, in the group's words, their 'most sustained public campaign', and positioned them in opposition to the Catholic Church, the government, employers and political parties.[69] IWU believed that their perspective was different from other groups campaigning for change because their demands were 'based on the fundamental right of all women to control their bodies'. The link between contraception and economic independence was stressed, while the group also argued for women's right to a self-determined sexuality.[70] According to O'Brien (IWU/CAP): 'We were challenging the idea of the downtrodden woman with children hanging out of her and so on, that there was some inevitability about that, we challenged that completely'. Feminist campaigners compared the plight of Irish women in relation to birth control with the rights of women in other EEC member states. In 1974, Betty Purcell, IWU member and founder of the Women's Group at UCD, wrote 'The fact that Ireland is one of the last European countries to keep contraception illegal has a lot of significance for Irishwomen today. Without the fundamental right of a woman to control her own fertility being recognised, all other rights give only a sham equality.'[71]

At an IWU Contraception Workshop in 1975, participants agreed that if women were given control of their bodies through access to contraception, it would be possible for them to gain more freedom in relation to employment opportunities.[72] In August 1975, a panel was established by IWU to devise a strategy for their contraception campaign. This initial panel consisted of five volunteers: Anne Speed, who would go on to be a key figure in the CAP campaign, Karen Snider, Patricia Kelleher, Patricia Cobey and Pat Farrell.[73] Over the following months, this group of women, which occasionally included others, met to discuss the campaign. The

[69] 'Irishwomen United and birth control', undated statement [RCAPA, BL/F/AP/1177/13].
[70] 'Irishwomen United Contraception Workshop', 9–10 May 1975 [RCAPA, BL/F/AP/1177/24].
[71] Betty Purcell, 'Contraception – a woman's right to choose' in Bread and Roses (c.1974) [RCAPA, BL/F/AP/1517/3].
[72] 'Irishwomen United Contraception Workshop', 9–10 May 1975 [RCAPA, BL/F/AP/1177/24].
[73] Minutes of a meeting of Irishwomen United, 2 August 1975 [RCAPA, BL/F/AP/1197/42].

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class issue was vital to the IWU contraception campaign from the beginning. At a panel meeting in September 1975 to devise a leaflet outlining their aims, they agreed that it ought to 'specifically focus on the fact that the advertising of contraceptives is not permitted and that therefore the availability of contraceptives is confined to specific classes and geographical areas'.[74] The IWU campaign focused on reaching women from working-class backgrounds. In October, a leafleting campaign was devised which specifically targeted more disadvantaged, working-class areas in Dublin, such as Crumlin, Ballymun and Tallaght.[75]

IWU was also a source of knowledge about contraception for women. Meetings provided members with practical information about contraceptive options and advice on sympathetic doctors who would prescribe the pill as a cycle regulator. According to Joanne O'Brien (IWU/CAP), 'Information was exchanged as to who were friendly doctors because I think you could get the pill on prescription supposedly to regulate your periods'. Taragh O'Kelly (IWU/CAP) remarked that in Dublin 'you just went to a Jewish doctor and he/she gave you a prescription with no questions asked and you went to a Jewish chemist or Protestant chemist, no questions asked'. Women who were anxious to obtain contraception also attended meetings. According to Betty Purcell (IWU/CAP):

> I remember myself counselling women who would come along to our meetings and were talking about things like their doctor had said, 'If you have another pregnancy, you'll die'. This was what was driving them to come to our meetings. You had women in those kind of situations saying, 'I've just got to get my hands on contraceptives'. They were the real cases in point, if you like, that … then there were other women who wanted to have careers and wanted to establish their families in an ordered way.

In this way, IWU became a women's network for information about contraception.[76] IWU also stressed the problems created by the increased medicalisation of women's bodies, in a similar manner to members of the American feminist movement in the early 1970s.[77] This was in contrast to Spain, where as Agata Ignaciuk and Teresa

[74] Minutes of the meeting of the panel for the 'Contraception Campaign', 2 September 1975 [RCAPA,BL/F/AP/1177/16].

[75] Minutes of a meeting of the 'Contraception Group', 7 October 1975 [RCAPA,BL/F/AP/1177/20].

[76] Leanne McCormick has similarly shown, for an earlier period in Belfast, how women's networks were integral to the dissemination of information around abortion, particularly in Protestant neighbourhoods (McCormick, 'No sense of wrongdoing', pp. 125–48).

[77] See Watkins, *On the Pill*, p.3. See also: Wendy Kline, *Bodies of Knowledge: Sexuality, Reproduction, and Women's Health in the Second Wave* (University of Chicago Press, 2010).

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Ortiz Gómez have shown 'family planning activism was initiated in medical circles during the late 1960s before it exploded in the following decade thanks to the commitment of radical women's organizations and their cooperation with liberal medical professionals', with similar patterns in France and Italy.[78]

In 1976, IWU stated: 'We demand the BEST and SAFEST forms of contraceptives FREE. Women are not guinea-pigs. We don't want to have to put up with expensive contraceptives that either don't work or make us feel ill or depressed.'[79] Similar statements were also circulated within the American and British women's movements. In the United States, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the perceived over-prescription of the contraceptive pill was critiqued by feminist activists who believed that women's reproductive healthcare had become over-medicalised and were concerned with the side effects.[80] With the publication of Barbara Seaman's *The Doctor's Case Against the Pill* (1969), American feminist activists were inspired to 'vocalise the shared perception that the medical profession was "condescending, paternalistic, judgemental and non-informative"'.[81] Similarly, in the British context, feminist campaigners also protested against the medical profession's control of women's access to reproductive health services, highlighting concerns about a lack of attention to the alleged side effects of contraceptive drugs.[82] However, for many middle-class Irish women, because of the ban on contraceptives, the pill was the only contraceptive option available to them on prescription in the late 1960s and 1970s. According to Roisin Boyd, writing in Irish feminist magazine *Wicca* in 1977:

> Because of this lack [of information on contraceptive choices], many women are using the Pill when it is unsuitable for them. Also the unavailability of contraception in country areas, means that women are dependent on sympathetic doctors or chemists. The situation at the moment is intolerable. There is an attitude prevalent among many doctors that you're lucky to be getting any contraception at all and they are reluctant to advise women on which is the best available method.[83]

As discussed in Chapter 4 the pill was heavily prescribed in Ireland during the 1960s and 1970s as it was the only contraceptive available

[78] Teresa Ortiz-Gómez, Agata Ignaciuk, 'The Fight for Family Planning in Spain during Late Francoism and the Transition to Democracy, 1965–1979', *Journal of Women's History*, 30:2, (Summer 2018), pp. 38–62, on p. 39.
[79] Statement by Irishwomen United, undated [RCAPA, BL/F/AP/1177/23].
[80] Watkins, *On the Pill*, p. 119. [81] *Ibid*., p.104.
[82] Jennifer Dale and Peggy Foster, *Feminists and State Welfare* (London, 2012), pp. 88–9.
[83] Roisin Boyd, 'Contraception: who to believe' in *Wicca* (1977), p. 10 [RCAPA, BL/F/AP/1498/3].

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legally on prescription, albeit prescribed through 'coded language', as stated in an oral history interview with Ruth Riddick, an Irish feminist activist and founder of Open Door Counselling, an unplanned pregnancy counselling service. However, IWU members demanded that a greater variety of contraceptive methods should be made available to Irish women. Ruth Torode (IWU/CAP) explained:

> I think it was assumed that the pill was the easiest for women to use though there were women who had difficulty with it. I think the demands around contraceptives were for choice and information and care. To make sure that you were monitored. I think that was an important thing. I think this whole thing about taking care of your body and that people aren't identical.

While IWU members were certainly influenced by the American feminist movement in particular, they believed that their approach was shaped by the particularities of the Irish context. Uniquely, the Irish campaign around contraception focused strongly on class and geographical inequalities, whereas for British and American birth control activists the issues of race and the maintenance of the right to contraception and abortion access were paramount.[84] Barbara Murray (IWU/CAP) explained: 'you know we were too busy trying to get things going and then there was the Troubles in the north and there was all this kind of … you know … But, we did feel we were part of an international women's movement but we weren't spending our time in contact with women elsewhere. We were busy doing stuff at home'. Respondents distinguished the Irish approach as being more practical than that of American feminists. Taragh O'Kelly (IWU/CAP) explained that American feminists 'were on a completely different plane. [They were engaged in] consciousness-raising and … We were saying "We're trying to get contraception legalised". There was sort of, shall we say, an academic esoteric view and then a down to earth view of what is feminism'. While Anne Speed (IWU/CAP) recalled being inspired by the scholarship of Sheila Rowbotham and the American socialist writer Mary-Alice Waters, she felt that: 'a lot of our activity, we designed it ourselves, do you know what I mean? It was our own determination to keep momentum and it was our own anger and our own … Yeah, our determination and our anger that kept us going'.

[84] In the words of Dorothy Roberts, 'reproductive politics in America inevitably involves racial politics. Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction and the Meaning of Liberty* (London, 1998), p. 9).

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7.3 The Contraception Action Programme

The Contraception Action Programme (CAP), established in spring 1976 to campaign specifically for the legalisation of contraception, emerged from the IWU Contraception Workshop. The organisation also included members from other interested groups. For instance, at a meeting of CAP at Buswell's Hotel, Dublin, in June 1976, attendees included members of Women's Aid, the IFPA, North Dublin Social Workers, Irish Women's Liberation Movement, Women's Progressive/ Political Association, FPS, the Labour Women's National Council and IWU, all of whom were women, with the exception of Robin Cochran, representative of FPS.[85] However, the driving force behind the campaign were predominantly members of IWU. According to Anne Speed, a key figure in CAP, the group mainly consisted of 'about five or six of us really, holding the fort. Now there'd be momentum at certain times. You'd have a public event and then you might have twenty people coming to a meeting and then you know, a year later it might be back down to five'. At the June meeting, it appears that there was disagreement over the whether the campaign should demand free contraception. Women's Aid argued that that this demand would 'be seen by the general public as a demand for 'sex on the rates', while FPS contended that the demand for free contraception 'would be too great a leap to make at present'.[86] IWU argued strongly in favour of the demand for free contraception. The meeting ended with a resolution that the campaign would request contraception to be made available free of charge at health services and at a minimum cost through pharmacies and voluntary family planning services.[87] However, with the benefit of hindsight, Anne Speed (IWU/CAP) reflected that perhaps a different approach might have been more successful:

> Now retrospectively, I'm thinking, would today, would you take the same view [regarding free contraception]? Maybe not. Because we might have actually affected reform quicker if we had understood how to fight for reform and how to build a broad front based on one or two key demands … Maybe look for the legalisation of contraception, thereafter talking about how it would be available and how poor women would get access to it? In other words, you know. But we threw everything into that goal that we had.

CAP members were predominantly female, yet Anne Speed believed it was the age of IWU members in CAP that distinguished them from other

[85] Minutes of a CAP meeting, 22 June 1976 [RCAPA, BL/F/AP/1177/21]. [86] *Ibid.*.
[87] *Ibid.*

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activist groups: 'We were 18, 19, 20. But like from the age of 18 … I and the oldest servers [in CAP] might have been 26, 27. You know what I mean, we were young. That really was very significant'. In comparison, an older and in some cases, arguably more conservative individuals were involved in organisations such as the IFPA. Oral history respondents expressed the sense of determination they felt through involvement in the CAP campaign. According to Taragh O'Kelly (IWU/CAP), "I think anybody that was on the ground in those days recognised that this was an issue and it was an issue we had to take by the horns and we had to win'. Betty Purcell (IWU/CAP) remarked similarly that 'The campaign was to absolutely embarrass the politicians and put the focus on making contraception an unstoppable force'.

CAP members also emphasised the health concerns relating to contraception, evidently drawing on fears raised by American feminists. Alicia Carrigy, CAP secretary in 1977, explained: 'We believe that people should have available adequate information on all methods of contraception, so that they may make an informed decision as to how best they can plan their families'. Carrigy drew attention to the fact that the contraceptive pill was the most widely used method of contraception in Ireland and that it 'appears to have inherent risks, especially to women over the age of 35'.[88] CAP activists were particularly motivated by the difficulties which faced working-class women who wanted to access contraception, another feature of the Irish movement which differentiated them from their British and American counterparts. Members of CAP were aware of the fact that many Irish people did not have access to contraception, in spite of the existence of several family planning clinics in Dublin by the late 1970s. Anne Speed linked the emphasis on class and the more militant approach of CAP to the youth of the group's membership:

> I mean it was very evident that the people who went to the clinics were either women who had started to enter the workforce and were beginning to try and plan their life and control their fertility and as you say, women with money and confidence even to make, to go to these clinics. So that was a big part of the reason why we felt that we had to take a more militant and radical approach, because we could see that as young feminists.

Moreover, there were limited ways of accessing contraception in more rural areas. According to members of the Labour Party's Women's Council, writing to the *Irish Times*, CAP addressed an important gap. The family planning clinics in existence only provided 'for the population of the larger urban areas' and 'its clinics are frequented mainly by the

[88] *Irish Independent*, 13 October 1977, p. 14.

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more affluent, giving little help to those less well off or to those living in rural areas'.[89] Labour councillor, Mary Freehill (CAP), remarked on the difficulties working-class women had in accessing family planning services:

> Certainly getting to family planning clinics was not something that somebody from Ballyfermot would quite easily come into town, and it was a brave thing for women in less well off areas. There was quite a divide. That was a big part of what we were trying to do … That's why we were out in places like Ballyfermot … They [working-class women] were listening to the priests more seriously than middle-class women who had been in a position to have their own kind of ideas.

Similarly, Barbara Murray (IWU/CAP) remembered the problems that women in rural areas had in accessing contraception:

> You would go down to the Irish Family Planning Services, you could. But, you see the trouble really was for people in country areas because nobody knew … I just lived up the road so you could do what you wanted really. But, it was really the women in rural areas or in certain parts of Dublin. Where were they going and what were they doing, that kind of thing and they might not have known where to go so … That was a concern as well. It was women in Dublin had a way … but although some parts of Dublin, how could women get away to get access because they're minding their children at home and why did they want to go off on their own to somewhere? You know, that kind-of thing.

In 1978, a CAP statement argued that while a limited contraceptive service was available to middle-class Irish women through family planning clinics run by the IFPA and FPS, 'the large numbers of women who most need access and advice are just not getting it. O.K., so we here can … understand how our bodies function, of what can go wrong. But what about other women? What about sisterhood and solidarity now? And it isn't a question of being charitable do-gooders. While one of us is oppressed – we are all oppressed.'[90] CAP also stressed the absence of women's voices in debates over contraception. CAP members regarded the Catholic Church and the 'capitalist state' as being a 'double barrier' in the campaign for the right to control one's own fertility. In their view, 'The Church has a very strong influence on people – firstly through organised religion, and secondly through the capitalist state which believes in the family unit but does little to help, and has little regard for women because it is so male dominated and petit bourgeois.'[91]

[89] *Irish Times*, 30 October 1976,
[90] CAP statement, undated, but probably February or March 1978 [RCAPA, BL/F/AP/1294/15].
[91] 'The Contraception Issue in Ireland', statement by CAP, undated [RCAPA, BL/F/AP/1177/3].

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Figure 7.2 Anne Speed speaking at a Contraception Action Programme (CAP) public meeting in Ballyfermot, Dublin on 21 March 1978.
Photograph by Derek Speirs.

More specifically, CAP members believed that women's voices had been missing from discussions over legislation. Leading up to the drafting of the Family Planning Bill in 1978, Minister for Health Charles Haughey had met with groups such as the IFPA, the Irish Medical Association, Irish Nurses Organisation, representatives of health boards, church hierarchies and Catholic interest groups to discuss their views.[92] This was condemned by IWU, who complained that Haughey was 'busy asking BISHOPS, Medics and other Male bodies their opinions on contraception' rather than women.[93]

In order to remedy this, a meeting was organised by CAP at Ballyfermot Community Centre in March 1978 in order to 'give women a chance to make their voices heard'[94] (Figures 7.2 and 7.3). The Ballinteer branch of CAP also organised a survey among 540 predominantly female respondents in 1977. The survey highlighted the demand for family planning services in the area and received significant coverage in

[92] Girvin, 'An Irish solution', pp. 16–18.
[93] 'Legalise contraception now' in *Wicca* (1977 or 1978, undated), pp. 15–16.
[94] *Irish Independent*, 21 March 1978, p. 6.

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Figure 7.3 Two women in the audience at CAP public meeting in Ballyfermot, Dublin on 21 March 1978.
Photograph by Derek Speirs.

the Irish press.[95] Signature campaigns were also utilised by the group. CAP members remarked in *Wicca* magazine that in the course of collecting signatures for a national campaign, they were 'saddened and shocked at the appalling ignorance because of lack of access in information and education and unavailability of Family Planning'.[96]

Direct action also took the form of contraception provision. Evelyn Conlon (IWU/CAP) recalled that she and other CAP members sold condoms at the Dandelion Market at the top of Grafton Street, Dublin at the beginning of the CAP campaign. However, Conlon explained that members soon came to an awareness that 'we couldn't just be doing it on Grafton Street in the really hip sort of Dandelion Market area … that we had to go into the suburbs as well and working-class places'. CAP literature also emphasised this point. CAP therefore employed radical strategies such as distributing contraceptives in housing estates.[97] Ballymun became a focus of CAP activism and a caravan was utilised to sell condoms and distribute leaflets, while information on 'sympathetic doctors' was also

[95] *Sunday Independent*, 13 November 1977, p. 4.
[96] 'Legalise contraception now' in *Wicca* (1977?), pp. 15–16.
[97] Connolly, *The Irish Women's Movement*, p. 144.

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Figure 7.4 CAP caravan, Ballymun, Dublin, 13 October 1979. Photograph by Derek Speirs.

provided (Figures 7.4 and 7.5). Betty Purcell (IWU/CAP) recalled that the caravan had the aim of providing 'service provision but also highlighting the issue and embarrassing the local politicians'. Historically, caravans have been utilised by birth control activists and had both practical and symbolic functions. In 1928, the British birth control campaigner Marie Stopes purchased two horse-drawn caravans which she used to provide information to communities in England and Wales without access to birth control clinics between 1928 and 1930.[98] Caravans were also utilised by the Vancouver Women's Caucus in 1970.[99] However, for CAP activists, the caravan was chosen for different reasons. In Ballymun, a working-class area of Dublin, where purpose-built flats had been erected in the 1960s, there were few local premises where the group could have set up a shop. According to Anne Speed (IWU/CAP):

[98] Fisher, p.29.

[99] The caucus travelled from Vancouver to Ottawa in a caravan which bore a coffin filled with coat hangers to represent the deaths of women from botched abortions, in order to protest against the restrictive nature of Canadian abortion law. Christabelle Sethna and Steve Hewitt, 'Clandestine operations: The Vancouver Women's Caucus, the abortion caravan, and the RCMP', *The Canadian Historical Review*, 90:3, (September 2009), pp. 463–95.

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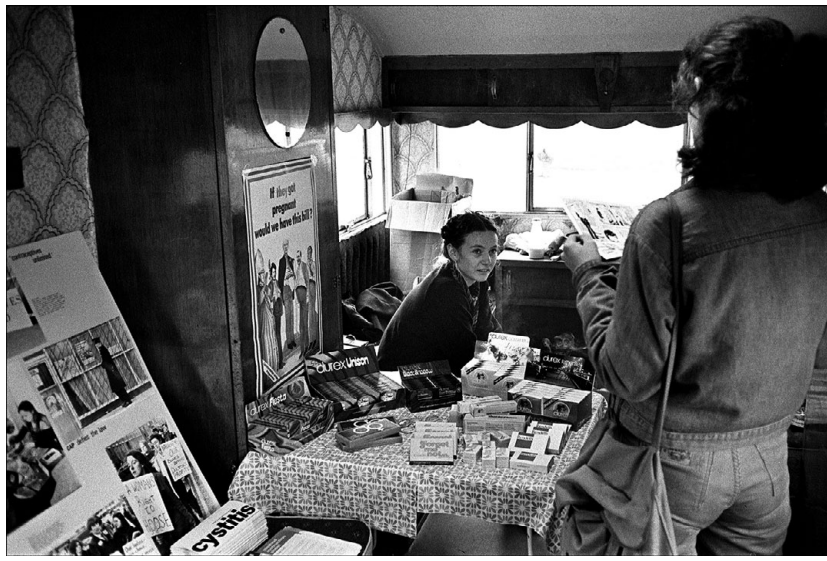

Figure 7.5 Interior of CAP caravan, Ballymun, Dublin, 13 October 1979. The woman facing the camera is Jacinta Deignan.
Photograph by Derek Speirs.

There were no shops. So we wouldn't have been able to hire any premises anyway … So that's why we thought the caravan would work. And we wouldn't be accountable or answerable to any landlord who might decide they didn't like what we were doing. But what we were doing was really publicly disseminating information. Where we were asked for specific help, we offered that help.

CAP activities brought some women into direct conflict with members of the Catholic Church, particularly during their work in disadvantaged areas. All CAP interviewees recalled receiving abuse from Father Michael Cleary, a well-known Dublin priest with a strong media presence.[100] Betty Purcell (IWU/CAP) recalled: 'I remember, actually, at one stage, going to a flat in Ballymun and knocking on the door and the person who opened it was Father Michael Cleary. He was living in the community and he was so abusive. I was very young; I was only sixteen or seventeen. I had an uncle who was a priest and I always thought a priest is a very respectable, decent person and he came out and he was just, "Fuck you".' Similarly, Taragh O'Kelly (IWU/CAP) recalled:

[100] Fuller, *Irish Catholicism*, p. 252.

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Mary and I were out in Ballyfermot out doing the petitions one day and the local priest who is that Father Michael Cleary, came up and he basically threatened us. 'Are you doing this here?' and we said, 'How are you Father, would you like to sign?' and it was sort of, 'Get the F out of my area'. He pretty much said if we didn't F off out of his patch, there were fellas around here who wouldn't like their wives getting involved in that stuff.

In 1995, it emerged that Cleary and his housekeeper, Phyllis Hamilton, had been living as man and wife and that he had fathered two children, one of whom was given up for adoption. This, along with other scandals such as that of Bishop Eamonn Casey in 1992, were disastrous for the Catholic Church which 'needed all the moral authority that it could muster to influence Irish Catholics' in the particularly fraught period of the 1990s.[101] Given the hypocrisy of Cleary's moral outrage concerning CAP's campaigns in Dublin, the memories of their activists' interactions with him were vividly recalled.

Anti-contraception campaigners were also active in writing to the press to complain about IWU and CAP activities. Mary Kennedy, a member of Irish conservative group, the Irish Family League, remarked in a letter to the *Irish Times* in 1976: 'Just as at the beginning of Time Eve was used to bring about the downfall of Adam, so today the feminists are being used knowingly or otherwise to bring about their own degradation and the destruction of the family'.[102] In a letter to the *Sligo Champion* in 1976 (which also appeared in several other newspapers), Bridget Bermingham, secretary of Catholic group Parent Concern, outlined some of the group's anxieties about CAP. She pointed out that the legalisation and unrestricted availability of contraception would 'introduce counter and supermarket sales, purchases from slot machines, mail orders by school-children etc., making it impossible to restrict inquisitive teenagers from the advertising of devices, techniques, pornographic and debasing sex books, some of which are already on sale, despite numerous protests'. The 'sex casualties' that had occurred in England, as well as statistics relating to numbers of teenagers on the pill, having abortions, and suffering from sexually transmitted diseases, were also referred to.[103]

As well as actively writing to newspapers, campaigners against the legalisation of contraception would sometimes disrupt CAP meetings. Betty Purcell (IWU/CAP) recalled:

Where we were, they turned up. They would just be often quite angry, and not violent but certainly with the intention of breaking up meetings and that sort of thing, and shouting people down and that kind of thing. It was quite hostile

[101] *Ibid.*. [102] *Irish Times*, 24 December 1976, p. 9.
[103] *Sligo Champion,* 10 December 1976, p. 14.

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and disrespectful, definitely, and quite intimidating to younger women who were involved.

In spite of the potential for disruption, CAP members agreed that public meetings were an important means of disseminating information and generating discussion on the contraception issue. Their first major event was a public rally, held at the Mansion House in Dublin in November 1976, with speakers including Dr Patrick J. Crowley, chairman of the Health Committee of the South Eastern Health Board, Limerick councillor Jim Kemmy and Dr. James Loughran, one of the founders of the IFPA.[104] According to one report, the speeches at the rally were 'drowned by the shouts and jeers of about 20 hecklers'.[105] Another CAP meeting of over 300 people in Dublin in 1977 was disrupted by a group of six protesters led by Mena Bean Ui Chribin, a postmistress and Catholic conservative campaigner.[106] These incidents highlight not only how divisive the issue of contraception was but also the generational divide between the CAP activists and those who were campaigning against their activities.

The efforts of CAP intensified following the publication of minister for health Charles Haughey's Health (Family Planning) Bill in 1978.[107] At a public meeting at TCD to discuss the bill in January 1978, CAP members argued that it would transfer power from family planning clinics to doctors and make contraception expensive. It would also put an end to mail order services for contraceptives, thereby further restricting access, especially for men and women who lived in rural areas.[108] The increase in power being given to doctors with regard to contraception was also a focus of concern. CAP stated in December 1978 that they 'totally rejected the suggestion that doctors should have the right to decide on "bona fide" family planning cases. The medical profession has only the responsibility to make all medical information available so that the patients may then make their decision.'[109] Furthermore, they argued that:

> instead of expanding the limited voluntary service, he [Haughey] intends to hand over to a male dominated elitist profession, which obscures and mystifies women's sexuality, our right to choose. What is "bona fide" anyway and don't you already know that many male doctors and female doctors (it is a male defined profession) haven't got much of an understanding of women anyway. The right to know about our bodies will be strictly controlled, there will be little or no research into contraception and we do want to know about safety.[110]

[104] *Irish Times*, 29 November 1976, p. 11.
[105] *Irish Times*, 1 December 1976, p. 9.
[106] 'Protestors ejected from meeting on contraception', *Irish Times*, 18 October 1978, p. 5.
[107] Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin*, p. 423.
[108] CAP public meeting statement, T.C.D., 29 January 1978 [RCAPA, BL/F/AP/1139/9].
[109] *Irish Times*, 16 December 1978, p. 6.
[110] CAP statement, undated, but probably February or March 1978 [RCAPA, BL/F/AP/1294/15].

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Some critics feared that not all chemists would necessarily comply with the legislation. According to Sally Keogh, IFPA information officer and CAP member, 'You could have a whole group of chemists in one town deciding yes they would stock them [contraceptives] or, no, they wouldn't, because some customers might decide to boycott a chemist shop because of their practice regarding contraceptive sales. We have not had a precedent like this before.'[111] A poster produced by CAP (Figure 7.6), illustrates the figures that CAP viewed to be standing in the way of contraception legislative reform: the archbishop of Dublin, politicians Charles Haughey, Jack Lynch and Garret FitzGerald, and a generic cartoon doctor, all drawn with pregnant bellies. The caption of the cartoon reads 'If they got pregnant would we have this bill?'

In reaction to the proposed legislation, which CAP described as 'repressive, regressive, restrictive and moralistic', a CAP-run shop, Contraceptives Unlimited, was opened on Harcourt Road, Dublin in November, 1978.[112] (Figures 7.7–7.9). The shop sold non-medical contraceptives such as condoms, jellies, creams and caps. Profits from the sale of contraceptives went towards the cost of fighting a court case over the confiscation of contraceptives imported by Family Planning Distributors.[113] According to Taragh O'Kelly (IWU/CAP), 'It was just blow the whole thing open was pretty much what our idea was'. The shop was following in a history of illegality with regard to contraception provision in Ireland, however, what distinguished it was that the women openly sold the contraceptives, rather than asking for a 'donation', as was done in the family planning clinics.[114]

Women who worked in the CAP shop recalled the anxiety that was felt when it opened, based on a fear that there would be no customers or a fear that they would be arrested. Joanne O'Brien (IWU/CAP) recalled: 'I remember Anne [Speed] saying to me just before we opened the shop, "Joanne, you will buy some" because she was so worked up and anxious that we would actually sell some. I remember saying to her, "Anne, I don't need them." She was just so funny, she was so worked up about it all. We didn't know what was going to happen, whether we were going to be all arrested'. Similarly, Taragh O'Kelly (IWU/CAP) recalled:

> We opened up there with a clear view that we were openly selling. We were openly breaking the law, with a view to being arrested, essentially. We made a rule

[111] *Irish Press*, 3 January 1979, p. 9.
[112] 'The contraception issue in Ireland', undated [RCAPA, BL/F/AP/1177/3].
[113] Barbara Murray, unpublished booklet on Irishwomen United, Sept. 1995, p. 62 (MS in the possession of Barbara Murray).
[114] Cloatre & Enright, 'On the perimeter of the lawful', p. 473.

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Figure 7.6 CAP poster, Limerick Family Planning Clinic, July 1981.
Photograph by Beth Lazroe. All rights reserved, DACS 2022.

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Figure 7.7 Front of Contraceptives Unlimited shop, Dublin, 28 November 1978.
Photograph by Derek Speirs.

Figure 7.8 Anne Connolly (left) and Anne Speed (right) of CAP celebrate the opening of Contraceptives Unlimited, 28 November 1978.
Photograph by Joanne O'Brien.

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Figure 7.9 Ann O'Brien (CAP) selling contraceptives at Contraceptives Unlimited, Dublin, 28 November 1978.
Photograph by Derek Speirs.

that anybody who was going to spend time in the shop had to be in a position to go to jail. Therefore anybody who had parental responsibilities or anything of that nature, while they helped out of the back, they were discouraged from being to the front, because we were convinced, we would be arrested, fined, no fine, go to jail. As you know, that never happened.

Contraceptives Unlimited was established, according to CAP member Anne Connolly, as a means of challenging the law on the sale of contraceptives. Speaking at the time, she stated 'If we are prosecuted we are not going to pay the fines … The Gardaí will have to arrest us or let us go. If they arrest us, there'll be a tremendous public outcry and international outrage. If they let us go it will show up the hypocrisy of the law.'[115] The shop also provided access for women who would not normally have been able to obtain contraception. Betty Purcell (IWU/CAP) recalled a mix of customers that included 'a lot of women from disadvantaged communities would come in who didn't have the amount of, I suppose, network support that middle-class women would have, and also didn't have the access to travel that a lot of women would have'. Customers also included members of the Irish Traveller community and women from

[115] *Irish Independent*, 29 November 1978, p. 12.

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rural areas 'who were coming up from the country, it might be ostensibly doing a day's shopping but they'd come into us and say, "Where could I go and what could I" … It would be that they would be women who'd be fearful of opening up to their GP' as well as women who 'didn't want to tell their husband that they wanted to limit their families'. Purcell explained that the role of the shop was not only the sale of non-medical contraceptives such as condoms but also information provision about where women could obtain the contraceptive pill: 'It was helpful just to give them that very basic advice, to women, that this was where they could get a fair hearing and without the fear of an individual GP turning them down'.

There was some backlash from members of anti-contraception groups. Taragh O'Kelly (IWU/CAP) remembered protestors 'who came in and threw the holy water at us and things like that'. Other interviewees recalled pickets and intimidation by anti-contraception groups. Betty Purcell (IWU/CAP) remembered:

> Then, yeah, we were distributing and then sometimes there'd be pickets on it, which were quite intimidating … Of course no one had mobile phones then or anything, so if you were on shift in the shop and the next thing 15 angry vociferous people were outside. They also used to take notes of people who were going in and that sort of thing.

The issue of young people potentially gaining access to contraception was one of concern to conservative groups when the shop opened. When asked by RTÉ reporter, George Devlin, if individuals would be asked their age when purchasing contraceptives, Anne Speed replied: 'No, we do not, we consider that an infringement on the individual right of people, because that is irrelevant to people. People have the right to engage in sexual activity irrespective of their age or their marital status. We will not be asking that question. We will, if very young people come into the shop obviously in need of advice be referring them to family planning clinics where we feel that trained counsellors and medical staff can help'.[116] Betty Purcell (IWU/CAP) also recalled attempts at entrapment where teenagers were sent into the shop to buy contraceptives. Despite the illegality of their activities, no legal action was taken against CAP members and no arrests were made. According to Joanne O'Brien (IWU/CAP): 'We thought we were going to be arrested. I think at that stage people must have felt that the issue, we had been campaigning for

[116] RTÉ news report on Contraceptives Unlimited, broadcast on RTE, 28 November 1978. Accessed: https://www.rte.ie/archives/2013/1127/489465-contraception-unlimited-1978/

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quite some time at that point. I think people were starting to feel, well, you know, people have a right to this'. O'Kelly suggested that the lack of arrests was due to

> pragmatism on the part of the government. There was an awful lot of international publicity. We were getting publicity from Germany, from France, from Holland and all of the rest of it, and bear in mind, on a business side of things, they wanted to prove themselves, be good Europeans and forward moving and the rest of it. The last thing they need or wanted was a bunch of women going to jail … For what? For selling condoms?

By December, the shop was still open, and CAP stated that they would continue to keep it open 'in continuing defiance of the present laws'. In spite of reports that the Gardaí were planning on closing the shop down, the group stated that they had made plans 'for the immediate reopening and restocking of the shop in the event of a raid and confiscation of stock or arrest of members'.[117] The shop was never raided.

A CAP rally was held in Dublin on 3 December 1978. As well as the shop Contraceptives Unlimited, CAP activists also organised spontaneous sales of contraceptives, for instance, at Ballymun shopping centre in January 1979.[118] In March, 1979, CAP picketed the Fianna Fáil Ard-Fheis. The same month, six student CAP members who had organised a stall illegally selling contraceptives at UCC, were instructed by university staff to remove them.[119] The following month, the Gardaí seized contraceptives at stalls in Knocknaheney, Cork, and Princes Street in Cork.[120] CAP, nevertheless, continued with their activities, and organised a 'Festival of Contraception' in May 1979 at Wynn's Hotel in Dublin with films, lectures, stalls and a workshop on 'Contraception, health and women's sexuality' which included talks by female speakers.[121] In further defiance of the Health (Family Planning) Act, the CAP caravan took to the road to sell contraceptives in October 1979 and, over several weekends, it visited disadvantaged parts of Irish cities such as Rahoon in Galway, Ballymun in Dublin and Knocknaheney in Cork, as well as Shannon in County Clare and rural areas where people had difficulties getting access to contraception.[122] In November, the caravan visited Tuam, Co. Galway where the chair of the local community council, Cora McNamara, apparently complained that 'the intelligence of the people of Tuam was undermined' by the visit of the CAP caravan.[123]

[117] *Irish Times*, 18 December 1978, p. 5.
[118] *Irish Times*, 27 January 1979, p. 4.
[119] *Irish Examiner*, 30 March 1979, p. 5.
[120] *Ibid.*, 23 April 1979, p. 7.
[121] *Irish Times*, 4 May 1979, p. 12.
[122] *Irish Independent*, 11 October 1979, p. 12.
[123] *Irish Times*, 11 November 1979, p. 12.

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Figure 7.10 CAP march in Dublin, 3 December 1978.
Photograph by Joanne O'Brien.

Evidently, in spite of the introduction of the Family Planning Act in 1979, the issue of contraception remained controversial and divisive.

As had been predicted by CAP, access to contraception remained restrictive into the 1980s. According to a survey conducted by CAP in 1981, of 100 chemists who were asked if they stocked contraceptives, 46 said they did not; 39 refused to cooperate with the survey and 15 said they did stock contraceptives. Of the chemists who stated that they did not stock contraceptives, 39% said they were 'conscientious objectors', 26% claimed there was no demand and 17% stated they were prohibited because they were limited companies.[124] CAP continued to defy the law. Another shop, called the Women's Health Information Shop, was set up by CAP in December 1981 in Dublin, and opened from Wednesdays to Saturdays. The shop provided information on health and contraception, as well as selling non-medical contraceptives, 'to put pressure on the Government to change the Family Planning Act, which is ridiculous'.[125] In addition, CAP continued to sell contraceptives at the Dandelion Market in Dublin, until it was closed in 1981.[126]

[124] *Irish Independent*, 17 July 1981, p. 3.
[125] Untitled article in *Wimmin*, 1:1 (December 1981), p. 25.
[126] *Irish Times*, 12 October 1981, p. 7.

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Figure 7.11 CAP picket outside Fianna Fáil, Ard Fheis, RDS, Dublin. The three women are Anne Speed, Roisin Boyd and Geraldine O'Reilly, 24 February 1979.
Photograph by Clodagh Boyd.

By the end of 1981, CAP had dismantled.[127] According to the *Irish Feminist Review* in 1984, CAP 'collapsed because the effort that had been put into the campaign over three years resulted in nothing but a miserable bill'.[128] According to Anne Speed, 'You can only take something so far. You just become tired. And we just became tired then. And so we didn't have any formal burial of CAP. CAP just kind of slipped into the distance.' Following the legalisation of contraception, some members of IWU and CAP became involved in the newly founded Women's Right to Choose Group and Anti-Amendment Campaign which both opposed the proposals for the eighth amendment of the Irish constitution, which had been put forward by an active pro-life movement which mobilised after the legalisation of contraception.[129] As Anne Speed explained:

Our main issue was as young militant feminists was, to get the break in the law, and then we were looking for the next fight. You know what I mean? And the next fight

[127] 'The life and death of the contraception campaign' in *Irish Feminist Review* (1984), p. 35.
[128] *Ibid.*. [129] See Connolly, *The Irish Women's Movement*, pp. 162–9.

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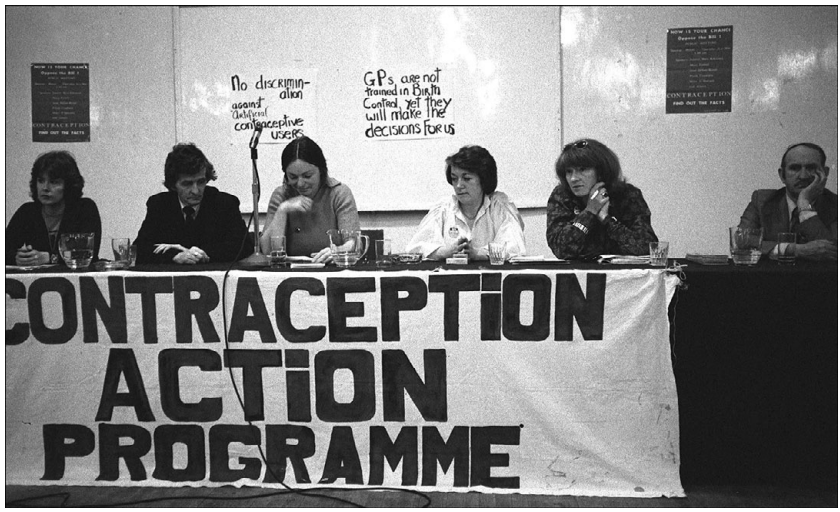

Figure 7.12 CAP public meeting in the Mansion House, Dublin, 31 May 1979. On the platform, L to R, unknown, Frank Crummey, Ann O'Brien, Mary Freehill, Jane Dillon Byrne and Matt Merrigan. Photograph by Derek Speirs.

was termination. So we didn't see ourselves … Because we weren't the doctors, we weren't the counsellors, we weren't the nurses, we weren't the professional people. We were the political agitators that moved on. Individually, moved on. And we all went our separate ways.

7.4 Conclusion

As Diarmaid Ferriter has asserted 'Irish feminists were facing a 1980s that would, in many respects, seek to vehemently push them back down'.[130] Indeed, several respondents compared the idealism and enthusiasm they felt in the 1970s with later feelings of despondence and disappointment in the 1980s following the introduction of the eighth amendment of the constitution, and the cases of Ann Lovett (1984) and the Kerry babies (1985).[131] As Raewyn Connell has argued in relation to the women's liberation and gay liberation movements, the 'surge in the pace and depth of sexual politics and the power of theory opens the

[130] Ferriter, *Ambiguous Republic*, p. 679.
[131] Hug, *The Politics of Sexual Morality*, p. 121; Nell McCafferty, *A Woman to Blame: the Kerry Babies Case* (Dublin, 1985).

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possibility of conscious social and personal transformation in a degree unthinkable before'. However, somewhat depressingly, she adds 'Yet the liberation movements have nothing like the social power needed to push this transformation through, except in limited milieux.'[132] In addition, some scholars have suggested exercising caution in overstating the contribution that these feminist groups made to social and political change in Ireland.[133] While it is difficult to quantify the contribution that Irish feminist groups made in terms of changes in the law on contraception, it is clear that they had an important role in opening up the public discourse on contraception and highlighting class and geographical inequalities that were not being assessed by other groups within the family planning movement.

While there are commonalities between the arguments made by Irish feminists and their British and American counterparts, such as, for example, in relation to the medicalisation of women's bodies, Ireland's distinctive religious and social climate, and laws, meant that the Irish feminist movement had a particular set of goals and challenges. Moreover, class became a central concern of their campaign to legalise contraception. Ultimately, Irish feminist campaigners believed in a women's movement that allowed for the equal distribution of sexual knowledge and access to contraception and, in this way, foregrounded the interconnection between health and economic rights. The feminist campaigns of IWU and CAP also illustrate the significance of informal women's networks in successfully navigating legal barriers to reproductive health in Ireland. In addition, it is important to note that CAP activities had an important legacy for future reproductive rights campaigns in Ireland.

Participation in direct action activities, such as the illegal import and sale of contraceptives could be personally challenging and not only put women activists in danger of being arrested, but also face-to-face with adversity and, occasionally, abuse. Irish feminist campaigners helped to publicise the hypocrisy and social disparities of the contraception issue. Moreover, through their demonstrations, meetings and service provision, in unconventional spaces, such as shops, markets, community centres and caravans, these women challenged the hold of both religious patriarchy and medical expertise in Ireland.

[132] Connell, *Gender and Power*, p. 279. [133] Galligan, *Women and Politics*, p. 157.

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