

# WOMEN AT W.A.R.

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## WOMEN AGAINST

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# Introduction

CAROLINE BARKER

Women Against Rape is an organisation whose starting point is that women all over the world have always been making a fight against rape. Our fight is international because our situation is. Everywhere we are financially dependent on men, and therefore we are expected to be constantly available to them in all ways, including sexually. Women's fight against this dependence and against being constantly available is the fight against rape.

In recent years, this fight has surfaced in the streets. There have been massive torchlight processions in many European countries by women 'taking back the night'. In Italy in 1977, when a prostitute woman was raped, thousands of women demonstrated against the courts which would not prosecute the gang of rapists.

In Karachi, Pakistan, in 1978, when an eight year old girl was raped, children went on the rampage through the city causing havoc.

In Soweto, South Africa, in 1977, when a teacher was raped, the schoolgirls in her class stoned the rapist to death.

Some may find what the children have done shocking. But were they wrong to defend themselves? That the State comes down on the side of the rapist is what's really shocking.

Rape by strangers is only the tip of the iceberg. Until recently, no-one has spoken out publicly about the rape that occurs most often—rape in marriage—not exotic, quite legal, just unavoidable for too many of us who are dependent on men for money for ourselves and our children.

The spread of the W.A.R. Campaign, springing from women's anger, has been dependent on focusing that anger. Police and courts look for what is 'special' in each rape case, in order to find



the particular way the woman is at fault. But the variety of circumstances cannot hide the obvious: that men rape women.

We can't separate our low status as women from the threat of rape we all face. We can't separate our refusal of any indignity from our refusal of rape—the greatest physical indignity of all. Every time we demand the right to say no—to employers or to government officials or to individual men—we are saying no to every rapist, all of whom only take yes for an answer.

But most women's experience of rape and the fight against it is hidden. Therefore an important part of the W.A.R. Campaign is to take that experience out of hiding and put it in the media, turning our shame into anger and our guilt into action. The publication of this pamphlet, which will be sold all over the world, is part of this process.

Already W.A.R. has changed people's awareness of how widespread rape is. And as the media were forced to report our actions women journalists, particularly, were in a stronger position to press their editors into giving our campaign the kind of coverage it deserved. One result is that W.A.R. tactics, which Ruth Hall here describes, have been used by other women fighting for the right to abortion or against media attacks on lesbian women. W.A.R. has set an example.

This publication of women talking about their personal experience of rape is the first of its kind to come out of Britain. These accounts were given at a public meeting in Bristol in November 1977. That they are personal, individual accounts only highlights what we have in common, despite differences of race, nationality or situation. The W.A.R. Campaign, then, shows not only that something can be done, but that women are doing it. That although it is women who are attacked, it is also women who are on the attack.

We have been told that the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world. That's not been our experience. But we're sure that the hand that rocks the cradle can rock the world. If that's what it takes to end rape, then that's what we'll do.

## This happened to me

JENNY SMITH

First of all, I'd like to introduce myself. I was a battered wife and I spent some time in a refuge for battered women in Hertfordshire. I'd like to talk mainly about my marriage, about how I was raped in marriage, and then a little bit about some of my experiences while I was trying to get out of this marriage; and what happened to me in terms of how Social Services and local authorities treated me and reinforced the isolation I was in. Then I'd like to talk a little bit about what I learnt from other women in the refuge, and finally about what the Women Against Rape Campaign has meant for me.

I am what they call a 'middle class woman', and my husband was a university lecturer. (A lot of people have had a very stereotyped idea of what a battered woman is, you know, expecting her to be the wife of a man who drinks, a man who's unemployed, and therefore the battering could be part of that situation.) The violence in my marriage started the moment I became financially dependent on my husband, i.e. when I became pregnant. Up to that point we'd had a more or less equal relationship. We'd both been students. He had a degree, a first in history at Oxford, and I had a degree also. And our relationship was based on a sort of mutual exchange of interests. The moment I became pregnant, the violence started. He knew I was dependent on him and that I couldn't leave. This violence, which in my case was expressed in hours and hours of abuse and screaming tantrums on his part, increased after the birth of my baby. He saw the baby as a threat, a threat to his getting the same kind of attention he'd had before, and also he felt that his rights as a husband, his sexual rights as a man, weren't being respected.

After the birth of the baby, I had a contraceptive coil fitted. It was very badly fitted and I had an infection, and I



was in a lot of pain. I went to several doctors and they all gave me penicillin or other anti-biotics; and one doctor I went to told me that the reason that I had an infection was because I had this fantasy, and that every woman has a fantasy about the womb—that it's like a mouth, and things disappear up it, so that's why I was in pain. And he wouldn't take the coil out. In the end, I got it taken out by the Marie Stopes Clinic, a women's clinic in London. But the infection had increased by this time and become quite deep-seated, and I was in a lot of pain.

In the first three or four months after the baby was born, my husband had been making sexual demands on me that I had managed to refuse, because I was in quite a lot of pain, I was very tired with the baby, and I was also very exhausted by the kind of battering that he was putting me through, which was emotional battering, very severe emotional battering, and physical battering as well. So after about three or four months he really had decided that this was it, that he'd really had enough of waiting. Not that he'd been totally without, but it really wasn't enough for him. And he decided that we should have this little holiday trip to Oxford. His mother had the baby, and the whole 'holiday' was veiled in a second honeymoon kind of image.

He took me to Oxford, and he walked me round Oxford for two days. I'd just come off penicillin, and I was in a lot of pain—I really was exhausted. And when we got to the hotel bedroom in the evening he said, well you know, this is what we're here for, this is it, and I really had no choice but to submit. I wasn't really aware of what was happening to me, I just was totally exhausted by then. But in fact it was planned rape, and after that all sexual intercourse with him was rape, because it was always against my will.

I did try and leave several times after that; but although I had a university degree I was really totally powerless, because I had nowhere to go except an aunt, who put me up for a couple of weeks, but I really couldn't stay. I had no money, I had no housing, I was terrified of being alone and isolated. So I went back to him. Twice I went back. The third time I tried

to leave, we'd moved from London to Hertfordshire, and by then I knew what I was up against. I knew the problems of housing, the problems of remaining supported, the problems of money. My very kind aunt was always saying that I really should take a job and try and get some work in a nursery, where the nursery could have my child at the same time. But I didn't see how I could manage to take on that extra work. And I didn't know about Social Security [Welfare]; I didn't know I could claim Social Security for me and the baby.

I went to the Social Services department in the town we were living in, to try and get some support; and when I said that I had a degree, they were really very amazed that I was being battered. They expected—because I had a degree—that I should cope, and that really this sort of thing shouldn't be happening to me and wasn't real. I was very, very isolated in my situation with my husband, who was accusing me the whole time, and threatening me and insulting me and telling me everybody hated me, and in fact trying to absolutely terrorise me and break my independence. So I really was looking towards the social worker for some kind of confirmation of what I thought was going on—that I really *was* being abused. And the fact that I didn't get any confirmation of my point of view, but got a confirmation of my husband's point of view, just reinforced the isolation I was in.

The assumption that the social worker made was that I'd provoked my husband and that it was all my fault, that I must have a sort of latent aggression, latent aggression for two years, that had been provoking my husband into his assault. And they offered me no help with housing and no advice about how I could leave.

I eventually managed to get to Women's Aid,\* and I found out by talking to other women that these attitudes towards battering and rape, these kinds of violence towards women, are totally reinforced by the law. The police won't intervene in a violent dispute. I had to call the police once—that was about two weeks before I finally left—and they just said, 'We

\* A network of battered women's refuges.



can't do anything, dear, have you got a friend to go and stay with for the night?' And then they went. I said, 'Please don't go, I'm absolutely terrified, and he's going to come back'—he'd run out of the house—'don't leave me.' They said, 'Well, there's nothing we can do, it's just a domestic dispute.' And they went off. Anything could have happened to me. In the end, the only people who helped me that night were a local organisation of single parents, who I contacted in the town. They got me to a mother and baby home in a nearby town for the night.

This kind of attitude in the law, which also says that rape in marriage isn't a crime, that it is actually legal—because it doesn't exist—means that a woman who's raped in marriage can't go to the police about her rape. The attitude is that violence in marriage isn't violence, it's just a domestic dispute; and rape in marriage isn't rape, it's just the husband asserting his natural marital rights, because he does have marital rights.

I was at the battered women's refuge for three or four months, and I met a lot of women there who all confirmed the same story. The battering they underwent was a mixture of physical battering, psychological battering, and rape. I never got tired of listening to their stories because they were always the same stories and yet they were all different. And the curious thing about them was that they all showed how the man knew what he was doing. He knew he was exploiting the woman's powerlessness, and it was really interesting to see how he exploited the vulnerability of each woman in each situation.

In my case, like most others, it was my lack of money and my isolation, the fact that I had no-one to go to. My husband really had a lot of power over me. He was very aggressive with me, and very charming socially, and so no-one believed me. And this kind of apparently schizoid behaviour was in fact consciously manipulative behaviour that all these husbands showed. They were very violent towards their women, and then the moment anyone came in through the door they would be extremely charming—they really knew what they were doing. It just shows that that kind of battering and

violence, and the kind of violence they show in rape, is not the result of a momentary urge, some kind of animal instinct that they can't help. They actually plan rape, and they plan battering, and they plan to abuse the vulnerable position that women are in.

It also came out while I was at the refuge that a lot of the women there had had to leave because their daughters were being raped, by the father or the stepfather or the lover, or 'sexually interfered with' as they say—which is rape. It made me realise the incidence of child rape is something that is just as hidden as rape in marriage.

People have this very exotic image of rape as street rape, and that it's something that requires a great deal of savagery. So they can't imagine how a woman in marriage can be raped, because they can't imagine a nice husband being very, very savage one night and actually raping her. But in fact it doesn't *require* so much savagery in marriage, because the woman is under a lot of pressure.

She always has to think of the children, she has to think that if she stood up to the man she might face a custody case, and she might lose her children. And she has to think, even if she did get custody, how would she support herself and the children? (In my case, my husband always threatened me that, if I left, he would get custody of the baby; and for a long time I believed him.) Then, because of the isolation, the privacy of the situation, there's no witness, the woman can't go to anyone. And because rape in marriage is not a crime, no-one's going to believe her. So she really doesn't stand a chance, and therefore she has to submit very quickly.

While I was in the refuge, I became involved with the Wages for Housework Campaign, because it spoke so immediately to my experience; and then when the Women Against Rape Campaign developed, I became involved in that. And it was only through the Women Against Rape Campaign that I was able to admit to myself that I had been raped in my marriage, because up to then I'd actually repressed it and denied it to myself. I really hadn't been able to admit to myself that this



had happened to me.

I think this shows up the personal power that comes from the Women Against Rape Campaign, which has exposed the kind of struggles that women have been making for a very, very long time against rape and violence, but which they have been making in isolation, and in a situation of great powerlessness. Because the Women Against Rape Campaign has brought out rape not only as street rape, but as child rape, as rape in marriage, rape of older women and all the other kinds of rape that women undergo, it has really shown the depth and extent of rape. It has also broken down the division between the rape that all of us go through every day—rape in the office even, just the boss touching you up—and this exotic image of the isolated street rape. And in exposing the extent of rape, it has made it possible for women to talk about it much more openly.

I've found that, as soon as I've started talking about rape, other women have said, 'Yes, well, you know when I was little this happened to me, and I have a friend and that's happened to her.' Therefore the fact that women have been able to talk about it in this massive way has given us all a lot of power. And the Women Against Rape Campaign, together with the Wages for Housework Campaign, has exposed not only the extent of rape in the home, but also the fact that we *can* get Social Security, that there *is* money, that we *can* get out, and that really this kind of rape is something we just don't have to put up with.

For me personally, and I think for all the women who took part in it, the public trial in Trafalgar Square,\* which Ruth's going to say something about, was a great moment of power, because it meant that for the first time women were really on the offensive, putting the State on trial, putting the courts on trial. Whereas in every other situation it's the woman who's on trial.

\* In the centre of London.

## Breaking the silence

NORMA STEELE

Something which hasn't really been spoken about in this country up to now is the particular vulnerability of Black women to rape and violence.

This rape and violence begins, as Jenny was saying, with the fact that as a whole all women are vulnerable; and this really stems from the fact that we're very dependent on men because as women we have very little money. But Black women in particular are at the bottom of the economic scale, and we've had the least money, because all our foreparents were robbed, and the women were raped, and they weren't paid for the kind of work they were doing, the forced motherhood. A fundamental part of women's work under slavery was to submit to rape.

So this attitude, that Black women should be sexually available to all men, has a long history, it hasn't just started. And the fact that we weren't paid for any of the work that we did, our foreparents did, has made us especially vulnerable. We've been forced to move from country to country in search of this money, our back pay, and reduced to the status of being regarded as 'immigrants'.

As immigrants, we're forced to take on the lowest paid jobs, with the worst conditions. Recently, Asian women factory workers have spoken out about the fact that they have been forced to go out with members of the management, have had to spend weekends with members of the management, just to be able to keep their jobs at even low rates of pay, just to get that little bit of money.

We also have to take on night shift work: for instance, as you all know there are a lot of Black women who work in



hospitals, servicing the hospitals, and who have to walk home late at night, and who therefore are quite vulnerable to rape in the streets. We're forced to live in the slum areas—just look around St. Paul's\*—with the poorest amenities, badly lit streets, and no police protection.

Of course, there are plenty of police around, harassing Black people and harassing prostitutes; but if there should be a case of rape, this isn't taken seriously. Their attitude to Black women living in St. Paul's is that we're all prostitutes, and we're therefore, again, sexually available to all men. The police view is that prostitutes *can't* be raped; and if a woman is working on the game, then if she gets raped that's her fault, she's supposed to have asked for it. But rape is rape, whatever kind of work you're doing, and this whole attitude of the police, the harassment, increases the likelihood of prostitutes getting raped, and therefore increases the likelihood that all women can be raped. And this generally means that we face rape in the streets, from both white and Black men, and we're not able to report it because we know the attitude of the police.

But we face not only the danger of rape in the street, but also by men we know, and that starts off with your husband. And especially when one is new to the country, with no relatives and no friends, the woman is completely dependent on the man, on the husband, so when she's raped there's no one to turn to. And of course she's got a lot at stake if she should dare complain about it. The pattern of emigration, in Third World countries especially, is that with the help of relatives and friends, particularly the immediate family, they first of all send the husband to, say, England; and then the husband in turn works and sends for his wife, and then they send for the children. The situation in the West Indies is that the couple are often living together as common law man and wife; but once they get here, because this isn't really acceptable, then there's a great deal of pressure on the woman to get married.

\* The most well known Black and immigrant area in Bristol. An old inner city district, close to the once thriving port, which includes Bristol's oldest red light street.

Of course, the majority of people living in Third World countries that were once British colonies have had some kind of Christian upbringing, so there is the attitude that if you're going to have kids and you're going to live with a man, you should get married; that if you've just lived with a man, then you've sinned. So that kind of pressure, plus the pressure of coming to this country where common law marriage is not so recognised, puts a great deal of pressure on the woman to get married, especially if she's got children, in order to be respected. But to maintain this kind of respectability, if she's in a situation where she faces abuse and violence from the husband, she daren't say anything. If there's anything wrong with the marriage, she can't talk about it.

Secondly, if she wants to bring her children over, obviously you need money to pay for the fare; and even if a woman is going out to work, on the small wage that she's getting, she can't afford to pay the fare without the help of her husband or another man. So again she's very dependent on the man. Especially if the child is not a child of the marriage, she may have to put up with a lot of pressure in order to make sure that she can get that money to get the children over, just to be with her. Just to have her child, her children, with her, she may have to put up with a lot of pressure and violence.

Once the children have joined her, that doesn't mean to say the problem ends there. Especially if it's a step child, she's got to be very careful, because there have been a lot of cases where the stepfather has raped the children. (Jenny has also talked about that.) And so if she's got a daughter, she's got to be watching her daughter all the time.

Because of these pressures, because she's got to weigh it up all the time—how can I keep my children with me? and so on—plus knowing the attitude of the police, she's not going to report rape cases, violence, having been beaten and so on, to the police. And therefore very few cases actually come to light in the courts. And the mother is very frightened, obviously, of reporting rape cases to the police because she's frightened of losing the man, she's frightened of losing her



children, she's frightened of losing the home, and she's frightened of what people will say, especially if a Black man gets imprisoned.

On top of this, because of the racism outside, because of the racism we face daily, we feel we must stick together to protect each other, to comfort each other, from the kind of continual harassment and abuse we are subjected to.

But this kind of defence imposes a kind of silence on Black women. We have to hide the fact that women are being raped, women are being beaten; and the men are very much aware of our position, and they exploit it. They play on this, knowing that we don't want to see another Black person in prison. Because we've *seen* it, many many times, where Black men, just because they happen to be moving in an area, living in an area, they're just picked up and questioned by the police, which is an attack on the Black men. But because we're aware of that, and the men know of our position, and know that we don't want to see any Black person exposed to this kind of daily harassment from the police, they're playing on this. And therefore there are women who are continually beaten and raped, and also children who are continually beaten and abused, but we can't say anything about it.

That doesn't mean to say that as Black women we're not fighting against it. Obviously we're fighting against it. More and more women are now leaving the marital home. They're setting up homes for themselves, they're going to the battered wives' hostels, and more and more women are taking on council flats [project housing], which once upon a time wasn't the respectable thing to do. Especially young women are doing this. And Black women are really taking the lead in taking Welfare, claiming Social Security benefits, because this kind of money is one way of getting out, escaping the kind of violence that women may face in a marriage.

One case in particular was in the newspapers yesterday. A Black woman, Miss Davis, just won a case in the High Court to throw her man out of the house after she'd been really violently beaten. Although they weren't married, she won the

right to stay in the home, which up to now common law wives haven't had the right to do.\* What this has done is to set a precedent for *all women* to demand what is rightfully ours. She has made it clear that, for all Black women, whatever country we're in, wherever we are, we are entitled to housing and money, and that we must continue to demand what is rightfully ours. This is what Black women are doing. We're demanding and taking Social Security benefits, council housing; we're setting up homes for ourselves, and so giving a lead to all women in fighting against rape and violence.

\* The case was taken to the House of Lords for final judgement, and Jennifer Davis's precedent was upheld (March 1978).



# No lasting harm?

KAREN CROCKER

I was raped while walking home from where I was working. I had to go out to work because we were living on £26 [\$50] a week—that is, my husband, myself and two children. And having two children entailed working at night, because one can't work in the day with a son aged eight months and another son aged two years. So I tried bar work, I tried restaurant work; but one has to stick with the jobs, and I just couldn't do that because I wasn't allowed to work during the term time, only during the vacations (my husband was a student, and a condition of his grant was that there should be nothing extra earned). So I worked as a stripper, because I could just phone up and say, 'Got any work?', and he'd give me some. Twenty-five pounds for taking off one's clothes two times a night for six nights.

So one night when I was walking home someone attacked me. I got raped. I went to the police and said I was a stripper, and I'd walked home and I'd got raped. They suggested I was a prostitute, or I had had an extra-marital affair and something had just gone wrong in it, that I hadn't been raped at all, even though it was blatantly obvious that I had. And while I was going down to the police station, because I said it was a Black man, they decided to pick up all the Black men just in case. Before I'd even described the rapist. (They had to let them all go when none of them fitted the description.)

When I got to the police station, I was subjected to an examination which was quite horrifying really, and almost as bad as the rape itself. I didn't want that examination, but I had to have it, to get that man convicted. Because there's no way of getting round the police. It costs a hell of a lot of money to employ lawyers and things, and we didn't have that.

After this examination, which apparently showed that I had been to bed with someone else other than the rapist, I was further subjected to two more—during the day, when I had to leave the children. While all this was going on, my husband and I were becoming more and more apart. I couldn't talk about sex, I couldn't kiss him, I couldn't hold him, I almost ran to the other end of the room if he tried to do anything to me. But the police demanded that I should sleep with my husband to prove their tests. They demanded that I should refrain from sexual intercourse for three days and then have a test, then have intercourse, and have another test.

All this was quite wearing, especially when you consider that, because we had so little money, I had to do all the housework by hand—I had to do all the washing by hand, I had to sweep the floors by hand, and they were all rotten and falling in because the flat was damp; and of course, I had to look after the children.

This was all having a bad effect on my nerves, and my husband wrote to his parents, who sent my mother down to pick me and the kids up for a holiday. But while I was away my husband had a nervous breakdown and had to be sent into hospital. So I came back.

And when I came back, I found out that the police had had a trial of a certain Delroy Anthony Rochester who raped me.\* And in that trial, the judge said that no lasting harm had been done to me.† Even though I was in an absolutely pitiful state. I couldn't even look after the kids properly. Yet I couldn't admit that, because if I admitted it I'd lose all chance of getting those kids in a custody case if my marriage did break up, or might lose them to the Social Services, or anything like that. So I just battled on. And I went to the press and told them the truth, that I was not a prostitute, that severe harm had been done to my marriage, myself, my children, and my husband—a harm that we'll

\* I know they had the right man because he gave details of what I knew had happened, which I had forgotten in my account to the police.

† He implied that I was a prostitute, and that prostitutes don't mind being raped.



never really recover from.

Going to the press led on to my going to the Trafalgar Square trial, because women from Women Against Rape got in touch with me through that; and that was the first time I'd been in contact with anyone in our situation. People don't talk about rape, they daren't admit it, that it exists, because having admitted it they'd have to do something about it.

In September, about six months after the rape, we decided that it would be a good idea if we moved. And my husband Clive went up to Hull, where we both come from, and eventually found a house, after three weeks of looking, costing £60 a month. And we went to the Social Security and we said, 'We've got a house, *much* better than where we live. No mice, no rot, no damp, no not-working-water-heaters. Please can you give us the money to move?' But they wouldn't. So now we've got a bank overdraft.

But the thing is that women are subjected to rape, and if they dare complain about it, they are subjected to more rape, by the police, by any men you might meet. There isn't any help at all; and we need that help, all of us, because any one of us is liable to be raped. Tonight. You have to get home tonight. You're not safe in your own houses.

## They say we're asking for it

JAN WILLIS

I'm speaking as a lesbian woman from Women Against Rape, and I'd just like to give our point of view about rape.

As a woman who never has the protection of a man, when you walk on the streets you're alone; and obviously, if you're alone on the streets you're going to be subjected to rape, physical violence, abuse. And the law doesn't protect us from men. If we ask for police protection, we just get told we should get ourselves a man, then we wouldn't need their protection, we'd have the protection of a man. *We're* treated like the criminals, not the men who assault us and rape us. So if we walk anywhere public, say with our lover, holding her hand, and we get assaulted by a man, then we just get told, 'Well, you provoked the violence because you shouldn't be holding this woman's hand, you should be holding a man's hand.'

You've got to look after yourself in every respect. I have to support myself financially, so in supporting myself I've got to take abuse and harassment at work. And if my boss takes a fancy to me, I'm supposed to be all pleased and happy, or make a joke of it, or pretend that I've got a boyfriend, in the hope that my boss will leave me alone, thinking that I'm another man's property. But sometimes, obviously, even this doesn't work—my boss will tell me, 'Well, it doesn't matter about your boyfriend, because I only want you in the lunch hour, or tea break.' So even that doesn't work.

If I offend him, by not being available, I may lose my



job; which if I lose my job is going to make me even more vulnerable to attacks, rape, physical violence, because I won't have the money to run a car (I haven't the money now), or take a cab. So at night, if I dare go out alone, I've got to take public transport, which every woman knows can be a nightmare. You get pestered by men, they touch you up, they chat you up. When I'm travelling alone, I've got the fear that every woman has, that someone will follow me from the tube or from the bus, and assault me, rape me, even kill me.

If I see another man on the street and tell him, 'Somebody's following me, I'm frightened, can you help me, can you give me your protection?', he'll probably say to me, he *will* say to me, 'Why the hell should I protect you? You're not my property; and anyway, you shouldn't be out alone, you should have a man with you.' Or, 'Get yourself a man, and then you won't be scared and you won't need my protection or anybody else's.' He may even 'join in the fun', as they say, with the other man. What happens in lots of cases is they just join in, because most men think rape's a big joke anyway.

This is really what happened to a woman at a women's disco in South London. She was on her way out of the disco with a friend, when some boys attacked them with bottles and a piece of flying glass went into her eye. She went to a pub further down the road to phone for an ambulance, and the guy who came to the door told her to go away, he didn't want to know, because she was from the women's disco down the road. He told her to 'go, I won't help you'.

So really, we're not just at the mercy of the potential rapist, we're at the mercy of every man.

Being a lesbian means I've chosen to live without a man. If I live on my own or with another woman, we're considered fair game. Two single, available women, just waiting for two (or however many) men to come and sweep us off our feet and give us what we need. When we say we're not

interested, they become hostile and violent; so we fear that they might even break into our homes and rape us to teach us a lesson, to put us back in our place where we should be. So we have to lock our doors and windows and be on our guard all the time, which often reduces us to nervous wrecks. We've worked hard for our homes, probably everyone else here does, and we don't want to leave, we want to stay—we like our flat, we like the street we live in; but we have to go because we're scared of the harm that's going to come to us if we stay. If we go to the police, we'll probably be told that we're neurotic lesbians anyway, and they can't do anything until something actually happens, i.e. we've got to wait until we're raped. And probably then nothing will be done anyway.

So I'm not going to have the protection of a man, because I'm a lesbian who's living without a man. At the same time, I haven't got the fear of being raped by my husband or my boyfriend. But there are some of us who are married, married lesbians, who can't leave their husbands because of custody cases. Where they've got children, if it's known that they're lesbian then they're going to lose their children in a custody case. Even if the husband's a right bastard, they're still going to lose the children. So they have to stay. In that way lesbian women get raped by their husbands. They've got to stay because they've got no money to leave, and because of the custody of the children; so they're raped all the time.

You know, people think that lesbian women don't get raped, but we do, just as much as other women do. And we face the fear of rape the same as all the women here.



# Up from under

RUTH HALL

I want to give a short history of how we started Women Against Rape in London, and what we have done.

The group was started about a year and a half ago by seven women. We came from different situations, some of us being full-time housewives, some of us doing secretarial or other jobs; we were of different ages and different nationalities. Some of us were rape victims in the usually understood sense of that term; but one of the first conclusions we came to as a group was that in fact we were all rape 'victims', in that rape had affected all of our lives in one way or another. When we dug into our own experience, we realised that there's a lot of rape going on that doesn't hit the headlines, and that rape isn't a rare thing at all. And from the beginning we saw that we were *all* affected by the *fear* of rape. Whether or not we actually are attacked, we have to calculate for instance, if we want to go out and see a friend in the evening, is it worth walking down the street with your heart thumping in your throat? But why should we have to think before we go out? Isn't it a basic right to be able to go out without having to worry?

The first few months of the group we spent discussing our own experience of rape, and of women's lives generally. We wanted to get to the root of what causes rape, because we decided very early that our goal was to eliminate it. That sometimes sounds like a wild idea. People say, 'You can't really expect to *stop* rape, it's human nature.' But it's not natural and inevitable. It's intolerable, unthinkable, that women should be forced into sex against our will. Rape has certain causes, which we plan to put an end to. We know that rape *can* be stopped, because there is an enormous force against rape, and that force is all women.

Some people think that, as far as rape's concerned, women are victims; and of course, a victim is supposed to be someone who's helpless and can't do anything on her own behalf. But that's a big lie. Rape has been very hidden, but what's been even more hidden is the fight women are making against it. In Women Against Rape, we didn't assume that we were unusual women who knew better than everyone else. We knew if we were frightened other women were frightened, and if we were angry other women were angry, and were doing something about it. The speeches tonight have shown how each of these women, and others in the same situation, have been fighting rape for a long time.

We see Women Against Rape's function as being a focus for the anger and the attack women are already making on rape, bringing the threads together, bringing the women together, so we're not forced each to take on the battle in isolation, in our own marriage or relationships with men, or living without men, or finding ways to keep off rapists in our own neighbourhood. We knew from the beginning that, to break that isolation, what we needed was a campaign. A campaign would make demands on the government aimed at stopping rape, and would mobilise the forces of women to win these demands. We needed a campaign that would be very public, and reach out through the media to women even in very isolated places, and let women know that they weren't alone. A campaign would help break down, all over the country, the idea that rape is all right, and that it's somehow women's fault, that women ask for it.

We knew that self-help measures, like advising women on locking doors and where not to go, and advising women to learn self-defence, could be all very well, but they didn't solve the problem. Even if some of us wanted to learn about locks and karate, this couldn't be our programme against rape. What if you happen to be too old or too small to fight back physically, or perhaps have a disability? And also this approach throws the onus and the work of protecting ourselves right back on to the woman's shoulders, and throws the onus on the woman to limit her movements in



order to stay out of the rapist's way. We also knew that rape crisis centres helping women after rape, though they can be very important—and we are demanding them all over the country—are also an enormous amount of work for the women who run them. And most important, they don't solve the problem of us getting raped in the first place.

So, we set ourselves the goal of ultimately eliminating rape. We knew it was possible, but we knew it would be no easy job. To do it we knew we had to look very hard at what causes rape, and also, at what women are already doing about rape, at how women are already getting at those causes.

## TAKING TO THE STREETS

Our first public action as a group was to take a petition out into the street. That experience was very exciting because it confirmed to us how furious other women were about rape—women were literally queuing up to sign the petition. One of the things people commented on was the House of Lords\* ruling in 1975 which says that it's not rape if the man thinks the woman consented, however unreasonable he is in thinking that. The House of Lords decision really exposed the fact that rape wasn't just a matter between the woman and one crazy rapist. The State was taking sides, and they came down on the side of the rapist. The House of Lords in effect ruled that women are really always available to men, that we should be on tap whenever they fancy they want us.

The other thing that the women we talked to felt strongly about was rape in marriage. We were a bit nervous about putting that into the petition because we thought people might find it threatening. At that time, before the Women Against Rape Campaign, nobody was even mentioning publicly that rape in marriage exists. But as it turned out, the general mood was 'It's about time', about time that rape in marriage is recognised, and recognised as a crime.

\* The upper house of Parliament, operating as the final court of appeal, whose judgement then becomes the law.

We realised, both from that and from our own discussions, that in fact one of the biggest battles women have been making against rape has been against rape in marriage. We've been fighting to establish that sex with a husband or boyfriend should be something that we want; that what happens in bed should satisfy us too, and it's not only his pleasure that counts; and certainly that we shouldn't be forced when we don't want it. That fight's taken a lot of forms, from having a 'headache', on up—the speakers here have spoken about some of them. We've come a long way from Victorian times when, for certain classes of women, you were expected just to lie back and think of England. And that's been part of a whole battle we've been making, not only to refuse to be 'on call' for sex, but to refuse to be on call for anything. As one of our slogans says, 'Eggs in the morning, sex at night, saying no is a woman's right.'

Another right women have been fighting for is the right to go out on our own or with other women. Here again we've made a lot of progress. We're in a much better position than our mothers were. At least in being able to get out of the front door. For instance, if you're married with children, getting the man to babysit. But once we're out, we find we have to deal with rape in the street, and it's very clear that the rapist is on the side that thinks we have no right to be out in the first place. In fact they often say that—they say we were asking for it, out on our own, without a man, that time of night, or in that part of the park, or wearing that sexy dress, or those sexy trousers, or whatever. And they make very plain that rape is not, like some people make out, a matter of uncontrollable sexual urges.

We refuse to believe men are animals, who can't control their urges—they can, and they're going to have to. But at the moment they often don't. It's clear that's first of all because they can afford to let their urges run wild and get away with it. And secondly, it's because they're using sex as a weapon, both inside the home and outside it, to put women back in what's supposed to be our place—which is, by general agreement, at the kitchen sink; and to assert



what is supposed to be their masculinity, which boils down to domination over women. You can see this by the way men joke about rape in the pub; it's supposed to be a good, tough, manly thing to do.

Listening to the speeches tonight, it's clear that what's very fundamental to fighting all this is the fight women have been making over money. A lot of women have gone out to work to have money of our own, to be able to set the terms of relations with men, so they're not so much the boss in the house. That way, of course, we've ended up with more work on top of the housework; and we're generally still dependent on a man for big things like rent, because women's wages are only about half men's—and for housework we get no wage at all. But even the money we have made that way has helped to make it possible for us to refuse to be ordered around, refuse to do all the shopping, cooking, cleaning, refuse to stay in at night, and refuse to put up with rape.

What's been even more crucial, as Jenny's speech has shown, has been the fact that, if we *leave* a man, we've won the right to Social Security, which is independent money of our own. That has meant a lot of women being able to walk out on rapist husbands, a lot of women—lesbian or not—never going *into* marriages; and it's meant that, for women who get married and stay married, the relationship's quite different. A lot of men know that, if they push us around too much, we'll be packing our bags.

This fight women have been making for money is also a fight against rape in the streets: first of all, for the obvious reason that when we can afford a car or a taxi we're much less vulnerable than when we're walking, or hitching, or waiting for a bus that never comes. But secondly, crucially, because in the long term women having money independent of men is going to put paid to the idea that we always owe them something, that we're available even when we say no, as the House of Lords ruling presumes we are. It'll also put paid to the idea that we can be pushed around by judges, the police or anyone else.

Women's economic dependence on men is the fundamental cause of rape. A lot of people blame attitudes for rape, but the question is—where do the attitudes come from? It's clear that when women have no money of our own there's a general expectation that we can be pushed around and expected to serve men; that's what children see at home and everywhere, and that's the expectation every boy grows up with.

So that it's obvious that to be realistic about stopping rape we have to deal with money—both on the level of individual cases where women need cash and housing to leave a situation, or compensation after a rape, and on the level of establishing as a right that every woman must have the financial independence she needs to leave a situation where she is vulnerable to rape. This strategy is in line with what women everywhere are already doing about rape.

Another key thrust of the campaign is the question of where the State comes down. The House of Commons, the House of Lords, the Cabinet, social workers, the Department of Health and Social Security etc., enforce women's subordinate position and financial dependence which ultimately cause rape. Then the police and the courts back up the rapist.

A lot of women knew where the State stood long before the House of Lords decision. Because another unrecognised way that these so-called victims have been fighting against rape has been to report it, and try to get the rapist convicted and taken off the streets. And what women have found when we do report rape is that the police keep us waiting for hours, take our clothes, put us through a heavy grilling; and very often they treat us with contempt, disbelief, and no consideration for either what we have been through or for what we are contributing by reporting the crime. Then in court, we often find yet again that we are the ones on trial, we're the ones who are assumed to be guilty. And if we're Black, or poor, or an unmarried mother, or a prostitute, or can be accused of being a prostitute, or if the man is white, well off and respectable, then we're



doubly accused before the trial begins.

A number of women have come out and said the trial was the worst part of it, that it's like going through the rape all over again, the same humiliation, the same complete lack of respect because you're 'only a woman'. Women come out with the conclusion that the courts and the police aren't really trying to stop rape. And that's underlined by the sentences—after what she's gone through the woman can find herself facing the fact that the man may be walking the streets free in six months, or quite often that he's not going to prison at all.

### OPENING CLOSED DOORS

In this country, the one who really exposed these court accomplices in rape was Carol Maggs, who was raped by an army Guardsman named Tom Holdsworth. He raped her, broke several ribs, and caused very serious physical injuries that had her in hospital for months afterwards. He was tried and sentenced, appealed, and three Appeal Court judges let him off with a suspended sentence, on the grounds that it would ruin his army career if he were jailed.

What was exceptional about this case was not what happened, because that kind of thing is happening all the time; what was exceptional was that the woman blew the whistle by going to the Press. That was June 1977. Immediately, there was an outcry from women all over the country. It was quite clear that the courts were saying we were worth nothing, that they were giving licence to rape, and we all knew we couldn't let it pass.

At that time, Women Against Rape had organised a public meeting—our first public meeting. And from that meeting a lot of ideas came out about what we should do about Carol Maggs's case. The first thing we did was to picket the courts where the decision had been made. But we weren't really content to stand there on the picket line, it didn't seem enough to stand outside. So a number of us decided

that we'd go in, and we went into the courts and found the place where Judge Roskill (one of the judges who had made that decision) was sitting; and we started chanting and unfolding our Women Against Rape banner and shouting at him, and eventually he had to leave the courtroom. Various people were coming in, trying to get us to go, and we just told them, 'Listen, it's all very well to ask us to leave, but what happens when a woman asks a rapist to leave?'

That was quite a breakthrough for us, partly because most of us hadn't done that kind of thing before, and it takes a little bit of breaking the ice before you find the nerve in yourself to walk into a court room and start shouting. But the level of anger was running so high that we just felt we had to do something like that; and once we'd started it began to seem much more possible.

After that we did it again! We invaded the Atheneum, a very exclusive club which some of the judges belong to. We invaded the Ministry of Defence after another military rape case. (That I think shocked them most of all, because if anybody is supposed to be able to defend themselves against invasions it's the Ministry of Defence.) And then the *Guardian* newspaper came out with an article called 'The Rapist's Reply', written by the features editor. We thought that took quite a lot of nerve on their part. The article told us we were all rather foolish to be worried about rape, and it was also very racist. We invaded the *Guardian* and extracted from them equal space to reply, and wrote a big article about Women Against Rape.

So by the middle of the summer people knew that rape wasn't something that was going to pass as acceptable any more, and neither was defending rapists—whether in court or in top class, 'liberal' newspapers. They knew that there was a group in the country that was ready to take action against people who are defending rape, and that there was so much support for us that they couldn't do what otherwise would have been quite simple, which is to arrest us. They knew they couldn't arrest us because they knew women all over the country were so furious about what was



happening that, if they'd tried to arrest women and say, 'These are terribly unreasonable women who ought to be jailed or fined,' they would have found themselves with even more unreasonable women on their hands. So we were able to have quite an effect because of the fury there was among women, not only in our own group, but all around the country.

## THE WOMEN'S COURT

The biggest event we organised was not an invasion, but a public trial, a women's court, in Trafalgar Square, which we organised with the help of the Wages for Housework Campaign. Many people will have seen it on the news. We had a woman judge who was me, a woman prosecutor, women in the witness stand, and the jury were all the women who had come to the trial. The people we called to trial were judges and government ministers, as representatives of government and industry; because we were saying that, although individual men are the ones who actually do the raping, we're not going to let off the hook the authorities that are condoning it and encouraging it, and putting women in a position where we're vulnerable to rape. The defendants were charged with 'rape, conspiracy to rape and perpetrate violence against women, rape of justice' and upholding 'men's power over us in order to uphold their own power over everyone'.

We called to trial the Minister of Defence, the Appeal Judges and the Lord Chancellor, who is responsible for the judiciary; the Minister for Social Security, who is responsible for the cohabitation ruling whereby a woman living with a man is not entitled to her own money, but must depend on the man; the Home Secretary and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The defendants didn't show up, but a woman artist had made a big screen with portraits of them, so we had that instead.

The purpose of the trial was first of all to expose how much rape is going on. We knew that so long as our lips are

sealed our hands are tied, and that each woman when she's raped is forced to keep it a secret, to repress it and to carry that load inside herself. We said that any woman could testify, and that all evidence against the defendants was admissible evidence—just as anything we've ever done in our lives can be used as evidence against us in a rape trial. Anything a woman considered rape was rape.

There were some twenty witnesses that day, who came up to speak about their own rape, about rape as they'd experienced it. Carol Maggs testified about what had happened to her. There were women who testified about being raped as children by fathers or stepfathers—which is very common, and very much hidden. One of the women who spoke about being raped as a child said she couldn't even tell her mother, because what was her mother going to do about it? It was the stepfather who was meddling with her, and her mother was dependent on this man. She knew that, if she did report it, the man would go and she'd end up in a children's home because her mother had no money to keep her.

There were lesbian women who spoke about men feeling that if you're lesbian that's a provocation. There were women who testified about rape in the office and rape in the factory. Mrs. Desai from Grunwick spoke. A number of Black women spoke about the kind of conditions in a ghetto which lead to rape, and about what kind of rape emigration itself is, in that you're separated off from the life you have known and—very often—from your children. Prostitute women spoke about the rape you have to put up with when you're a prostitute. The police and the landlord demand sexual services from you; and of course, you can't go to the police because what you're doing is supposed to be far more illegal than what the rapist is doing. Women spoke about rape in marriage, and about the rape of older women. One woman spoke of having to hide her limp in case men in the street thought her an easy target. And that's just part of the list.\*

\* The full transcript of this trial, together with other Women Against Rape material, will be published in a forthcoming book, *Women Against Rape*.



We're normally prevented from ever saying what is going on and naming a lot of guilty parties, who are usually even better hidden than the rape. It was an amazing feeling of women's strength and power in Trafalgar Square that day. And that strength and power didn't stop in the square. A lot of media were there, and let women everywhere know what was happening. People far and wide heard about the trial—women in Los Angeles told us that they'd heard about it on the news.

As women have heard about Women Against Rape, we've been getting flooded with letters from women saying they want to take part, they'd like to circulate our petition, they want to start a Women Against Rape group. A number of men also were very excited by the trial. Even before the trial some men had issued a statement in support of what we were doing, and in support also of our right to decide when, where and how we wanted men to be present in supporting us.

Since the trial, we've been expanding on a national level. There are groups now in a number of cities, and new groups starting all over the place. In Manchester, for instance, a three year old girl was raped by a wealthy young man, and the judge let him off with a suspended sentence. Her mother got up a petition, got in touch with us in London, and started a Women Against Rape group.

We've been taking up individual cases of women who are in a situation where they've been raped, or are afraid of being raped, and want to do something about it. That includes confronting the housing authorities, and confronting the Department of Health and Social Security. We bring the power of W.A.R. to back up individual women in pressing for the money and housing they need to avoid rape. And at the same time, tied in with this, we are pressing for *every* woman to be able, as a right, to claim money when she needs it against rape.

In the same way, we're fighting to get government compensation *after* rape. Rape involves tremendous financial

costs, and we don't see why women should be the ones to pay them. People often don't realise, they think you're just raped and that's the end of it. But in fact on top of all the physical and emotional suffering, you very often lose a job, or lose a boyfriend or husband. Very often you have to move house to get away from memories, or from the rapist. Even if he's been found guilty, he may still be free. You need money to start putting your life together. Yet Carol Maggs was offered only £150 [\$300] by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, and many women get nothing. While it's only women paying, the State won't take rape seriously. So we're demanding compensation for every rape from the government, compensation that is appropriate to what the woman's been through, and which covers her costs—including the cost of abortion or bringing up a child that results from a rape.

At the same time, we're continuing the assault on the courts. We've sent a deputation to the Home Office and presented a brief to the government, giving a whole series of examples of the courts' 'green light' policy on rape.\* We've also organised pickets, and other actions around specific cases. And we're pursuing the judges themselves who are encouraging rape, with special attention for Roskill, Widen and Slynn who were so concerned about Guardsman Holdsworth's career. It's time to put an end to *their* careers.

After less than a year of public campaigning, we are already feeling the results of the Women Against Rape Campaign. We know that the government and the judges are feeling the pressure. For instance, you may have seen the big headline, 'Woman Power', when a judge said he had to give a rapist a six year sentence because *women* would not allow him to do less.† And beyond that, we're finding that since

\* This brief will be available as a pamphlet, to be published later in 1978.

† The judge was Neil McKinnon, who later went out of his way to endorse the racist language of a member of a fascist organisation appearing before him on a charge of attempting to stir up racial hatred. The outcry against McKinnon's racism followed a precedent and pattern set by Women Against Rape, with a court invasion and demands for the judge's dismissal. Women Against Rape joined in making these demands, charging that racial violence has always meant the rape of women, particularly Black women; and that judges who are against the rape of some women and for the rape of others are not qualified to sit in courts of justice.



women have begun to get together and speak out against rape, it's more and more possible to come out and say what is really happening in our lives. It's much harder for people anywhere to justify rape or say we get what we deserve. And it's easier for *us* to get some of what *we* deserve, all over the country. It's becoming more and more clear not only how far-reaching is all women's fight against rape, but how far-reaching are its implications. Women everywhere are saying no to all the ways we've been used, and abused, and to all the ways we've always been expected to be available on demand.

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*Women Against Rape groups are now forming in many towns and cities. Please contact one of these W.A.R. addresses for up to date information:*

Women Against Rape, London  
60 Westbourne Park Villas,  
London W.2., England. (tel: 01 221 5754)

Women Against Rape, Bristol  
150 Richmond Road, Montpelier,  
Bristol 6, England. (tel: 0272 422810)

Women Against Rape, Cambridge  
19 City Road,  
Cambridge, England. (tel: 0223 57142)

*To get in touch with groups in North America working along similar lines to W.A.R. in Britain contact:*

U.S.A.

Black Women for Wages for Housework  
c/o Brown, 100 Boerum Place,  
Brooklyn, New York 11201. (tel: 212 834 0992)

Canada

Women Against Rape, Toronto  
P.O. Box 38, Station E,  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada. (tel: 416 466 7457)

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# If YOU REALLY WANT TO KNOW ABOUT RAPE, READ THIS

For the first time in print, women in Britain tell of the rape they have experienced—and what they are doing to stop it.

**Jenny Smith** on rape and battering in marriage, and how she fought to get out.

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**Karen Crocker** who worked as a stripper and was raped on her way home from work. When the judge said no lasting harm had been done, she went to the press with her story.

**Jan Wills** on the violence lesbian women face both on the streets and in marriage.

**Ruth Hall**, national spokeswoman for W.A.R., on the massive movement to finally end rape.

**Caroline Barker** who introduces the pamphlet is a founding member of W.A.R. Bristol.

**WOMEN AGAINST RAPE** is known throughout Britain for invading courts, government offices, the Atheneum club and a national newspaper—shaking the serene security of those who, till now, have ignored or encouraged rape. W.A.R.'s Women's Court in Trafalgar Square, London, in July 1977 broke the silence that has hidden most rape and opened the floodgates of women's pent-up fury.

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