

many of the residents just to the north now want me to stay out for good. The others—perhaps still a majority, perhaps not—simply expect much more of me than handyman jobs, and who can blame them? Who wants to be painted all over with Dogwood and Pomegranate? Who wants an amateur decorator who can't fill his Saturdays? Nobody. Maybe it wasn't just that store on 105th Street that got redeveloped that afternoon. Maybe it was me."

Hearing

IN each of the past three years, the New York State Legislature has defeated proposals to liberalize the state's eighty-six-year-old criminal-abortion statute, which permits an abortion only when the operation is necessary to preserve a pregnant woman's life. Now a reform bill introduced by State Assemblyman Albert H. Blumenthal, of New York County, appears likely to pass. It would amend "life" to "health," and give relief to women who are physically or mentally unequipped to care for a child or who risk bearing a deformed child, to victims of rape and incest, and to the very young. A second bill is also pending. Sponsored by Assemblywoman Constance Cook, of the 125th Assembly District, it would repeal the abortion law entirely and make abortion available on the same basis as any other medical treatment. The repeal bill has received little public attention. Newspapers that mention it at all tend to treat it as a quixotic oddity. Most people do not know that the Cook bill exists, and some legislators, when asked for their support, have professed not to have heard of it. A number of women's organizations, however, are very much aware of the repeal proposal and are determined to spread the word. These groups are part of a revived—and increasingly militant—feminist movement. They include the National Organization for Women (NOW), the radical October Seventeenth Movement (a split-off from NOW), and Women's Liberation, a collective label for radical feminist groups formed by women activists who found that men on the left too often expected them to type, make coffee, and keep quiet. Whatever their ideological differences, feminists have united on the abortion issue. They oppose Blumenthal's reforms—or any reforms—and demand total repeal. Abortion legislation, they assert, is

class legislation, imposed on women by a male-supremacist society, and deprives women of control over their bodies. They argue that women should not have to petition doctors (mostly male) to grant them as a privilege what is really a fundamental right, and that only the pregnant woman herself can know whether she is physically and emotionally prepared to bear a child.

Last Thursday, the Joint Legislative Committee on the Problems of Public Health convened in the Public Health Building, at 125 Worth Street, to hear a panel of expert witnesses—doctors, lawyers, and clergymen selected for their knowledge of medical, legal, and social problems connected with abortion—who were to comment on the law and suggest modifications. About thirty women, including City Councilman Carol Greitzer, came to the hearings to demonstrate against reform and for repeal, against more hearings and for immediate action, and against the committee's concept of expertise. "The only real experts on abortion are women," read a leaflet distributed by Women's Liberation. "Women who have known the pain, fear, and socially imposed guilt of an illegal abortion. Women who have seen their friends dead or in agony from a post-abortion infection. Women who have had children by the wrong man, at the wrong time, because no doctor would help them." The demonstrators, about half of them young women and half middle-aged housewives and professionals, picketed outside the building until the proceedings began, at 10 A.M. Then they filed into the hearing room. The eight members of the Joint Committee—all male—were lined up on a platform facing the audience. The chairman, State Senator Norman F. Lent, announced that the purpose of the meeting was not to hear public opinion but, rather, to hear testimony from "experts familiar with the psychological and sociological facts." Of the fifteen witnesses listed on the agenda, fourteen were men; the lone woman was a nun.

The first witness, the chairman of the Governor's commission on abortion reform, began enumerating the commission's recommendations. Suddenly, a young, neatly dressed woman seated near the front stood up. "O.K., folks," she said. "Now it's time to hear from the real experts. I don't mean the public opinion you're so uninterested in. I mean concrete evidence from the people who really know—women. I

can tell you the psychological and sociological effect the law has had on me—it's made me *angry!* It's made me think about things like forcing doctors to operate at gunpoint."

It took several minutes for Senator Lent to collect himself and try to restore order. By that time, several other women were on their feet, shouting.

"Where are the women on your panel?" one woman said.

"I had an abortion when I was seventeen. You don't know what that's like," another said.

"Men don't get pregnant. Men don't rear children. They just make the laws," said a third.

Senator Lent began, "If you girls can organize yourselves and select a spokesman—"

"We don't want a spokesman! We all want to testify!" a woman cried.

"But wait a minute, dear—" the Senator began.

"Don't call me 'dear'! Would you call a black person 'boy'?" the woman shouted.

The committee quickly adjourned the hearing and announced that there would be a closed executive session in an upstairs room.

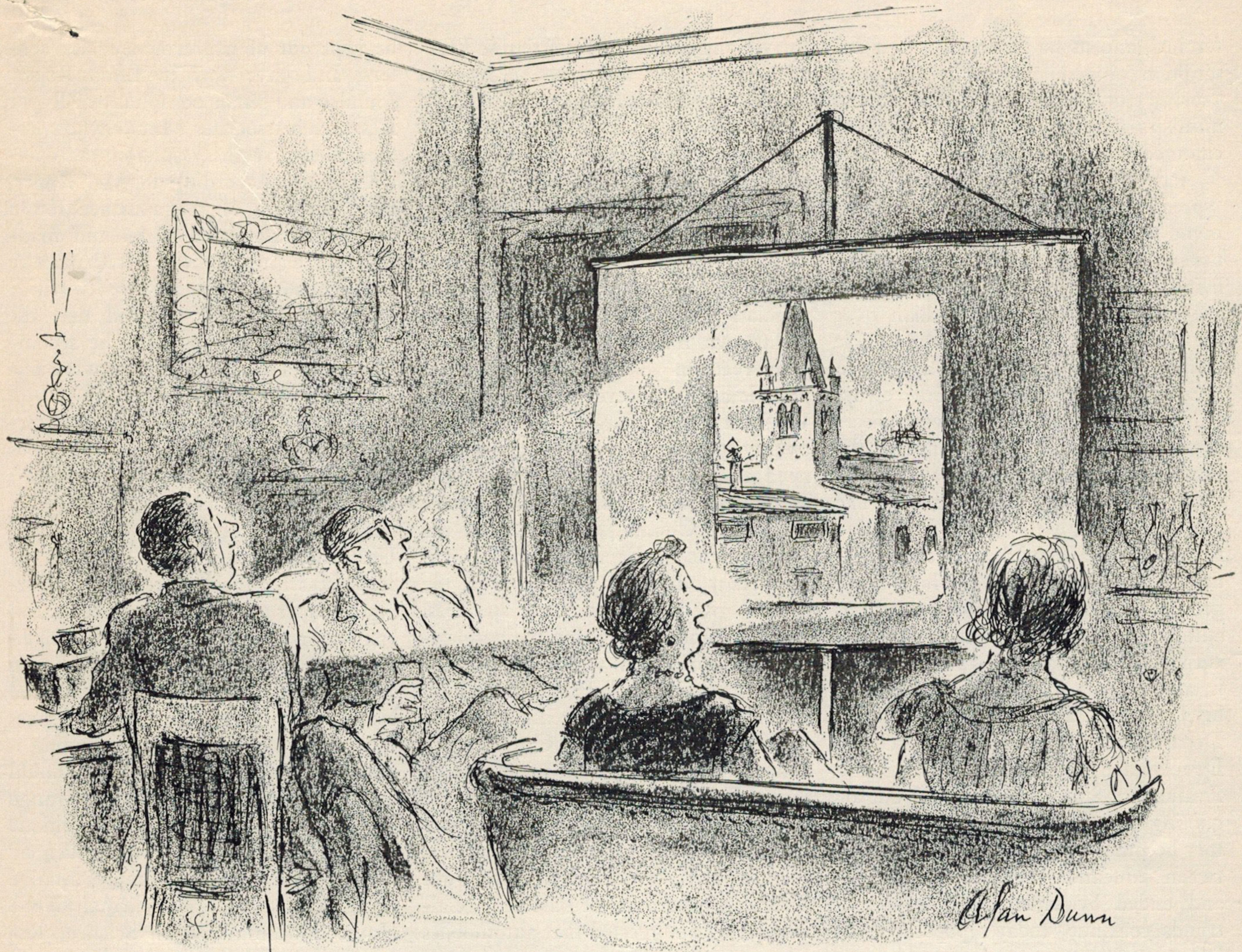
Senator Seymour Thaler, who has been long associated with hospital reform, and who is himself a proponent of the Cook bill, was furious with the women. "What have you accomplished?" he called out. "There are people here who want to do something for you!"

"We're tired of being done for! We want to *do*, for a change!" one of the women replied.

Upstairs, police barred the door, and the women stood outside shouting, "We are the experts!" Women's Liberation sent in a formal request to testify, and the committee replied that two women might speak after the other witnesses had finished. The women were not satisfied ("It's a back-of-the-bus compromise!") "They just want to stall us till the newspapermen go home"), but half a dozen members of Women's Liberation decided to stick it out. All of them were under thirty, and half were married. Two had had illegal abortions; one had had a child and given it up for adoption; one had a friend who had nearly died because she hesitated to go to the hospital after a badly done seven-hundred-dollar operation.

As it turned out, the women waited for seven hours, sitting on the floor in the corridor, because the authorities, afraid of further disruption, would not let them into the hearing room. Finally, three women were permitted to





"I don't remember Verona very well. I guess I didn't buy anything there."

speaking. They talked about their experiences and demanded a public hearing that would be devoted entirely to the expert testimony of women.

The legislators would not agree to this. "Why do you assume we're against you?" one senator asked. "Four of the witnesses were for repeal. They said the same things you've been saying."

"There's a political problem you're overlooking," said the last of the women to speak. "In this society, there is an imbalance in power between men and women, just as there is between whites and blacks. You and your experts may have the right ideas, but you're still men talking to each other. *We* want to be consulted. Even if we accepted your definition of expert—and we don't—couldn't you find any female doctors or lawyers?"

"I agree with you about the law," Senator Thaler said. "But you're just acting out your personal pique against men."

"Not personal pique—*political grievance!*" the final speaker replied.

"All I can say," Senator Thaler de-

clared, in conclusion, "is that you're the rudest bunch of people I've ever met."

The meeting broke up, and everyone began drifting out. "Well, we're probably the first women ever to talk about our abortions in public," one woman said. "That's something, anyway."

OVERHEARD Sunday before last in Chappaqua, when a heavy but lacy filigree of snow had begun to cover house, field, and tree, a bundled-up matron, climbing into a taxi in front of her house, to the driver: "Another damned fairyland!"

1969 to 2019

THE proliferation of problems in this increasingly complex society of ours has led to a proliferation of conferences on how to deal with the problems, which, in turn, has given rise to seemingly endless discussion about what sort of projections to make, plans to draw up, and policies to implement in order to solve the problems that, in

Mother Goose progression, led to the conferences that gave rise to the discussion—or so it seemed to us by the time we had finished looking in on the American Institute of Planners' Conference that was held for two days recently in the Sert Room of the Waldorf-Astoria. The conference was entitled "Building the Future Environment—An Atlantic Region Perspective to the Year 2020," and was attended by more than four hundred businessmen, government officials, architects, planners, and educators. When we arrived for the first seminar, we found Boris Pushkarev, planning director of the Regional Plan Association, in the midst of delivering a paper that presented a detailed forecast for living and working conditions in the urbanized northeastern-seaboard corridor. Mr. Pushkarev was speaking from a lectern that stood in front of an electronic digital-display unit, which, to dramatize the problems facing the now and future inhabitants of Megalopolis, had been set to advance at the rate of one year for every half hour of the con-