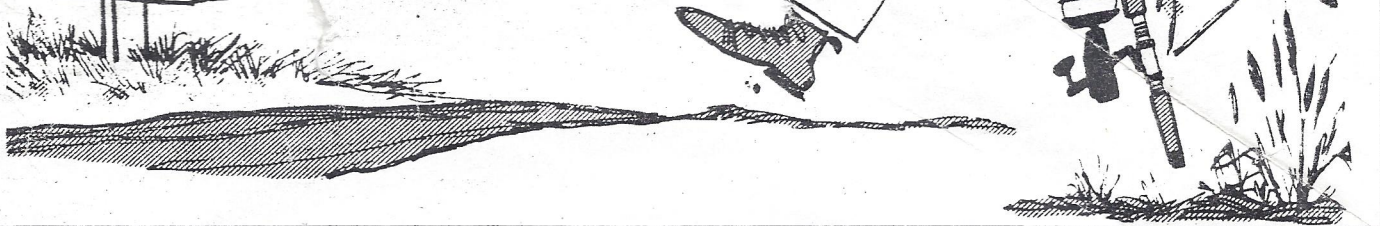


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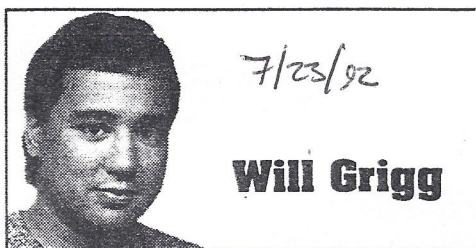


# ARM specializes in legal stunts

A Hollywood star caught in a reflective mood will muse, "You know, what I really want to do is direct." Those who witnessed the court test of the Utah abortion law may suspect that attorney Janet Benshoof, who argued the ACLU's case against the law, is from the Jonathan Demme school of legal theory. Mr. Demme is the Oscar-winning director of "Silence of the Lambs" and co-creator of the cinematic mass murderer Hannibal Lecter. He is also, appropriately enough, an abortion-rights advocate; Demme participated in last spring's pro-abortion march in Washington, D.C.

Janet Benshoof compensates for her scanty legal skills by devising theatrical spectacles; it was her stated intention to turn the ACLU's challenge into a "show trial." Benshoof has since left the ACLU to concentrate exclusively upon abortion. Her latest directoral credit came in the cases of Leona Bente, a pregnant activist from California who smuggled a quantity of the illegal abortion pill RU-486 into America.

Benshoof informed all and sundry that Bente was fighting a deadline: the drug would only be effective until the eighth week of pregnancy, and she was "terrified" by the prospect of a conventional abortion. As it happened, Bente had undergone a surgical abortion in 1983; furthermore, nothing would have prevented the woman from taking the drug in England, where she had obtained it. Benshoof's deadline was a device designed to



## At Home and Abroad

wring pathos from Bente's situation. An appeal was made to the Supreme Court, which upheld the confiscation of Bente's drug by Customs officials.

Nearly every element of the Bente affair — the decision to smuggle the drug into the country, the media coverage of Bente's arrival, the confiscation of the drugs by Customs officials (who had been informed of Bente's trip), the appeal to the Supreme Court — was choreographed by Benshoof and the Abortion Rights Mobilization (ARM). It is unclear whether Bente's pregnancy itself was the result of a preconceived design, but one is entitled to suspect that such an act is within the compass of ARM's cynicism. ARM specializes in high-profile, "consciousness-raising" legal stunts. Just a few years ago the Supreme Court turned down an ARM request to deprive the Catholic Church of its tax-exempt status.

The Bente melodrama was not the only recent example of abortion-related politi-

cal theater. On the morning of June 30, a small group of Logan pro-abortion activists invaded the Cache County courthouse. One of the activists slumped to the floor to play the role of a dead "Jane Doe," while two others caterwauled in feigned grief. The objective of this protest, which was planned by NOW several months ago, was to provoke law enforcement officials into arresting the protesters. Much to his credit, the local sheriff refused to indulge the protesters.

Logan NOW co-ordinator Rebecca Wheeler (who has also served as head of the Logan ACLU) supervised the Logan protest. Wheeler explained, "In unity we register our refusal to abide the slow garroting of women's freedom ... we mourn the assault on women's competence." Such poorly-parsed remarks illustrate why Wheeler's group prefers tantrums over debate. Like Benshoof, Wheeler represents that element of the Left that believes that logic is transmitted through the tear ducts.

It should come as no surprise that Wheeler co-ordinated the NOW picket of last April's LDS General Conference, during which Elder Richard Scott was defamed as a servant and protector of child molesters.

Lights, camera, pathos! Leftist activism is increasingly the politics of melodrama; with the media prompting the electorate: Boo the villains! Weep for the victims! Cheer the liberators! The spectacle does nothing to advance the cause of reason, but it makes a wonderful emetic.