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Raising a voice for choice



by Laura Martins

Pro-choice activists and supporters gathered last Saturday October 13 at Queen's Part to voice their opposition to the Federal government's Bill C-43 which would place abortion back in the Criminal code.

Members of York's Women's Centre, along with approximately 50 other York students under the Centre's banner, joined the pro-choice supporters. Jayne Heard, a member of the Women's Centre, said that the main concern expressed by students in the few days prior to the rally was whether or not abortions are legal.

"A lot of people aren't sure of where Canada stands in terms of the legality of abortion," said Heard. "We had a lot of people coming up and asking if it is illegal to have an abortion?" Perhaps they misunderstood the bill for a law."

The members of the Centre, however, don't see this lack of awareness as peculiar to York students.

"I think a lot of people are unclear about the bill. I don't think it says anything about York. It says something

about the ambiguity of the legal system," said Centre member Elise Chenier.

Other York groups at the rally included Osgoode students and faculty under the banner "Osgoode for Choice," the York club of International Socialists and the York New Democrats.

Last May 29 the House of Commons passed Bill C-43 by nine votes. It now awaits passage by the Senate which is presently bogged down with the proposed GST legislation. If passed, this law will make abortions illegal unless a doctor judges that the woman's mental, physical, or psychological health is at risk.

Despite the fact that the bill hasn't become law, it has created an access problem for women across the country seeking abortions. Fearing prosecution, a number of doctors, even those who are pro-choice, are withdrawing abortion services. According to Linda Tornay, the president of the Ontario Labour Council, 59 per cent of obstetricians across Ontario are refusing to perform abortions.

Michelle Robidoux of the Ontario Coalition for Abortion Clinics stated that Metro Toronto, one of the better access areas in Canada, is also suffering. Previous to Bill C-43 there was a seven to ten day waiting period which has now increased to 30 days.

Anne Swarbrick, the new provincial Women's Issue's Minister delivered encouraging political support at the rally for the Pro-choice movement.

"I am delighted to be here, representing a government that has proven that it is a feminist government," said Swarbrick. She received an enthusiastic response from a crowd, which police estimated at 1,200, when she called upon the Federal government to withdraw Bill C-43.

Once the speeches ended, the crowd marched down to Old City Hall. A small group of pro-life demonstrators stood on the corner of College St. and University Avenue holding up posters of human fetuses as the crowd chanted pro-choice slogans. No confrontations took place.

30 similar rallies took place in cities across Canada.