

IN-DEPTH *A Feature*

ABORTION

Regardless of how one looks at the issue, abortion takes lives.

Notwithstanding the debate over whether or not the practice of abortion is tantamount to the termination of a (unborn) human being; there can be no such ambivalence over the recent deaths of Dr. David Gunn, Dr. John Britton and retired air force Lt. Col. James Barrett. In two separate incidents over the last two years, these three men were murdered, outside of Florida abortion clinics, by abortion protestors.

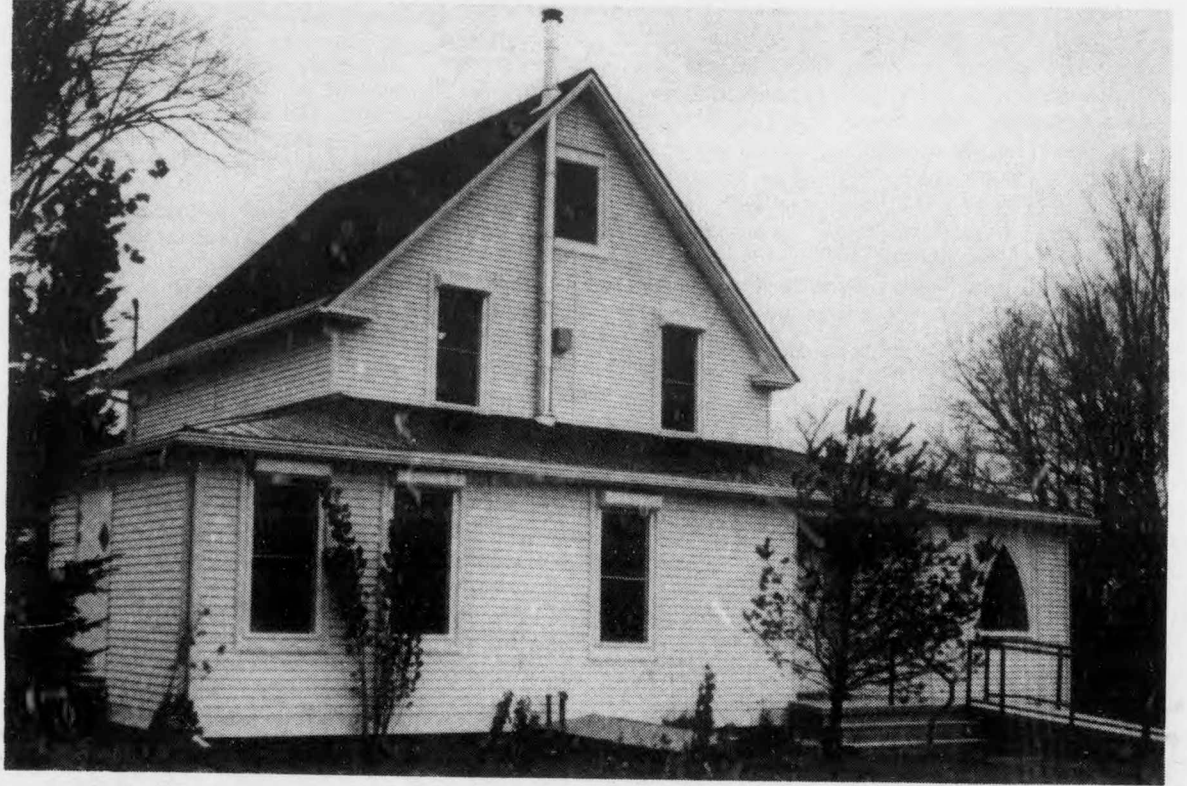
Paul Hill, a former Presbyterian minister was recently found guilty of murder, and could face the death penalty for the shotgun slayings of Dr. Britton, his escort James Barrett and the wounding of Barrett's wife June. Particularly disturbing is the fact that Hill's only defence has been his unwavering conviction that homicide is justifiable in order to save the lives of fetuses; arguing in his summation to the jury that "You have a responsibility to protect your neighbour's life and to use force if necessary to do so."

Apparently Hill's radical sentiments are shared by others including a Maryland organization, Defenders of the Defenders of Life, which explicitly advocates killing abortion providers and has openly endorsed Paul Hill's actions.

Canadians who might have once comforted themselves with the belief that such extremism surely would not manifest itself north of the American border, would be well-advised to disabuse themselves of any such notions in view of the recent shooting of Dr. Garson Romalis.

Dr. Romalis, a Vancouver gynecologist, was wounded in the leg by an unknown sniper while eating breakfast at his home. While police have no suspect in the case, they believe that the murder attempt is linked to Dr. Romalis's performing abortions. His home had been plagued in the past by harassing phone calls and anti-abortion protests.

Acts of violence such as these serve to obliterate the former relative polarity of the abortion debate. Whereas the convenient dichotomy of Pro-Life versus Pro-Choice once sufficed to identify most individuals who expressed an opinion on this emotionally charged issue, it now appears that a third category must reluctantly be acknowledged. Given that the professed goals of these anti-abortion extremists are clearly inimical to those of any group purporting to take a so-called Pro-Life stance, it hardly seems consistent to subsume the two under one heading. To do so would be analogous to the para-



Dr. Henry Morgentaler's clinic in Nashwaaksis

doxical claim made by Robert Jay Lifton's *Nazi Doctors* that they could heal through killing.

Affording Anti-Abortion radicals recognition as a distinct group in the abortion debate, should not be misconstrued as ascribing any modicum of legitimacy to their practices.

Clearly such terrorist tactics have no place in what should be a peaceful, albeit, often passionate, discourse on the place of abortion in our society. Words, not bullets, shall hopefully continue to determine the outcome of the abortion debate.

With this focus in mind, this week's

In-Depth feature, pitting arguments against counter-arguments, endeavours to further elucidate this contentious debate. As with all In-Depth features, reader feedback is welcomed and encouraged.

Luke Peterson
In-depth Editor

An Exchange:

What has society gained or lost by the right to abortion?

PRO

By A.J. Carisse

Originally intended as a discussion on the ethical merits of the right to abortion, I am pleased that my counterpart on this issue, John Valk, has reformulated the question under debate as: "What has society gained and/or lost by the right to abortion?" Thus phrased, this takes the issue out of the realm of ethics, as is indeed proper, unless one is bound by the strident and vacuous claims of utilitarianism, the extent of the value of something to "society" is inconsequential to ethical inquiry. In any case, abortion is not a matter of ethics, but one of prudence, as is the case with all affairs of a fundamentally personal nature.

We may still indulge ourselves on the overall measure of utility flowing from the existence of such rights, if only for our edification. First, we must delimit the concept of "society". Although this term is carelessly posited as some form of reified pseudo entity, it merely comprises the collection of individuals within a common classification, with no other validity beyond the compilation of cumulative generality. For our purposes, we will understand it as comprising the set of human beings on Earth. What it cannot include is merely potential members of society, whether pre- or post gestation.

The obvious starting point is the effect abortion may have upon the aborter. A situation of significant disutility has been avoided through the upholding of this practice, sparing the person of a great deal of personal grief, physical trauma and risk, long-term financial hardship, and/or the psychological pain of giving birth only to be forced into abandonment. Of course, many willingly take on these burdens, but the commitment of bearing a child is a great one, and certainly ought to be made with conviction, both for the parents' sake and for the welfare of their prospective progeny.

The welfare of society in general is also upheld by this right. As recognized in its being upheld by the Supreme Court,

"[e]ach is the proper guardian of his own health, whether bodily or mental and spiritual. Mankind are greater gainers by suffering each other to live as seems good to themselves than by compelling each to live as seems good to the rest" (J.S. Mill, as cited in R.v. Morgentaler, [1988] 1 S.C.R. 30). Not only do we have no business deciding these matters for others, but in doing so we fail to realize the compelling principle of affording proper respect to others, which not only violates the proper level of dignity deserving to every human being, it greatly interferes with the achievement of the "greatest good for the greatest number." Although a utilitarian of the first order, Mill at least retained the presence of mind to realize this fundamental truth.

No doubt, the legions of busybodies who object to this practice on the grounds of grandeur notions of propriety will claim a net loss of utility from their squabbling. While this is true, and indeed we tend to disagree on a great many issues, life would be dull indeed if we agreed on everything, and short of establishing justifiable grounds for taking action (which does not obtain here), at the very least we must afford others the same right to hold an opinion as we, which would eliminate this problem. Even worse are the claims wielded on religious grounds. Although abortion may be excluded from their religious tenets, it must be understood that not all persons share their ideology and practices, and they at the very least could spare us of their supernatural admonitions and threats.

Finally, it is argued that society is made worse off by failing to procreate. This is simply not the case. The major crisis facing humanity is the inadequacy of our limited resources toward our exploding overpopulation, and if nothing else, we must exercise discretion in our reproduction. One thing is for sure - failing to add to this problem is hardly grounds for its compulsion. To those seeking to adopt, and somehow feel deprived in such a situation, there is no

shortage of available candidates, to put it mildly, to which they ought to confine their efforts if they are serious at all about this.

Society would be far better off if all of us spent less time trying to unjustifiably force our personal preferences upon others. Human life does indeed hold immeasurable value. The ability to reproduce is merely one of the many ways this becomes expressed. We cannot view this as mere breeding; human beings are far more than mere instruments to be viewed in such a feral manner. Whether one may own and breed cattle is one thing - human beings are not property, and to view even one as such is inhuman.

CON

Abortion: Social Loss or Gain?

By John Valk

The issue of abortion in Canada is nothing short of controversial. It has generated many acrimonious and heated debates. Pro-choice and anti-abortion "camps" have addressed its every nuanced aspect, generally while talking past each other. Canadians are hopelessly divided on the issue. There is a lack of consensus, evident in the government's very inability to rule on it.

What has been gained, or lost, in all this melee? Have Canadians advanced as a society in according women the right to abortion? Are we a better society as a result of it?

Pro-choice advocates fought long and hard for the right of women to control their own bodies. There has been an important victory: the freedom to choose. No longer are women forced by law to subject their own bodies against their will. No longer are they forced by law to bear what all too often became their sole responsibility. Women, more so than men, have keenly understood what this meant, and the liberation that has been achieved. Women have clearly gained. Society has listened to the voice of women.

Not infrequently, what one person gains another many lose. This is most evi-

dent with abortion, and the very reason why it is so controversial. What has been a principle gain for women, has been a real loss for the unborn.

Anti-abortion advocates have argued strongly that the unborn must be accorded status. A fetus is nothing less than a human being, in a primary stage of development. Abortion ruthlessly destroys a child, they state, at a stage when it is most vulnerable and in need of protection. No slight of hand terminology - "fetus", "tissue", "medical procedure" - disguises the fact that a human is violently ripped from the very environment meant to nurture it. The unborn have clearly not gained. Society has failed to protect them.

If the debates have in the past polarized between the rights of women and the rights of the unborn there has recently been a softening of attitudes. Both sides now recognize that when it comes to abortion no one wins. Who can be content with the increasing number of women seeking abortions, other than those profiting from performing the "procedure"? So the question comes back to us; has society gained or lost when it comes to abortion?

Few will deny that women have gained a valuable right. Even fewer will want to take it away from them. But the right gained is not a right unencumbered. Abortion carries with it potential long-

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ELIGIBILITY: A candidate must teach at least one 3-credit hour undergraduate course, and at least one 3-credit hour course each term, during the academic year in which the nomination is made. It is not expected that the nominees should excel in all criteria listed on the nomination form, but they should be qualified in most categories. Individuals are not eligible if they have been previous recipients of the Award.

NOMINATION: Candidates for the Award are proposed and recommended to the Senate Committee on Quality of Teaching by students and faculty of the University.

The basic information required is contained on the Nomination Forms, which are available from the University Secretary, Fredericton; the Vice-President (Saint John); the Student Council, Saint John or Fredericton; and Faculty offices. No one may nominate or support more than one candidate. The form must be signed by two nominators. The Committee places little value on long lists of signatures supporting a nomination. However, signed letters or paragraphs of support from a variety of sources (current and former students, faculty members, Department Chairs or Deans) can enhance a nomination.

Send nominations to the University Secretary, Room 110, Old Arts Building, UNB Fredericton, or to the Vice-President (Saint John), Room 110, Oland Hall, UNB Saint John.