

Pelrine points to Morgentaler defense

by Linda Blanchet

Approximately 70 people, including representatives of Edmonton's women's groups,



met Wednesday to hear an account by Eleanor Wright Pelrine of the legal battle of Dr. Henry Morgentaler. Pelrine, outspoken advocate of abortion law repeal and author of a recently published book about Morgentaler's case, met the doctor in 1970 in the course of research for her first book, *Abortion in Canada*.

Through his dedication to humanism and civil liberty, says Pelrine, Dr. Morgentaler came to recognize the need for people to control their own sexuality

and reproduction. For a number of years he worked quietly through humanist associations to achieve reform of Canada's abortion law.

In 1968, he urged before the government's Commons Health and Welfare Committee that the abortion law be repealed. As a result of the ensuing publicity, Dr. Morgentaler was besieged by requests from women wishing to obtain abortions. At first he held back, but in 1969, he equipped his clinic to provide first-trimester abortions to women on an outpatient basis.

As a result of Morgentaler's refusal to hide his activities, he came under police surveillance. After a feature on the operation of the clinic was aired on CTV's public affairs program, *W5*, a raid on the clinic was carried out and Morgentaler and his staff were arrested.

A trial for the first of 12 counts of performing illegal abortion began in October 1973, and after three and a half weeks a verdict of not guilty was returned by the jury. In April 1974 this decision was overturned by the Quebec Court of Appeal, and later the Supreme Court upheld the decision of the Quebec court. In a second trial the jury again returned a not guilty verdict. Despite two

jury acquittals, Morgentaler is still serving the 18-month sentence imposed by the Supreme Court, and though he has completed a third of his sentence, his application for parole was turned down on the grounds that his behavior in prison was "unacceptable," says Pelrine. At present he is a patient in a Montreal nursing home, she says, his health broken, and his assets frozen by the Quebec government.

Morgentaler has yet to be tried for ten additional charges of performing illegal abortion. Pelrine states that the courts are in no hurry to push for prosecution, and that they will continue to bring up additional charges when it is their interest to do so. She terms this legal harassment "technological justice."

Pelrine emphasized the need for an organized defense of Dr. Morgentaler, and suggested that the following demands be raised:

1. Immediate passage for an amendment to the Criminal Code preventing a reversal of a jury acquittal by an appeal court. This amendment, promised by former Justice Minister Otto Lang, has not yet been passed by Parliament.

2. That the government exercise the royal prerogative of mercy by granting Morgentaler a full pardon. Prime Minister Trudeau, who described Morgentaler as "a fine humanitarian", denies him this pardon.

3. Introduce a bill for immediate repeal of Section 251 of the Criminal Code, Canada's

present abortion law. Two thirds of Canada's population indicated in 1974 that abortion should be considered a matter between a woman and her doctor.

A limited number of copies of Pelrine's new book, *Morgentaler: The Doctor Who Couldn't Turn Away*, can be obtained by contacting the office of the Canadian Association for Repeal of the Abortion Law (CARAL) in Edmonton. CARAL is the only organized group which is presently engaged in the defense of Morgentaler.

The next meeting of CARAL is scheduled for Wednesday, January 7, at the Edmonton Women's Place, and further information about CARAL and its activities may be obtained by phoning 433-7425.

Indian student awards

The Council of India Societies of Alberta wishes to present its annual student achievement awards in conjunction with the Republic Day Celebration towards the end of January, 1976, in Edmonton.

The objective of these awards is to honour outstanding achievements of young people. The awards are divided into categories of academic honours standing (high school and post-secondary), distinctive achievement in academic, athletic, and cultural fields of activity, and service to the local or Indian community.

Candidates must be full-time students, members of the East India Community, and residents of Alberta.

The Council would like participation to be as wide as possible. All eligible candidates are urged to apply.

Information about the awards and application forms may be obtained from B.A. Gandhi, India Centre, 10436 81 Avenue, Edmonton (telephone 439-5071).

Completed forms along with supporting documents should be returned to this address before Friday, January 9.

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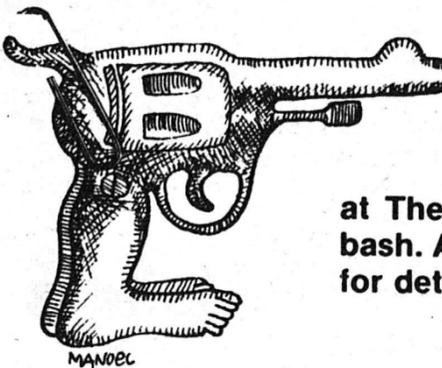


Mike Cranston

From 5:30 to 9 A.M.



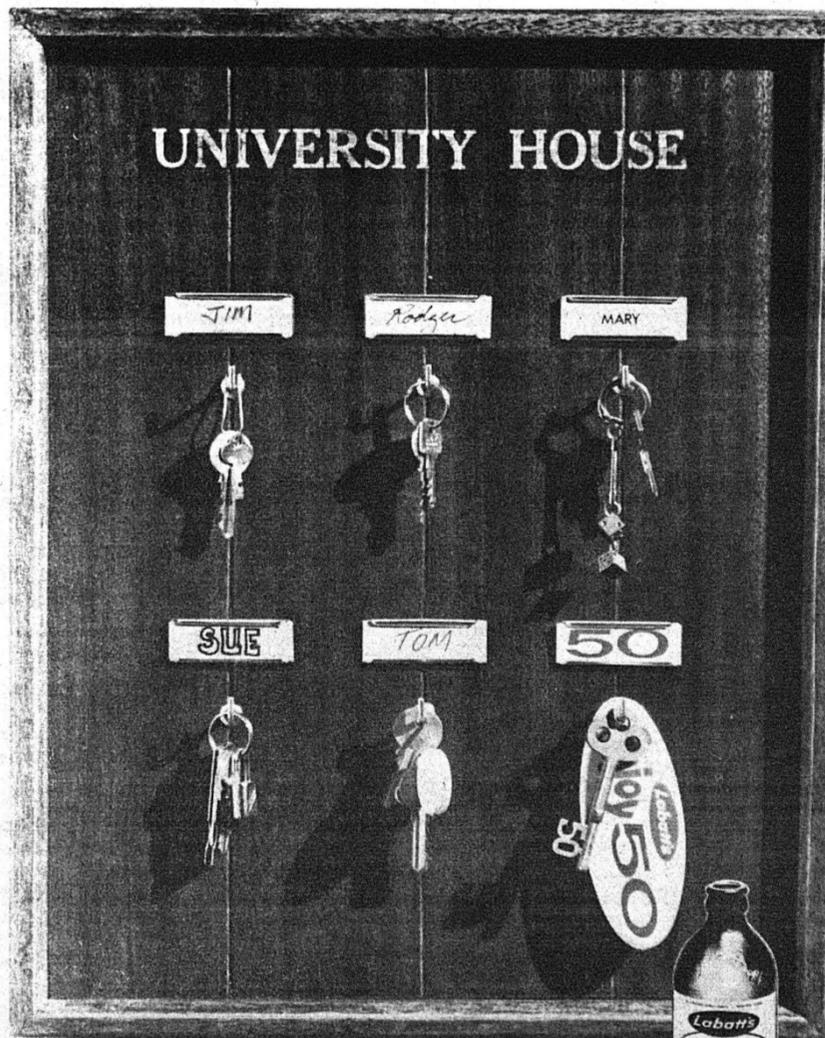
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