

The pros and cons of the abortion question

By Laura Brown

The audience was small but attentive at last Thursday's bearpit panel-discussion on the *Issues on Abortion*.

Representatives from the Canadian Association for Repeal of the Abortion Laws, Birthright, and Pro-Life offered their viewpoints on abortion at this event, sponsored by Harbinger for Awareness Week.

The law on abortion, which exists under Section 251 of the Criminal Code "forbids abortion, except (following a doctor's referral), when performed in an approved or accredited hospital after approval by a Therapeutic Abortion Committee of at least three doctors (none of whom may perform the abortion), who certify that continuation of the pregnancy would, or would be likely to endanger the life or health of the woman."

Miller stated that CARAL takes the view that the whole abortion question is fundamental to women's rights and civil rights.

"We believe in freedom of choice", she said, "We are not pro-abortion, we are pro-choice."

Concentrating primarily on the current anti-abortion organizations, Miller pointed out that the definition of 'personhood' is one of their most basic arguments.

"The opposition to women's right to an abortion is largely

based on religious doctrine which defines 'personhood'," she maintained.

That abortion is murder is the argument used by those "who have a theological position based on religious dogma that personhood begins at conception," she continued.

"But under the law," Madisso added, "one becomes a person when born alive."

The opposition to abortion, Miller said, "is strong, organized, vocal and well-financed."

"Now the anti-abortion groups want to remove 'health' from the criminal code", Miller told the audience.

"And in the upcoming federal election, some anti-abortion groups will ask the candidates if they are prepared to do this and will work on amending the law," she claimed.

Young teenage girls' ignorance about the law and their psychological misgivings about birth control account for many unwanted pregnancies.

"Is this what anti-abortionists want? ... children having children?", she questioned angrily.

Madisso outlined some of the problems women face under this law which primarily affects those who are poor or simply uninformed.

There are few hospitals which are "approved" for abortion or

which have the proper committees to grant permission. Furthermore, there are many problems with the existing committees.

"There are no guidelines set in the Criminal Code for the Committee" she said. "It's a law unto itself."

"Each committee makes up its own rules," she continued, "and they are not required to give a woman reasons if they refuse her... and there is no appeal."

Mary Grant, the Birthright representative, spoke briefly about the organization.

"We think there's a better solution for problem pregnancies than abortion," she began.

"Birthright serves as a counselling centre and provides practi-

cal services," she continued. These services include pregnancy tests, referrals to doctors, counselling on financial and family matters, and job and housing options.

Pro-Life representative Janet Smith's comments concentrated on answering to CARAL's position. Throughout her discussion she was often interrupted by sometimes taunting and sometimes open hostility from the audience.

Answering to the argument that abortion is an issue of women's rights, Smith said, "The first right before all rights is the right to life."

The onlookers expressed anger when she continued: "And your (women's) rights aren't

necessarily what you want them to be."

The abortion issue is not discussion between those in favour and opposing abortion, "but the rights of the unborn human being," she remarked.

Smith's argument was based on the definition of personhood.

She drew the analogy that people who support abortion are thinking in the same way as those who had supported slavery.

"The law once said that blacks are not human beings like us," she said, "and now the law is saying that foetus aren't human beings."

Her strongest criticism lay with what she termed "women's selectivity.... just getting rid of what you want to get rid of," she remarked.

New pres will "take issues to students"

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"I think we're doing it rationally, it's not a backroom move," said Smockum. "If people don't like it, they should let me know and let Gary know—in fact it would be nice if they would."

The decision on Empey becoming business manager will be made by the incoming members of the council for 1979-80.

When the probable president was asked what his plans were he said "as far as I'm concerned my term in office begins tomorrow." Smockum intends to confer with representatives from student organizations in the coming weeks and said he "will be keeping fairly regular hours" in the council office from now on.

Smockum gave assurances that he will do plenty of consulting with the colleges and that "there'll be two college conferences next year no matter what."

Asked how he felt about a situation where he will be a non-elected president, Barb Taylor will be a non-elected External Affairs

vice-president, and John Simon could still be acclaimed University Affairs vice-president pending a decision by CYSF's election tribunal—all taking office under a revamped constitution designed to increase student input—Smockum looked to the future.

He said the only way to counter the current lack of student interest is "to do things students are interested in."

"We're going to take the issues to the students more than this year," he said. One way of doing this would be for the council to weekly or semi-weekly Central Square "bearpit" sessions dealing with the issues of the day.

As for external affairs, Smockum said "as far as I'm concerned the Ontario Federation of Students has done a damn good job this year." He expressed the view that council must "really look at continuing its membership in the National Union of Students, which he maintained can spend "two and one-half hours debating irrelevancies" at conferences. He said York students are paying a "higher fee per capita" than other campuses for membership in the National Union.

Should he be appointed to the business manager's job, Empey said he "will actively try to increase the council's funding" and play the role of "investment counsellor". He added that he realizes that the elected politicians will be making the decisions and that "when it comes to signing a cheque, when he (Smockum) says sign it, I have to sign it." He said his

"political opinions won't be projected outside this office."

Asked Tuesday if the council would advertise the business manager's job, CYSF president David Chodikoff said the position has been advertised with Manpower and that one or two applicants expressed an interest but "didn't follow it up for one reason or another."

Chodikoff was already calling Empey "the most 'qualified' on Tuesday," because he knows the books and understands the politics of the council."

Chodikoff said he didn't think CYSF could get someone with as much experience as Doug Wise (20 years related government experience before he started in 1971) for "what we're paying."

BOG reverses Atkinson dean decision

(cont'd from pg. 1)

According to one member of the BOG, the reason the Board let Atkinson have its way Friday was because the July deadline is fast approaching and Atkinson Council clung to its position steadfastly.

Although the Board agreed to let Atkinson have its way, its motion read that its decision was in no way a precedent for future dean selections.

The Board wants a university-wide policy to be implemented after the Atkinson dean is chosen, a policy which will be decided upon by the executives of the Senate and Board.

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