

*Abortion*

proportion to the general public. I only wish this debate could have included many more young men, and women of child-bearing age, because they are the people directly affected and they are not represented adequately in this debate.

While I think we must respect each other's differing views, I cannot condone anyone forcing their views on another person. This is why I believe in choice. For women, a decision regarding termination of an unwanted pregnancy is a very difficult moral issue as well as a personal health matter. I know of no one, man or woman, who favours abortion. So why are some women and young girls forced to consider abortion? Usually it is because contraception has been ineffective or because no method of birth control was used by either the man or woman. In some cases, the high incidence of teenage pregnancies, and we know of increasing numbers of 13 and 14 year old girls who have become pregnant, may be because they are ignorant about sex and birth control. Very often they are afraid to tell their parents that they are pregnant. Some do not even know until several months later. Often, I am sure, if they think it through, they would be aware that they cannot care for a child. Perhaps their parents will decide and advise them their lives could be ruined, so they agree to an abortion.

Many women who seek abortions are single, with no partner to share the responsibility, financially or as a parent. The sex partner often takes no responsibility for contraception. Men usually think this is a woman's responsibility, or perhaps they do not even care. More often than not, the man takes off, leaving the woman alone to either consider the painful decision of seeking an abortion or to care for their child with no support from the father. There are many women in this situation and I do not think we can stand in judgment on them when they choose an abortion.

Still other women may be married with many financial, health and family reasons for not wanting another child. This is true of men also. One woman that I know very well had four children, including twins. The children were very young. At the same time she had an alcoholic husband. She told me how desperate she was 20 years ago when she found out she was pregnant again. Even 20 years later she was really upset talking about it. She was so desperate that she decided to go through the agony of using a back street abortionist, there being no legal abortions at that time. It was either that or suicide, she said. So at great risk to herself she chose the abortionist, and she had many complications as a result.

Over the years this woman and many of her sisters in the women's movement have worked very hard to be sure that their daughters will not have to face this kind of tragedy in similar circumstances. They have worked together to ensure that legal medical abortions are accessible and based on the decision of the woman in consultation with her doctor.

The public has become much more liberal in its attitude toward choice. In a 1988 Gallup poll, 69 per cent of Canadians agreed that "the decision whether to have an abortion should rest with the woman in consultation with her physician". The

Canadian Medical Association, a fairly conservative group, has also taken this position. So has the United Church of Canada.

The Supreme Court decision in the Morgentaler case judged previous legislation under the Criminal Code to be unconstitutional since therapeutic abortion committees delayed procedures, denied access, and threatened the security of the person. The majority of judges acknowledged the right of a woman and her doctor to choice in the earlier stages of pregnancy. In the later stages, they acknowledged the importance of also protecting the foetus.

I think most women, and men also, who support choice would not disagree with those principles, but many object very strenuously to recriminalizing abortion under the Criminal Code. Imposing criminal sanctions against women and physicians is no solution. Statistics show that most abortions are performed in the first trimester, long before a foetus is viable. I would like to give several facts which I received from the Canadian Abortion Rights Action League to clarify certain misinformation which has been circulated.

First, women do not approach abortion as a means of birth control. As Doctor Marian Powell's 1987 study showed, the majority of girls and women seeking abortion become pregnant while using contraception. Despite public perception, contraceptives are not 100 per cent effective, nor are they easily available, especially for the poor, the young, or people in isolated or rural areas.

Second, women do not have abortions for convenience or for frivolous reasons. On the contrary, women choose abortion because they take the responsibilities of motherhood seriously. Women realize how important the timing and number of children can be to the well-being of their families.

Third, women who want to have abortions want to have them as early in the pregnancy as possible, as do the doctors who perform them. Some 89 per cent of all abortions in Canada are performed by the twelfth week of pregnancy, and 99.6 per cent are performed by the twentieth week. Reduction in the legal impediments to access results in fewer delays and earlier abortions.

Prevention of unwanted pregnancies and earlier access to medical abortions are needed rather than criminal sanctions. It is interesting that countries with tough criminal prohibition have not reduced the number of abortions. In Brazil, where abortions are prohibited, over one million illegal abortions were performed in one year and many deaths resulted. Criminal prohibitions did not prevent or reduce abortions.

It is also interesting that the incidence of abortions in Quebec decreased during the period when the Criminal Code was ignored and abortions were available through community clinics. There is no evidence during the past six months, when we have not had any law, that abortions have increased. Therefore, why do we need Criminal Code legislation? We all