

Panel discussion

Morgentaler explains abortions to Toronto audience

By ROSEMARY McCracken
 Dr. Henry Morgentaler spoke Nov. 28 at the St. Lawrence Centre about his decision which led him to perform 5,000 to 6,000 abortions in the last five years.
 Morgentaler, a Montreal physician charged with thirteen counts of performing abortions in a place other than an approved or accredited hospital; Florynce Kennedy, a San Francisco feminist lawyer, and Grace MacInnis, a Vancouver Member of Parliament, participated in the panel discussion sponsored by the Toronto Committee to Defend Dr. Morgentaler.
 On Nov. 13, a jury found Morgentaler not guilty of one of these charges, citing section 45 of the Criminal Code which states that a

medically necessary operation is not illegal. However, if convicted on any of the remaining charges, Morgentaler could be sentenced to life imprisonment.
 Morgentaler, under restrictions which forbid him to comment on the case, thanked those in Toronto for their support during his trial. "I was treated as a criminal, manacled, stripped naked, searched," he said.
 He said that after presenting a brief to the House of Commons regarding abolition of abortion from the criminal code, many women came to

him asking for termination of their unwanted pregnancies. At first he refused because of the illegality of such actions.
 "But soon I realized that it was not enough to wait for the law to be changed while victims of the law were being forced to either visit back-alley butchers or perform self-induced abortions," Morgentaler said.
 "If there was a person drowning in a lake and sign forbidding help, what would you do? You would ignore the sign, of course. There are many existential problems in the world that

can't be helped. But this is a problem that can be helped."
 He has publicly offered his clinic to the Quebec government and his services to the federal government to train doctors and nurses to perform abortions by vacuum suction.
 Grace MacInnis noted that birth control was only made legal in Canada in 1969. "Although there are people here who are against abortion and no one should force an abortion on them, they have no right to keep another person from an abortion. If we take abortion out of the criminal code, we

will be allowing both groups to follow their consciences."
 Florynce Kennedy, founder of the Feminist Party in the United States, asked "Why are the fetus-fetishers not concerned with the 72,000 people in the U.S. who die annually from tobacco?"
 Morgentaler has compiled statistics on abortions and on post-abortion symptoms from questionnaires distributed to both patients and doctors who recommended patients. These statistics will shortly be published in a scientific medical journal.



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