

and the law is still there

to birth control information can much less afford the \$300 to \$1,000 that women must pay to procure an illegal abortion from a qualified doctor.

And so, thousands of women — poor and working class women who cannot afford to support their born children, much less those unborn — are driven into the hands of incompetent, unqualified people, who for as little as \$10 and as much as a few hundred dollars, are more than willing to try and rid the woman's body of the unwanted fetus. The sordid results of butchers and quacks continue to flow into the emergency wards of hospitals.

Of the estimated 100,000 illegal abortions performed annually in Canada, at least 20,000 cases of post-abortive complications are admitted to hospitals. At least 2,000 of these result in severe disability or death for the women involved. These estimates are probably low — death is often attributed to more "acceptable" causes than illegal abortion.

Every year, our inhuman abortion laws take their toll of deaths of women who, by their actions, indicate their refusal to accept and obey laws which do not deal with the reality of their lives. So desperate are many women, when faced with an unwanted pregnancy and the advent of a life dictated by the needs of an unwanted child, that they place themselves willingly in the hands of people who may not know for sure the dimensions of a uterus, and who have never heard of sterilizing their kitchen knives. Horror stories of women attempting to abort themselves by swallowing potent chemical solutions or inserting knitting needles and laundry bleach into the vagina or uterus, are all too frequent.

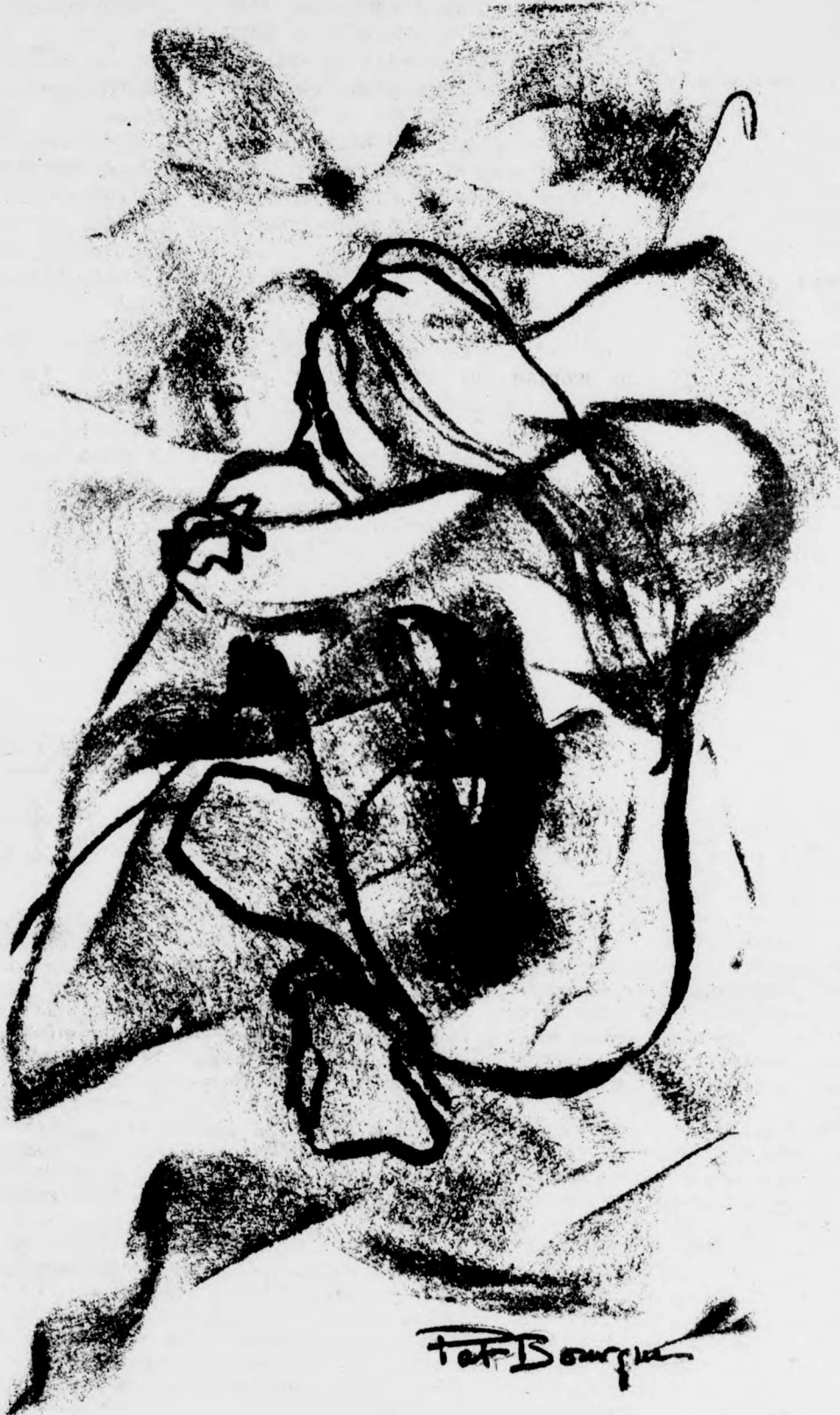
Those who favored reform of the old abortion laws, passed in 1892, claimed that the liberalization of the law would radically change the status of legal and illegal abortion in this country.

However, we can see from looking at numbers of therapeutic abortions granted in hospitals today, and at the numbers of women mutilated through illegal abortion, who continue to flow into emergency wards that the slight change in the laws has not made the slightest difference for most women seeking abortion. In fact, the supposed liberalization of the abortion laws has only served to safeguard and legalize what had already been the practice of most doctors and hospitals prior to August, 1969.

The same doctors who sit on abortion boards and grant only a few legal abortions a year, attend to several cases of butchered abortions each night. Some large metropolitan hospitals, who granted five or six abortions a year previously, now grant 10 or 12, while over 100,000 illegal abortions are still performed.

Few Roman Catholic hospitals have in the past, or intend in the future, to perform abortions for any reason. In the words of the Catholic Register, "abortion involves nothing less than a conspiracy to commit murder."

Many psychiatrists and gynecologists, those men who have been given the responsibility for the decision, regard abortion as "akin to murder." The head of gynecology and obstetrics at a large Montreal hospital was recently quoted as saying, "I don't know of any gynecologist anywhere who wants to perform abortions. He is the one who commits the murder. . . . The law has merely legalized what we have been doing for the past 30-40 years."



The implications of the words of a Toronto psychiatrist questioned about abortion, are that a woman is only fulfilled through pregnancy and childbirth: "In most cases pregnancy actually protects a woman from mental breakdowns and suicide. But, women who obtain legal abortions often suffer from guilt feelings. Termination of pregnancy may represent murder to a woman, although she may not realize it till afterwards."

"Fear of pregnancy is something which has always prevented promiscuity," another Toronto doctor says, expressing his approval of strict laws governing abortion.

It is no wonder that 19 out of 20 applicants to doctors never make it to hospital boards when so many conservative doctors have such paternalistic and punitive attitudes towards women seeking help for unwanted pregnancies.

The laws governing abortion speak nothing of cases in which children are certain to be born mentally or physically defective. This society allows mentally defective children, in many cases totally dependent and useless, unable to ever fend for themselves, to live as vegetables only to die before their teens.

The sacredness with which this society supposedly regards human life is exposed when we see the utter

hypocrisy of a system which values the fetus so highly that it cannot be destroyed, but has little regard for the welfare of its human beings.

We can create laws forcing a woman to bear an unwanted child, but we cannot ensure that she will not bear resentment for that child. Children should be created as an achievement, and cared for with love, not flung into the world as disastrous accidents, as is so often the case. Nothing is more tragic than the realization of a child that he is unwanted.

Our laws must not demand the survival of the embryo without being equally concerned about his welfare as a human being. Certainly there can be no more inhuman a situation than for a mother to be forced to raise a child she does not want or for a child to be subject to the resentment and despair of a woman who never meant to bear him.

The present abortion laws are not made for children. We need not only laws that will allow us not to have children, but a society in which we will want to have children. There are already thousands of children in Canada who nobody wants.

To understand why it is that children — and not just unwanted ones — are a burden, we have to understand the conditions under which women bring children into this

society. Most women with children have no alternatives but to let those children define their whole lives.

Nursery schools are only available to children of parents who can afford to pay their exorbitant prices. Day care centres are only beginning to meet the needs of women who work or go to school; many thousands more are needed to provide facilities for all women who work.

At the same time we declare the right of all women to legalized abortion, we must also demand that institutions be created in which children can be cared for lovingly in a context in which they will cease to be a burden.

Women's liberation groups across the country have been and will be raising these issues — related to the right of all women to control their own bodies and make decisions about their lives — until we win this fundamental human right for all women.

By their actions (100,000 illegal abortions each year), Canadian women have shown that they refuse to accept or obey laws which do not speak to their needs or desires. Women will continue to die needlessly unless they organize and act together to challenge the institutions of this society which deny them the right to make decisions which determine their lives.