



Abortion

A LIFE OR DEATH DILEMMA

by Paul Creeiman

The issue of abortion is a dilemma which still arouses the most heated arguments today.

The distinction between what if human life and what is mere soul-less protoplasm, and the question of justification for the death of the fetus is a problem which is of special importance in light of the rapidly developing technology for genetic manipulation. The ethical guidelines which are agreed upon for the issue of abortion will set a precedent for the further manipulation of life-forms and fetal experimentation which is going to take place in the next few years.

In Canada, the real origin of the abortion issues was with the liberalization of the abortion laws in 1969.

Amendments to Section 251 of the Criminal Code were adopted by Parliament in April of that year. The amendments authorized therapeutic abortions in cases where the life or health of the woman was threatened. A hospital committee must decide if childbirth is likely to impair the physical or mental well-being of the woman. If so, then they sign a certificate authorizing a doctor to perform the abortion.

The most vocal protest to the 1969 amendments came from the Roman Catholic Church. The stand of the Roman Catholic Church on abortion is unchanging. The Church is opposed to abortion for any reason whatsoever. In the Declaration on Abortion, the reasoning behind this edict is clearly elucidated: Since the fetus is alive from the moment of conception, it is murder to purposefully abort the fetus, under any circumstances.

In 1973, a petition signed by 353,647 Canadians from more than 50 pro-life groups was presented to Prime Minister Trudeau. In meetings held after the presentation, Trudeau and several cabinet ministers expressed their personal opposition to abortion and their concern over abuse of the liberalized abortion laws.

In opposition to the Pro-Lifers, however, are those who believe that abortion is a matter of personal choice. The most vocal group in this category are feminists, who see denial of abortion as infringements on a woman's right to control her own body.

This point of view was upheld by the Report of the Council on the Status of Women, who encountered immediate opposition from the Right to Life groups.

From a more practical point of view, what is actually involved in the decision to undergo abortion? We spoke with Dr. Cameron of the Dalhousie Family Medicine center.

The decisions which have to be made by a doctor are not easy ones, said Dr. Cameron. "Basically, we're in a situation where we would prefer to be looking after our own families, because we know them and know their background. . .we're probably in a better position to recommend abortion with regards to the impact on the mental health of the mother. . .However, we find ourselves in the position where we . . . get a lot of people referred in off the streets, from other doctors, requesting abortions, about whom we know nothing.

That's where it becomes an ethical and a bit of a moral issue. . .How can we decide

patients to go elsewhere, or whether they were ethically constrained to make arrangements through another doctor."

"As it stands, at the moment, a Canadian doctor can just say that he doesn't want to deal with this problem, and that the patient will have to make other arrangements, which is sort of an unsatisfactory arrangement," says Dr. Cameron.

Those doctors who do face the problem of abortion, however, must often reconcile the attitudes of "women who make up their mind on the short term end of things"—without considering the longer

"As it now stands a Canadian doctor can just say that he doesn't want to deal with this problem; . . .

whether this person should have an abortion? And so that burden is placed on our shoulders. It's sometimes an uncomfortable position to be in."

Dr. Cameron said that of five patients to be referred for abortions by his team in the last month, only one was a regular patient.

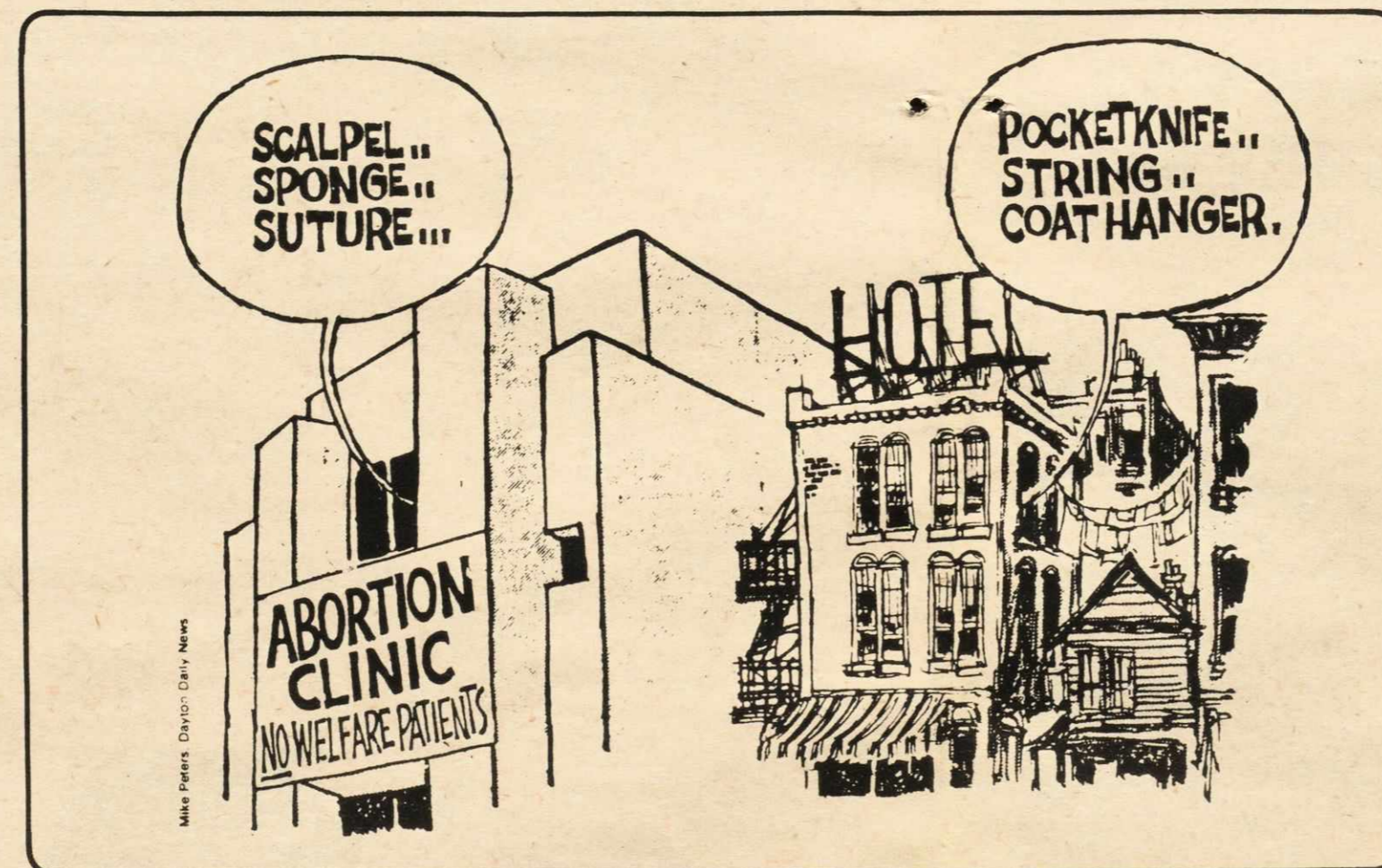
Ethical debate on the subject of abortion has been prevalent in the Canadian Medical Association. "The crux of the issue was the action of a doctor who refuses to consider abortion as an option on any grounds whatsoever, whether emotional, social, economic, or medical. The question was whether or not such doctors were justified in telling their

term implications of guilt and grief.

Dr. Cameron said "The average situation here is an eighteen to twenty-four year old unmarried female who is working here in town, and if she gets pregnant, she'll lose her job. . ."

In the end, it seems, the issue of abortion is one that must be resolved by personal responsibility. Although the answer to the life and death question of abortion may not be clear, what is very clear is the need for everyone to make their own decision.

A consensual ethical stand on abortion will help guide our society through the even more difficult dilemmas of the future.



Supreme Court to Decide Abortion Issue



WASHINGTON—The U.S. Supreme Court has agreed to consider whether Congress can refuse to pay for most abortions for women on welfare. The Justices will study the constitutionality of an amendment adopted in 1978. It bars Medicaid spending for abortions except in certain cases. These include when a woman's life would be endangered by childbirth, cases of promptly-reported rape or incest, or when two doctors say childbirth would cause severe and long-lasting physical health damages to the mother.

A more recent amendment is even more restrictive, eliminating the exemption for severe and long-lasting physical health damages.

Last April, a federal judge in Chicago struck down the restriction on abortion spending—both the congressional amendment and an Illinois law patterned after it.

Ethics and Abortion

A PERSONAL DECISION: INTERVIEWS AT DAL

by Paul Creeiman

The law in Canada presently permits therapeutic abortions in cases where the life or health of the mother is in jeopardy. The Gazette asked for comments on this law and its relation to their personal stand on abortion;

Doctor Richmond Bridge, the Anglican Chaplain at Dal, states that his church upholds the concept of the sanctity of human life, and for that reason is generally opposed to abortion. Sometimes extenuating circumstances, such as when the life of the mother is endangered, make a more difficult decision necessary. In such cases, states Dr. Bridge, "A decision must be made by consultation between the woman, her doctor, and especially the father."

Father Joe Hattie, the Roman Catholic Chaplain at Dalhousie, maintains a stronger stand on abortion, one in accord with the teachings of his Church. Since the fetus is human life from the moment of conception, abortion is the murder of an innocent.

Father Hattie believes that an abortion is unjustifiable for any reason. He also makes a strong point regarding women's rights and abortion, stating that women who abort are not strengthening the status of women, but weakening it, because they are committing an offense against the integrity of their own body.

Most students at Dalhousie were more moderate in their statements. The overwhelming majority of those interviewed approved of the law as it now stands regarding therapeutic abortion.

Marion Smith, a second year commerce student, said "I don't think that there

should be abortion on demand. I agree with the laws the way they are."

Says Dal student David Fletcher—"I don't believe that there should be abortion on demand. The guidelines as they now exist I think are rather relaxed, so that it doesn't mean the physical health of the mother, but mental stability, so that abortion becomes a matter of convenience."

When asked if he thought the present abortion laws were being abused, David replied "Abused? Well not exactly, but they are rather liberally enforced. . .I am against abortion simply because you don't want a baby."

Dan Maclean, a first year student in the Faculty of Arts and Science, takes a stronger pro-abortion stand;

"If I were to ask for an operation, I'd be granted an operation, because I'm allowed to do whatever I like with my physical, cororeal body."

By the same token, any woman should be allowed to do whatever she likes with her own body, and if she chooses not to have a child, then it's up to her. . ."

Jennifer Havill, a second year student at St. Mary's, said "If the mother's life is in danger, I'd say you should save the mother, but I don't think that abortion should be permitted unless to save her life."

Wayne Lynch, a Dalhousie student says, "I'm adopted. So I can agree with the other principle too. . .If there were enough people that didn't go along with the laws of society—so that anyone could have an abortion. . .Well I might not be here. . ."