

## Commentary

# Abortion: Individual and societal dilemma

by Olga Jagodnik

"I'm pregnant."  
"If I have this baby, my life will be ruined."

"If I have an abortion, I'm killing a human being."  
This seems to be the only way of looking at the situation of an unwanted, unplanned pregnancy. If you've been there, you know the panic, the heartache, the desperation involved in trying to make a decision you can live with. Either way, your final choice will determine the way you feel, the choices you make in your life, all of your life. Either way, this baby or fetus will not be forgotten. Ever.

Henry Morgentaler, speaking at SUB Theatre last Thursday, feels that women have a right to have sex; to enjoy it and if caught at the end of it by pregnancy, the right to make a dignified choice to end it. He retells the story of his first involvement with women in Montreal who wanted the right of abortion. After doing a government paper on abortion and publicly acknowledging that his feelings were in favor of choice, women flocked to his practice for abortions. He said he couldn't perform them because the penalty under law was life imprisonment. Story after story caught his attention: women were performing abortions on themselves, going to back-street hustlers and trading sexual favours for abortions, getting their lovers to perform them, and the results were devastating: death, sterility and great mental anguish for the women and their families. Today he says he feels that he had no choice but to act as a humanitarian.

That was some fifteen years ago and Dr. Morgentaler has progressed far from those earlier times. He operated a legal abortion clinic in Montreal and was instrumental in starting the several other clinics in the only province in Canada which allows them to operate legally. He is in the throes now of legal action following clinics in Toronto and Winnipeg that he has started.

On the other side of the dilemma, and confusingly also a humanistic one, is the argument made by pro-life groups that abortions kill human beings. Life starts at the moment of conception and whether the fetus is killed at one cell, one hundred cells, it is the same. It is death to the unborn.

The two sides are unrelenting on the issues they each deal with. That evening in SUB Theatre, eight hundred men and women cheered as one after another pro-choice questioner was shot down. The question of depressed women committing suicide after having abortions was dealt with speedily by Dr. Morgentaler. He said this was simply not true. Women were more depressed and suicidal after having a baby they did not want, he replied to the Catholic priest who had to shout his question to be heard.

If anyone was looking for a debate on both sides of the issue, they were sadly mistaken. Either you were on the inside of the point or the outside. The outside meant being one of a thousand pro-life protestors who picketed outside SUB with placards with their children. After an hour they retreated out of the cold to the Education Building to light candles in memory of the dead unborn.

My political science professor allowed discussion of the issue the following day in class. He cited an article that he had read written by a feminist woman who said that it might be important, in breaking down the largest issue of contention between the two sides—that of whether one is killing a human being or not—for pro-choice groups to admit that yes, one was killing a life, and to get on with it.

It was surprising the number of men in the class who took the pro-life viewpoint. Abortion meant killing a life all right and that life had something to do with men too. Should men pay for half the cost of the abortion, was a question asked. Reply: how often do men pay for half the cost of birth control? And no, having sex with someone did not necessarily mean that love had entered the picture. How naive! In that case, how could a woman who had gotten pregnant as a result of that act, expect any support from the man involved? In fact, that seems to be the situation of most unwanted pregnancies, especially where the couple involved are young.

So, yes, the woman is left to herself to make the decision that will make or break her life—depending on how she sees herself at that moment. Will she be desperate enough to try to commit an abortion on herself if she is refused under the law? Yes, she may, if she cannot afford the services offered in the U.S. or in Quebec. Or will she choose to follow her own conscience of when life begins and have the child and carry on from there? Socially, we know that there will be some hard years of struggle for both the woman and the child, and there's the stigma to consider—having failed society in some way.

Kathleen Higgins, past president and director of the Alberta Federation of Women United for Families gives a clearly opposite picture to the one related above. She is positive about her position in terms of the support we can give to women caught in the firing line of which decision is right for her, socially and personally. It is clear to Mr. Higgins that education is the solution to much of the problem. And education to chastity outside of marriage is one of the requisites.

Mrs. Higgins feels that abortion is sexually exploitive of women. After all, it is the woman who is left

to deal with the pregnancy. She says that women who have had an abortion tend to commit suicide on the day the baby was due to have been born. She cites the story of a woman who is a strong pro-life advocate not but who aborted her child at five-and-a-half months. The woman was injected through the stomach with a saline solution which precipitates actual delivery and of course, death, of the fetus. For twenty-four hours, the woman said she waited while her child thrashed around in her womb before its death. She has never forgotten that experience, says the woman.

"Why should parents have the right to kill their children before they are born?" asks Mrs. Higgins. "Is this not child abuse?" Women who have their baby and then give up the child for adoption, she says, "feel totally peaceful within themselves," knowing they've done the right thing in terms of their own conscience. She's never met anyone, she says, who, having had an abortion, was just able to forget it. The argument made by Dr. Morgentaler that women will go back to coat-hangers if denied an abortion, is just not so, she says. She says a chemical called prosto-glandins, the above saline solution, is the alternative of the coat-hanger, so

his argument of further deaths does not wash.

Mrs. Higgins gives Dr. Morgentaler credit, though, for calling the law dealing with abortion a farce. "He's saying the law is a farce and has to be changed."

In the final analysis, "that's not why I'm vocally pro-life. I think it's right and faithful to what the truth is," she concludes.

A postscript to this. *Sixty Minutes* dealt with the issue of over-population in China last Sunday. And what should creep into this but the issue of abortion? China has a population of over a quarter of a billion people. Their solution to the problem of over-population has been to offer special benefits to single-child families. These benefits follow the child all the way through his or her life and education and involve the signing of documents by the parents promising not to have a second child. If they do, all the benefits given to them must be paid back and are equivalent to about a year's salary for one of them.

To watch over the entire system of birth control, planned families and these contracts between the state and families are the "granny police." Annual awards and rewards are offered to the grannies for doing their jobs well. And they do.

The most alarming case given was that of a couple working in a small village. They have a one-and-a-half year old son and financially were very well off in comparison to the others of the village. Both worked most of the time, in the fields, a factory, and he building furniture at home at night. The woman became pregnant and kept the pregnancy secret from the villagers during the winter months when heavy clothing was necessary. In the fifth month, the secret was discovered and one by one, each official of the village came to see the couple to persuade the woman to have an abortion. Finally, the woman said, she was just too worn down to resist. She asked for a job at the shoe factory in exchange for the abortion. They said yes, the job, but she must be sterilized too. She said no. In the end, at six months pregnant, she had the abortion using the saline method already described and which was shown on the screen, to my horror. Mike Wallace concluded the segment by saying "China's way of dealing with over-population may seem harsh but there may be no other choice."

How little it is to conclude that having a choice here in North America, we are as usual, unable to make it conclusively.

### Yard Apes



by Hans Beckers

## STUDENT UNION General Election & Referendums

### NOMINATIONS ARE OPEN FOR THE FOLLOWING POSITIONS

#### SU EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

President  
VP Internal Affairs  
VP Academic  
VP Finance & Administration  
VP External Affairs

#### UNIVERSITY ATHLETIC BOARD (UAB)

President Men's Athletics  
President Women's Athletics  
VP Men's Athletics  
VP Woman's Athletics

#### BOARD OF GOVERNORS

1 Student Representative

#### CLOSING OF NOMINATIONS:

1700 hrs., Thursday, January 24, 1985

#### ELECTIONS:

Thursday & Friday, Feb. 7 & 8, 1985

#### ADVANCE POLL — February 6, 1985

### CFS REFERENDUM

**QUESTION WILL BE:** Do you support continued membership in the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) at a continued cost of \$4.00 per full-time student per year and \$0.80 per part-time student per year?

YES  NO

### SU BUILDING POLICY REFERENDUM

**QUESTION WILL BE:** Do you wish the Students' Union to place restrictions, in addition to those which exist within applicable federal and provincial laws, on activities in the Students' Union Building?

YES  NO

#### CLOSING OF NOMINATIONS:

For both questions, 1700 hrs.,  
Thursday, January 24, 1985

#### ELECTIONS:

Thursday & Friday, Feb. 7 & 8, 1985

#### ADVANCE POLL:

February 6, 1985

For further information please contact Returning Office  
Room 232, SUB. Schedule of office hours on door.