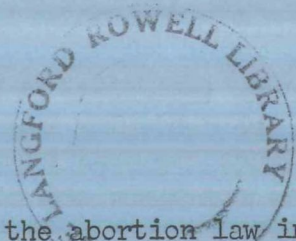


Montreal, Quebec

May 4, 1974



To my Friends in the Abortion Law Repeal Movement:

I think that those of us who are fighting for the repeal of the abortion law in Canada have to wake up from our complacency and realize that unless we redouble our efforts and really throw ourselves into the fight with all we've got, the women of Canada will continue to be subjected to all the dangers and indignities of oppressive and cruel abortion laws.

Maybe there was some ground for complacency. Our American sisters have won a tremendous victory a year ago when the Supreme Court abolished all restrictive laws and decreed abortion on demand across the United States.

An opinion poll in Canada on January 4, 1973 showed that two out of three Canadians were in agreement with the idea that abortion should be a private matter between a woman and her doctor. Denmark and other countries in Western Europe were introducing bills to have abortion on request.

And on November 13, 1973 a Montreal jury acquitted me of a charge of having performed an illegal abortion, leading many of us to believe that a loophole in the law could now be used to offer women safe abortions. There were indeed grounds for rejoicing. The law itself is discredited and not being respected by the majority of the population. However, it is still being applied with a vengeance and the recent decision of the Quebec Appeals Court reversing the jury decision and finding me guilty without ordering a new jury trial is, or should be, a rude awakening for all of us.

Indeed, what is happening in Montreal is indicative of the spirit of vengeance and oppression against women and women's rights rarely witnessed lately in any other country. There are countries which have oppressive abortion laws similar or even worse than Canada's; examples, Holland and Belgium. In Holland the law is not being applied and abortion clinic that do provide safe procedures for women who need them are openly tolerated. In Belgium, after a spectacular case of a doctor openly doing abortions produced an outcry in the country, doctors and hospitals are openly defying the law and helping women while the government and the law enforcement agencies look the other way. But what is happening in Montreal?

Over the last few years there have been a few doctors and clinics who more or less openly helped women in distress. These clinics over the last few years have helped hundreds of women obtain safe abortions -- women from six provinces: Quebec, Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland. Due to the overzealousness and misplaced fanaticism of the prosecuting attorney in Montreal who specializes in abortion case witch-hunts, and no doubt with the tacit or explicit assent of the Minister of Justice of Quebec and the most reactionary Minister of Justice Canada ever had, Otto Lang, four of these doctors are now being prosecuted and all the clinics but one have ceased to offer help to women needing abortions.

What this means is that those who cannot get a hospital abortion in Canada, cannot afford to go to the United States for a legal abortion and those who cannot be accommodated by the one clinic still open, have to either resign themselves to carry on with an unwanted pregnancy or else go the well-known road of the back-alley with all the dangers of death, injury, sterility, loss of dignity and mental stress.

(over)



Those who intimidate and close down doctors' clinics offering safe abortions to women are condemning women to die and be injured by quacks; they carry a moral if not direct criminal responsibility for the suffering of women unable to obtain medical abortions and should be held accountable for their acts, even if they act in the name of the law.

How long will women and men in this country who care for humanity and decency tolerate this state of affairs when a few callous, hostile, male chauvinist pigs with positions of power are able to impose untold suffering on women in this country without spectacular actions of protest and indignation breaking out until such cruelty and unhumanity are brought to a stop?

How long will it take until those rascals responsible for such deliberately cruel application of outdated and unjust laws are themselves brought to justice? How long will it take until the insult to women branding them as criminals when they resort to abortion not approved by law will be wiped out? How long is it necessary to wait? How many more women need to be sacrificed before our politicians decide to put reason and compassion before fear of the vociferous Catholic lobby?

Our fight is a fight for human rights, for freedom to choose, freedom of conscience, freedom of religion. Our fight is for decency and humanity and the most fundamental of freedoms: the right to decent medical care when needed by women who have decided they need an abortion.

Being reasonable is not enough. Our fight will demand sacrifice and effort: sustained effort.

As for myself, I shall continue as best I can to do what I can to help women to obtain safe abortions.

In spite of all harassment, vilification, slander and calumny; in spite of concerted Government action against me on many fronts, including the seizure and rape of all my personal diaries with my most intimate thoughts; in spite of threats of incarceration, continuous legal harassment, denial of basic freedoms such as freedom of speech and other similar actions, I am determined to continue this fight until this basic right of women, to control their reproduction and to obtain abortions when needed, in safety and dignity, is achieved.

Together, we shall overcome!!!

Henry Morgentaler.

(This statement was read to the demonstration rally in Toronto on May 4, 1974 organized by the Toronto Committee to Defend Dr. Morgentaler to protest the overturning of the November acquittal.)

