



Canadian Association for  
Repeal of the Abortion Law



l'Association Canadienne pour  
l'Abrogation de la Loi sur l'Avortement

JANUARY 1979 NEWSLETTER

Hello, Everybody!

In this mailing we are including "Childbirth by Choice", a pamphlet which was prepared in November, 1976 for federal Members of Parliament. Please read it and keep it in your file of CARAL material. If you already have a copy, please give this one to a friend. It will be invaluable during the federal election campaign. And if you feel you can use this brochure in any way to increase understanding of the abortion issue, we will be happy to provide you with additional copies. Some suggestions: mailing it to all provincial members of Parliament; mailing it to local high-schools and libraries, women's groups, church groups, newspaper editors. If you have not already started a CARAL file, this would be a good time to begin, as we will be sending you more information pertaining to the federal election.

BILL 139

Ontario members will be happy to hear that Bill 139 (introduced by John Sweeney, Liberal member from Kitchener-Wilmott), designed to reduce access to abortion, was blocked at second reading and died. In Ontario if 20 members rise to oppose second reading of a private member's bill, it is blocked. Twenty-three members rose to oppose it.

We would like to thank all of you who wrote letters and phoned the legislators expressing your objection to the bill. This type of bill is certain to be introduced in other provincial houses by anti-choice zealots, who are determined to deny women access to abortion by whatever means possible. If this happens, get in touch with the national office of CARAL. We can offer suggestions on how to fight such a bill.

Sweeney's bill was designed to intimidate women and doctors by setting up delays and red tape, by tripling the paper work involved in obtaining an abortion, by requiring doctors to give one-sided information to women about the consequences of abortion, by giving public servants the right to inspect records and documents pertaining to the abortion. Dr. May Cohen set out her objections to the bill in a letter to members of the legislature. We quote in part:

As a physician I also object to the fact that passage of this bill would give government the right to dictate to me how I should deal with my patient's health problems. Specifically, this bill would tell me how I must counsel my patient and how to deal with her regardless of her particular needs. Passage of such a provision would constitute a dangerous precedent.

Abortion is being treated differently from all other health care problems. This attitude is detrimental to the best interests of my patients.

In reading section 4, subs. 2(a), I wonder if Mr. Sweeney is aware of the studies on the negative effects on a woman's health of denying her the right to have an abortion. One would certainly question the objectivity of the information Mr. Sweeney would wish to have documented. Furthermore, it is not possible to give an advance description of the life condition of the fetus. Again Mr. Sweeney is prejudging what he would like to have written into the document.

The idea of singling out those charts of patients undergoing therapeutic abortion for inspection by the Ministry represents the grossest form of breach of confidentiality. It is obvious that knowledge of this procedure could clearly intimidate women who quite rightfully expect their medical condition to be honoured by the same degree of confidentiality as would apply to any other treatment.

Surely as physicians we are faced with more than enough red tape now. The prospect of filling out the forms and documents required here would deter many physicians from dealing with patients in this situation - obviously something which Mr. Sweeney would find highly desirable.

#### OTHER ATTEMPTS TO RESTRICT ACCESS TO ABORTION

In the last newsletter we informed you about the action begun by the Ottawa lawyer David Dehler against the committees of the Ottawa Civic Hospital and the Riverside Hospital. A second action has been started in Saskatchewan by that well-known anti-choice extremist, Joe Borowski. His action is against the federal Minister of Justice (then Otto Lang) and the federal Minister of Finance, Jean Chretien. Both these actions (Dehler's and Borowski's) allege that abortion is contrary to the Bill of Rights and that Section 251 of the Criminal Code is invalid. Both seek injunctions restraining the performance of abortions.

We have also learned that a resolution calling for a bill of rights for children, which would include a "right to be born", has been introduced in the Nova Scotia legislative assembly. A second resolution has called on the government to tighten the definition of insured services under the Health Services and Insurance Act so that medical insurance would pay for only those abortions when "continuation of the pregnancy would be likely to seriously endanger the mother's life or there would be a serious risk of severe and prolonged damage to the mother's physical health." This is a clear attempt to restrict access to abortion. As such, it is an encroachment by the province on federal jurisdiction and is therefore unconstitutional.

In Alberta the local Campaign Life group has presented a brief to the Hospitals Minister, Gordon Miniely, who has agreed to look into the practice of paying for out-of-province abortions and what Campaign Life claims is a practice whereby anti-choice doctors do not serve on therapeutic abortion committees. (One immediately wonders why they should: how can someone opposed to abortion make an adjudication as to whether or not a woman should be allowed to have one?)

A similar situation has arisen in Ontario. Women who have gone to the United States for an abortion have been singled out by OHIP and have been required to produce letters from two physicians (one of whom cannot be the physician performing the abortion) to prove that they recommended termination of the pregnancy. Unless such letters are produced, OHIP refuses to cover the cost of the abortion. If this is a new policy, it should be made known to the public, rather than be selectively applied against individual women. Moreover, if it is a policy, it is a bad one: there is no such requirement for any other medical procedure.

As the federal Report of the Committee on the Operation of the Abortion Law (usually known as the Badgley Report) found, an average of 8 weeks passes from the time a woman sees a doctor because she thinks she's pregnant and the time she actually gets an abortion - and all because of the red-tape of the therapeutic abortion committee system. The Badgley Report also documents that only 1/5th. of Canadian civilian hospitals have committees; that 2/3rds. of Canadians do not know that abortion is legal in this country; that less than 1% of doctors know that the law sets no limit on gestation period; that 1/5th. of the women who go to the United States for an abortion do so because their doctors told them that abortion was illegal in Canada; that 1 out of 4 women who carried their pregnancies to term did so because of a lack of services or too great a delay caused by the present system. Given these facts, it is to be expected that women will go to the U.S. for a medical service they cannot get in this country. In fact, of course, people go abroad all the time for medical help, but, as always, a double standard exists for abortion.

Although only about half of British Columbia's publicly-funded hospitals perform abortions at all, and the requirements vary widely even among those, B.C. hospitals were, in 1978, the object of anti-choice attacks. The result was that Vancouver General Hospital's board of trustees was replaced by a government-appointed administrator. Lyon's Gate Hospital in North Vancouver, on the other hand, resisted an attempt by the anti-choice minority to take over the hospital board. Much of the press coverage focused on the influence of "single-interest groups", of which pro-choice people are said to be one. Such a generalization ignores two salient facts: first, that pro-choice people are defending themselves from the attacks of the anti-choice lobby, which has publicly declared itself to be a single-interest group, and secondly, that anyone who believes in choice cannot, by definition, be a single-interest group.

In Quebec the Parti Québécois government has decided to allow the establishment of 20 family planning clinics across the province; these clinics would also perform abortions. The situation has long been in need of remedy: abortion has been almost unavailable to French-speaking Quebecers, to those living outside Montreal, and to the poor. A report put out by the Quebec Council on the Status of Women has also, among other things, recommended freedom of choice.

Finally, on the subject of what each one of us has to do: we must write letters and make phone calls. When you hear of an attempt to restrict access by limiting health insurance coverage, write to the Minister of Health in your province, with copies to the Premier, to opposition party health critics, and to sympathetic people of the media. When you hear of a bill of rights for children, write to your MP or MPP with copies to the Premier and opposition party leaders expressing the view that one right of every child must be the right to be a wanted child. Write on the same theme to the newspapers.

#### TV COMMERCIALS

Not content to fight abortion rights in the courts and in provincial legislatures, the anti-choice lobby continues its attacks on agencies doing abortion referral and on governments funding them. This is a blatant attempt to deny women the right to know and to deny agencies and organizations the right to inform. "Right to Life" is encouraging its members to complain to the Family Planning Division of the federal Department of Health and Welfare that proposed national TV commercials promoting birth control refer people to agencies which also give information about abortion. There is nothing in the ads about abortion, so it makes one wonder what the "Right to Life" target really is. Could it be birth control itself? We think so.

It is important that support be given to government efforts to educate the public on matters of birth control. Without this support this particular project may not be renewed in 1979 and 1980. Write to or call the following people:

1. the TV station manager in your district and the network when the ads appear
2. Ms. S. Brazeau, Director,  
Family Planning,  
Health and Welfare,  
Ottawa, Ontario.

to encourage the project.

#### FAMILY PLANNING IN FINANCIAL TROUBLE

Monique Bégin, Minister of National Health and Welfare, has announced a reduction of almost 50% in the ministry's family planning grants program, effective April 1, 1979. The cut entails a drop from \$2.1 million in the current fiscal year to \$1.1 million in the next. Believing as we do in the importance of contraception, we should make our views on this cutback known to the Minister. Write to:

The Hon. Monique Bégin,  
Minister of National Health and Welfare,  
558 Confederation Bldg.,  
Ottawa, Ontario.

### CBC UNDER ATTACK

In the recent CRTC hearings on renewal of broadcast licenses, the "Alliance for Life", another incarnation of the anti-choice lobby, submitted an intervention against the renewal of the licence of the CBC on the grounds that CBC programming and news reporting is biased. CARAL has obtained a copy of this intervention and, needless to say, we are amused that the CBC should be accused of "pro-abortion" bias. We have never found this to be the case. In fact, we could present the CRTC with a few complaints of our own about CBC reporting.

However, the real issue here is the obvious attempt to intimidate a publicly-funded broadcasting system into censoring its reporting and programming and into one-sided views acceptable to special-interest lobbies.

### 1979 IS INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE CHILD

Wouldn't it be wonderful if conditions were such that every child was a wanted child and every mother a willing mother? With this in mind, how about making a personal commitment to write your MP soon, urging him or her to work for the removal of abortion from the Criminal Code and to work for increased funding for birth control education and research. And while you're writing, you could include a strong suggestion that any Bill of Rights for children which may be enacted during 1979 include the right to be wanted and to be born to willing parents.

You may have heard that a bill setting up a task force to draft a Bill of Rights for children has been given all-party approval and has been referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs. In principle, we support this bill, but we have some reservations about the outcome.

The sponsor is James McGrath (St. John's East), well-known for his anti-abortion views, who said in the House of Commons on Nov. 9, 1978, in reference to his bill, "The ultimate right of children is the right to life itself." We are concerned that Mr. McGrath and other anti-choice MP's will use this bill to push for "increased legal protection for the unborn", the anti-choice euphemism for total prohibition of abortion. The head of the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs is Mark McGuigan, another anti-choice M.P. You can get a copy of Mr. McGrath's bill and the Commons debate from Mr. McGrath's office, House of Commons, Ottawa. Ask for Bill C-204. An Act Respecting a Canadian Bill of Rights for Children.

Don't forget to write your M.P. both about removing abortion from the Criminal Code, and about including the right to be wanted in a Bill of Rights for children. Send copies to the Prime Minister and to the leaders of the other parties etc. Your letters are important in helping M.P.s make up their minds about issues. Don't assume he or she won't listen to you. If nothing else, the letters are counted.

### STOP THE PRESS NEWS

Someone has anonymously donated \$1,000 to CARAL. to that "someone" whoever he or she may be, the executive says a heartfelt thank you. It is partly because of this gift that we are able to send all members a copy of "Childbirth by Choice".

### CARAL IN PRINT

We have been immortalized in the recently-published Canadian Book of Lists! On page 304 you will find ten reasons in support of freedom of choice on abortion, prepared by us for Pagurian Press.

### PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

On a more personal note, the Executive wishes all CARAL members and their families a happy and fulfilling New Year! We are encouraged by your expressions of support and your continued dedication to the cause of freedom of choice. Your contact with us is appreciated - let's keep hearing from you with good news or bad and let's work with energy and optimism during the upcoming year!

*Merike Madisso*

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