

No New Law on Abortion

"Keep your laws off
my body"

by Treena Khan and Michelle
Smith Canadian University Press

They came marching through
downtown Ottawa to the rhythm
of 500 chanting voices.

"One, two, three, four, open
up the clinic door! Five, six,
seven, eight, don't tell us when to
procreate!"

As the crowd approached Parli-
ament Hill, a woman watching
the procession from the sidewalk
spat on one of the marchers. The
protestors, many of them stu-
dents from Carleton University
and the University of Ottawa,
walked on.

The pro-choice movement has
had its share of problems. Pro-
choice groups have lacked the vis-
ibility and apparent strength of
the pro-life movement, which has
staged emotional and dramatic
campaigns across North America
for the rights of the unborn.

And until January 1988, it
lacked the force of the law.

But the events surrounding
the abortion debate this past
summer have instigated a massive
mobilization of the pro-choice
movement.

The Chantal Daigle case fo-
cused national attention on a
woman's right to choose, when
her boyfriend launched legal ac-
tion to stop her from attaining
an abortion. Daigle finally won
the case in the Supreme Court of
Canada.

Saturday's country-wide Day
of Action was in support of Cana-
dian women's right to choose,
condemning the possible intro-
duction of abortion legislation by
Parliament.

More than 17,000 people took
part in pro-choice rallies in more
than 31 cities across Canada Oct.
14th, around the theme "Don't
lose the right to choose."

By 6:30 p.m., the crowd in
Ottawa was nearly 2,000 strong.
They yelled, cheered, sang, and
waved placards and flashlights in
the air for the television cameras
to see.

With the moon rising over
Parliament's East Block, the chanting and cheering
of the excited crowd reverberated
throughout Parliament Hill.

Children playing soccer on
the west field of the Hill didn't
seem to notice the intensity of
the speeches from representa-
tives of the Canadian Abortion
Rights Action League (CARAL),
the Canadian Labour Congress
(CLC), the Ontario Federation of
Students, Canadian Federation of
Students' Pacific Region and oth-
ers.

"Since the Chantal Daigle
case this year, the pro-choice
movement's gained a lot of sup-
port - the pro-life's lost a lot,"
said Pierre Beaulne, a member
of the Carleton Pro-Choice Net-
work.

A middle-aged couple on the
fringe of the crowd kept their gaze
fixed on the speaker, each firmly
gripping the sides of their sign,
reading "No New Law!"

And while the Daigle case
has converted people to the pro-
choice side, and stirred others out
of apathy, these two are long-time
fighters.

Gwen Norminton has been a
member of CARAL since 1974.
"That was the year I had an
abortion - in New York," she
said. Norminton had undergone
a tubal ligation in Ottawa two
years before.

"I already had two sons," she
said. "I didn't think I could han-
dle yet another child."

The operation, however, did
not prevent Norminton from be-
coming pregnant again.

She returned to the doctor
who performed the tubal ligation,
but he wasn't sympathetic.

"My doctor was very pro-
life," she said with a trace of
anger. "I told him I couldn't han-
dle another child, and all he said
was, 'Yes, you can.'"

Norminton

eventually brought him to provin-
cial court. "Valium and I took
him all the way to Toronto," she
said. "I wanted him to phone all
the women that he had performed
the operation on and inform them
that his operation didn't work."

Normantin had no reserva-
tions about having an abortion.
"I had a miscarriage between my
two sons," she said in a trembling
voice. "I just started bleeding,
and it just came out in the toilet."

What I saw wasn't a child. It
was not a human being." Nor-
mantin didn't ask her doctor to
perform the abortion, already
aware of what his feelings were
about it.

She could not go to another
doctor in Ottawa, either, since, at
that time, the law required each
woman's case to be presented to
a hospital board for approval.

"I couldn't wait for the whole
process, while this fetus was get-
ting bigger and bigger. And I
didn't want to be turned down,"
she said.



She found a doctor who could
have performed the abortion, but
he had a two-week waiting list.

She then turned to the now-
defunct Association for the Re-
peal of Canadian Abortion Law
(ARCAL), a counselling group,
for support. They recommended
an abortion clinic in New York.

"So we told the children we
were going to Montreal for the
weekend," said Norminton. "I
cried all the way there and all
the way back because my govern-
ment wouldn't allow me to have
an abortion in Canada."

She said she wasn't the only
one going to the United States for
the operation.

"There were six other women
from Ottawa with me in that
clinic in New York that week-
end," she said. "And I let the
politicians know that later."

Norminton turned to her hus-
band, Ted, who was standing
back and letting her tell her story.

"And this guy has supported
me all the way," she said.
Norminton said she was satis-
fied with her decision to have the
abortion.

"I had no guilt feelings," she
said. "I went home and the neigh-
bors brought the children to me
and I cried for joy because there
was so much relief. Whatever en-
ergy I had, I could give my love
to them, I didn't have to spread it
any further. I knew I couldn't."

Fifteen years
later, Norminton stands with the
rest of the crowd gathered on the
Hill, rallying against the possibil-
ity of a new law which would re-
strict abortion rights.

"The politicians are hitting
on the kids, the teenagers, say-
ing they'll just use abortions as
a method of birth control," she
said.

But Norminton doesn't agree
with the government. "The abor-
tion I had was by a suction
method," she recalled. "I could
still feel it, in my mind, for a
long time after that. Only people
with a low mental capacity would
want to go through that over and
over."

Norminton said women still
need to have access to abortions.
"No birth control method is per-
fect," she said. "I have friends -
one who was on the Pill, one who
was using an I.U.D. (intrauter-
ine device) - who both got preg-
nant."

Norminton's voice, which had
become louder and higher, sud-
denly grew quiet. "The anti-
choice people put forth this con-
cept of putting a child up for
adoption. Not everybody can do
that. There's no way I could have
gone through the emotional nine
months, give birth, and then give
it up," she explained.

She surveyed the chanting
crowd around her. "Then I re-
alized that the moral issue was
whether what I was carrying was
a child or not. And I knew from
the miscarriage that it was not,"
she said.

You can kneel and you can
pray, But women's rights are here
to stay!

A woman in a red cloak
walked through the crowd, draw-
ing ironic smiles from the crowd.

"There's a handmaiden in our
midst," said CARAL spokesper-
son Cindy Moriarty, her voice
booming over the loudspeaker.
People looked around with know-
ing faces.

The cloaked woman repre-
sented the handmaidens in Mar-
garet Atwood's novel *The Hand-
maid's Tale*.

Forced to keep their entire
bodies concealed from head to toe
in red cloaks and to wear white
hats with wings that block pe-
ripheral vision, Atwood's hand-
maids represent women's status
in repressive societies where the
notion of choice never arises.
With all the singing, poetry read-
ings, and speeches that were de-
livered throughout the evening,
the enthusiasm of the crowd
never waned.

Ending with singer Tracy
Chapman's song, "Talkin' Bout
A Revolution," the pro-choicers'
day of action appeared to reiter-
ate pop musician's words that a
new revolution was beginning.

Michelle Hurtubise, an orga-
nizer with the University of Ot-
tawa's Pro-Choice Network, used
a megaphone to blast the mes-
sage that the pro-choice move-
ment had been reactivated.

"It's not going to stop with
tonight," she said.

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