

Abortion

pregnancy. Surely we in Canada believe in this form of justice as well as in the advice and expertise of the doctors who will be working with these women.

Abortions take place every day. Involuntary abortions are a part of nature in every species. Illegal backstreet abortions by quacks will continue regardless of whether we have legislation or change the legislation, but there is no doubt that they will increase in frequency and in danger if there is no legal alternative. They will increase for the poor people. Young teenagers and poor women are the ones who will go to the backstreets. The rich people can afford to go across the border, or have this done by private means.

I would like to discuss some of the facts that were referred to by a previous speaker, and also contradict some of his interpretations of the statistics. For instance, abortions are not readily available now in Canada. Only 58 per cent of hospitals are eligible to establish abortion committees. That is not very many and they are not available to people in all communities. Only 52 per cent of eligible hospitals are actually performing abortions, and 45 per cent of Canadians live in communities where legal abortions cannot be performed.

As to the opinion of Canadians, I should like to refer to a Gallup poll in April, 1978, which shows that 69 per cent of persons interviewed were in favour of abortions under some circumstances. Therefore, they would indeed support the present legislation with no change. There was a reduction from 16 per cent to 14 per cent in that period from 1975 to 1978 in the number of people who were not in favour of the present legislation and felt that abortions should be made illegal. Some 76 per cent of the people believed that abortion should be available if a woman's health was seriously endangered. Most important, one third of all legal abortions in Canada are performed on young women under the age of 20, and that represents only the registered abortions, not taking into account the many illegal abortions that are certainly performed.

In 1977 there were 54,000 legal abortions in Canada, and 3,000 Canadian women, presumably women in the upper income group, who went across the border to have their abortions. In 1977 some 57,000 legal abortions were performed in Canada and 2,000 women crossed the line into the United States. There was some decrease in that regard probably due to the fact that the opportunity was available in Canada.

The rate of abortions in Canada is very low compared to that in other countries. Our abortion rate is about half of that in the United States per 1,000 females, it is about equal to that in the United Kingdom, and it is half the rate in Sweden. In many developing countries, of course, abortion has been liberalized far beyond this responsibility, particularly to economic and population factors.

I would like to mention quickly just two or three other points. I wish it were possible for men to get really emotionally involved in this question. It is really impossible for a man, for whom it is impossible to be in the situation, to really see it from the woman's point of view. That is why I am concerned

[Mrs. Mitchell.]

that there are not more women in this House available to speak about this from the woman's point of view. The only thing I can think of which would bring this closer to those gentlemen in the House, is to refer to the situation of a teenage daughter. How would you really feel if your young daughter was pregnant and was told she could not have an abortion?

Many young people are living together in temporary kinds of arrangements. They are living away from home without a regular source of income. The relationship is probably not stable, and certainly most young people are not mature enough to think of having families and providing the nourishment and care that children require. What would you do if your daughter was in this situation? Would you say she had no right to go to the hospital for a legal abortion? Would you force her and her boyfriend to go to the back streets of Toronto or Vancouver to some quack? That is what you are saying if you support this bill.

Let me refer for a moment to other forms of birth control. We know that women are increasingly concerned about present forms of contraceptives, many of which have side effects and, indeed, are not nearly as infallible as we once thought. More and more men are thinking in terms of having vasectomies. If we apply the same principle, what is the situation then? I know this is not analogous, but perhaps the principle is the same. How would you feel about a bill in this House forbidding you to have a vasectomy if you felt that was the best way for you and your wife to prevent unwanted pregnancy? Women have the right to make their own decisions, hopefully without torture, without feelings of guilt and without being blackmailed. If they have access to proper counselling, education, family planning, contraceptives and good medical advice, maybe they would choose some alternative to abortion.

Certainly with my background I am familiar with children who have been taken in for care, and I can certainly tell members of this House that the rights of those children who go into one foster home after another are not being observed. Their health, welfare, and ability to mature as human beings are in serious jeopardy.

The question of health was referred to, and we all know that health involves the total human being and not just the narrow area of physical or mental damage as mentioned in this bill.

● (1700)

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would really like to address myself to the rights of children. Those who have spoken today have mentioned this. It seems to me that the rights of children are the right to be loved, to have care, to be nourished emotionally as well as physically, to have security, hopefully to have two parents, hopefully to have decent housing, decent income, and food on the table. There are millions and millions of families across this country who cannot provide that for their children. Children have the right not to be abused or neglected.

It is demonstrated every day that child abuse and neglect are on the increase. Men and women who have not had their own needs met and are seriously deprived themselves, who