

Status of Women Study

grams, Mr. Speaker, and services should be organized for women offenders. Women should not be incarcerated in the maximum security prison at Kingston at a time when the trend of penal reform is toward small, open institutions. As a result, quite rightly, the commissioners recommend that the federal women's prison at Kingston be closed.

Speaking on the question of release and after-care, the commissioners indicate that parole services for Indians and Eskimos call for special attention and that these people require parole services to fit their general needs. The commissioners ask that these be recognized and implemented with regard to parole. On release, most offenders find it difficult to become reintegrated in the community. Halfway houses for people newly released on parole or discharged from correctional institutions, where they can stay until they have become adjusted to life outside, are extremely important. If we are to provide follow-up and after-care services for young women we shall need halfway houses in which they can be reintegrated in society and in which they can find friendship, employment and fulfilment.

Of all chapters in the report on the status of women, chapter 9, dealing with women and the criminal law, is perhaps the most important. I underline the necessity of the government's moving rapidly in bringing about changes in the criminal law so that women may obtain equality and fulfilment.

Mr. Murray McBride (Lanark-Renfrew-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a privilege to participate in the debate on the status of women. I will take note of the fact that in the report significant mention was made of the subject of abortion. I will use the time at my disposal to discuss in the House the very difficult, emotional, brutal, tragic and complex question of abortion.

You will remember, Sir, that on Friday last Bill C-32 was debated in this House. That bill had one main purpose, to remove the subject of abortion from the Criminal Code and treat the question as one of individual choice to be made as the individual judges best, without reference to society in general, to the values that society exalts and to the powers to give life or determine death which that society champions and which society says belongs to society as a whole. That decision must be made by society. However, if abortion were completely removed from the Criminal Code, that power would be abandoned. Since my time is limited this evening I will go directly to my main points and state categorically that abortion is death. The decision to abort is a decision to terminate life. Allow me to explain why I think so.

As a free agent, I am free to cut off my own hand or to drop a giant cleaver on my leg. The limb, which was part of my body, which is flesh and blood, tissue and bone, was alive. But once severed from the larger body of the host, the tissue soon dies. It is not able to sustain itself once it is separated from the host body.

If abortion were simply the removal of a small bundle of tissue from somebody's body and were similar to the removal of the bundle of tissue that is my hand, which

[Mr. Gilbert.]

would not sustain itself apart from the host body and which would therefore die, that would be one thing. That, if it were to happen, would be arrestingly tragic. Anyone who has worked in the healing arts must know this, as must anyone who has read Arthur Hailey's novel "Hospital". We feel a sense of awe when tissue is severed. We must ask, what do you do with an arm or a leg once it has been severed or cut free? Hopefully, we will never have a society with so little sensitivity for the physical presence of the human personality that we will ever treat casually portions of a human body.

A person might cut off a portion of his body from choice. Certainly we have thought that traditional wrist slashing in suicidal attempts, or wilful severing of a limb, was an offence that ought to be condemned by a society in which the value of people is beyond measure and in which the physical life of an individual is something that no one individual has the right to terminate. Now we are moving toward taking suicide out of the Criminal Code. I say that this would be a wise move. But it is precisely because society treats self-destruction as arising from a mental illness, as something done by an ill person who is no longer able to take responsibility for himself, that suicide attempts are being removed from the Criminal Code. That is not being done because society in any way takes lightly the mutilation of one's body or the death of oneself, but because the person is deemed to be deranged and incapable of sound judgment.

A fetus of 12 hours, three weeks or two months is, in one respect, like a limb or portion of a human body. It is human tissue which cannot survive apart from the host body. It is like the victim of polio who dies without his iron lung or the injured hockey player in a coma who exists so long as another person wills that he shall exist and who, unless someone fills the role of host every hour of every day, will simply die. The human embryo is more than a hand or a leg or an eye. When a sperm enters the egg and the chromosomes line up, the genetic characteristics of the third person, now growing, now developing, are determined. Those characteristics are different from the characteristics of either parent. The new combination of characteristics and physical traits are all established and are unique to the individual who is now in the embryonic stage.

This human embryo in its early stages is just like some people who line the wards of hospitals for the aged throughout our land. If you take away the tubes, the oxygen masks and the intravenous feedings—in short, if you remove all the supports to life that must be provided for the individual by others—the individual will die just as the embryo will die if separated from the host body, because neither the individual nor the embryo are capable of sustaining life on their own. Why do these old people die? They die for the identical reason that an aborted child dies: they cannot survive without being surrounded and supported by a human life other than their own.

There may well be a valid argument in favour of mercy killing—euthanasia, to use the fancy word—of one person deciding that it is better for another to die than to