

Government Orders

that within the legislation we have provided they will be able to do that better than they can without a law.

Right Hon. John N. Turner (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, before I get into the substance of the matter, I have to say at the outset that this government has been totally negligent in waiting so long to bring forth this legislation. It has been nearly two years since the Supreme Court of Canada declared the previous law unconstitutional. Since then we have had nothing but procrastination and delay. This government has dilly-dallied, refusing to face up to its responsibilities and, of course, allowing the type of judicial chaos we had during the summer.

Suddenly the minister is trying to rush it through this House. I want to tell him that we will try to be as constructive as we can, but we do not accept the cavalier attitude that the government has shown towards Parliament in dealing with the issue, nor do I believe the people of Canada appreciate that attitude.

[*Translation*]

Following the Supreme Court's decision, the Government had promised on many occasions that it would introduce a bill at its earliest convenience, to use the very expression used by Ray Hnatyshyn, the predecessor of the current Minister of Justice, who apparently is in line for the job of next Governor General of Canada. But this Government has produced nothing except, in July 1988, a multiple choice questionnaire which has lead us nowhere.

It has been totally inexcusable for the government to leave this matter on hold for nearly two years. Finally, we have now a bill in a context where all Members can consider the situation very closely.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, we are faced with a very sensitive moral dilemma. It is a dilemma which, on the one hand, has an impact on the life of every individual, and on the other hand, has major social consequences for our country. No woman could decide lightly to have an abortion. A woman could only consider it with a lot of anxiety and suffering as a last recourse solution. There is no one here who would trade places with a woman faced with such a decision. I suggest that for those of us who are not women this situation is just impossible to fathom. The fact remains that in the real world, thousands of Canadian women must face this decision.

[*English*]

Analysing the situation, there could be no more difficult issue for those of us elected by our constituents than to respond to this issue on a national basis. It is not the responsibility of the legislatures. I do not believe it is primarily the responsibility of the courts. It is the responsibility of members of Parliament.

Within our society there are two diametrically opposite and opposed views on abortion. I can appreciate completely the strength, honesty, and commitment of the convictions of both the pro-life and pro-choice advocates. One group of Canadians believes fundamentally that it is a question of the sanctity of life, the protection of life. The other group believes, also fundamentally, that it is a question of a woman's control over her own body, it is a question of personal liberty and security of her person.

There is no way that these two views can be reconciled philosophically. There is no way these two opposing views can be reconciled theologically or indeed politically. Speaking frankly, we will never reach a consensus on this issue in the House of Commons or in the country. We can reach only an accommodation at best.

So what is our duty here? How do we approach the matter? It is our duty, as legislators, to attempt to find that uneasy accommodation between those two points of view. As I have indicated, in arriving at a judgment, the Liberal caucus members are free to vote as they see fit. This is not a partisan matter and we will not treat it in a partisan fashion.

In a pluralistic society such as we have in Canada, with a separation of church and state, no official religion, with a wide variety of moral views, with a growing variety of cultural traditions, a wide spectrum of religious upbringing, our responsibility as legislators is somehow to seek the common good. Our duty is to seek the best equilibrium we can between the two polarized and competing views on the subject of abortion, between two irreconcilable views on abortion.

I come to the subject with a strong conviction that my duty, and I believe our duty, is not to impose our own beliefs rigidly on the views of others who may strongly disagree. Each of us has the right to his own moral perspective. Each of us has the right to express that view clearly. Each of us has the right to try to convince others