

*Abortion*

as they are in many parts of today's troubled world. In my nomination speech on September 17, 1977, I said:

I will defend human life from its conception until its natural end.

This means I am opposed to, first, abortion; second, euthanasia; third, capital punishment; and—although I do not have it included in the document from which I read at that time—I am also against death from starvation, from war or from any other act in which the human right to live is violently taken away from some other person.

The human rights which I support are, first, the right to be born; second, the right to adequate food, housing, medical care and education; third, the right to live in, at least, frugal comfort within one's cultural tradition; fourth, freedom of conscience, worship, expression, political participation and peaceful dissent; fifth, equal treatment in public, job markets and courts, regardless of sex, age, ethnic origin, marital status, religious or political beliefs, social and economic status; sixth, the right to social assistance when age or other circumstances make self-support inadequate; and seventh, the right to die with dignity.

I believe that human rights are all of a piece—ignore one right and you jeopardize all the others. That is why a single issue approach to rights will not work. If we are really pro-life, we have to protect human life from conception through to death. This requires an active, lifelong concern for a just social system.

In that document I repeated that my stand on abortion is at odds with the present New Democratic Party policy, but dissent has an honourable tradition within the NDP. As other speakers have already pointed out, there is no doubt at all that the issue about which we are speaking is highly emotional, and because of that, it is very difficult for people to really hear what the other side is saying. I am fully aware of this. When an emotional argument is taking place, it is terribly difficult to hear the other side. Over the years I have tried to hear all the positions, but the part which I was never able to hear, at least within myself, was the basic assumption that abortion itself was a moral act. Abortion, as I understand it, is a direct attack carried out against a living unborn child. I cannot see it from any other point of view than that of morality and I consider it to be an evil act. It is an evil act, in my view. It touches on a basic moral principle which I am sure can be sustained by everybody in the House. It is a basic moral principle of ethics that you cannot do an evil act for a good end.

So we face a serious problem because of how one should act in the face of problems which have been discussed today, the existence of which I do not deny, the social problems about which the hon. member for Vancouver East (Mrs. Mitchell) spoke. I recognize that there are answers to social problems, but I cannot, in my conscience, understand how it is possible to carry out an evil act, or an act which I perceive as being evil, for a good or an apparent good.

I could bring religious arguments into the debate but I will not. However, I think I can bring to this debate some of my own reflections in past years. I have had to come to terms with

my own life every day and with the life of everyone else whom I have met. Every single person whom I meet is a mystery which cannot be explained except for the fact that we are all present here in this universe at this time, and that we are in the process of going from conception to death. The process cannot be stopped. So when someone says that they can overcome that basic mystery and that somehow or other they have greater understanding and knowledge of the point at which life starts and stops, after seven days, after seven months, after seven years or after 70 years, I cannot accept that, because no one I know has that power.

I spoke of the mystery of human life, and it is because human life is a mystery with individual reason, will, personality and conscience that I speak about human rights. I believe that the individual is unique on the face of this earth and therefore has rights. Individuals have those rights not because the House of Commons gives them to him or her but because there is basically something different and special about human existence. That is why dogs, horses, salmon or geraniums do not have rights. All plants and animals have life but they do not share the kind of life I have—they do not have human life.

I do not want anyone to think that I am attacking anybody for what they have done, or anything of that sort. All I am saying is that I have never heard anyone answer the questions I am posing in a way I would consider reasonable. I have to live by my own conscience. In my belief, conscience is a unique power that a human being has and that no other thing on this planet has. A human conscience, so far as I understand it, is the judgment of right reason. It is a judgment which I must make about a particular act, about a particular way of acting, about a particular series of acts, and the only thing I have to go on is my right reason. I must use my faculties to look upon a particular action and say whether it is evil or good. I must follow my conscience in making that decision. I am sure no one in the House would deny that. Perhaps we see it differently because we have a difficult time hearing each other.

• (1750)

I should like to share some of my own experience. As we go through the period from conception to death we acquire experience. I refer to the question of health and what human health basically means. If it is a question of health—the health of the unborn child is not taken into consideration. It is destroyed! That is the act to which we must relate our consciences.

Yesterday I had an opportunity to speak with an archaeologist whose wife had experienced an accidental miscarriage. She was an archaeologist as well; I do not know whether they had any religious faith. He related the drastic effect of this spontaneous miscarriage on his family. His wife was able to explain it by indicating that her body was the result of five or ten million years of preparation before it could reach the high level of existence necessary to produce a human life. When the miscarriage occurred she reacted to it in such a way that the emotional impact was present years later. My experience counselling many people involved with abortions leads me to