Abortion Plebiscite Act

want a referendum on abortion, and he would like the following question to be asked:

[*English*]

Are you in favour of deleting from the Criminal Code of Canada the provisions relating to abortion: yes or no?

[*Translation*]

It is not as simple as that. We must first ask ourselves what abortion is. Is it a murder or not? The question of whether the foetus is a human life or not has not been settled. Some theologians say there is life from the moment of conception, others deny it. There is no agreement on this matter. Moreover, jurists say there is no life as long as the child has not been born viable.

So until the whole problem is solved, how could there be such a referendum? The people would have to be extremely well informed before they could decide. Should the Criminal Code be amended or remain as it is? What the hon. member suggests seems to be an impossible thing to do.

[*English*]

What he wants is this: he wants to hold a national plebiscite at the next convenient opportunity, and then attempt to tie the hands of the government to bring in legislation to enact the result of the poll. I think such an approach is entirely inappropriate both from a traditional, constitutional and parliamentary point of view, and having regard to the nature of the issue involved. It is on this latter point I should like to dwell for a moment or two.

Should Canada decide upon the kind of abortion laws it ought, or ought not to enact, on the basis of a national poll? First, the bill proposes to hold the poll in conjunction with the next federal election, whenever that might be. To link such a vote to a general election could exercise a serious distortion of influence on that election in terms of the turnout, the focusing of issues, and so on. It would be surrounded by all the election politicking which normally attends a general election campaign. This could seriously distort the issue. The two votes should be kept entirely separate if an accurate expression of public opinion is desired.

Yet how can a plebiscite be taken on such a question? I should like to refer now to two surveys which were made some time ago. In March, 1971, in that month's edition of *Chatelaine* a report was made of a survey conducted by the magazine involving 6,000 respondents. The author of the report came out, apparently, in favour of abortion on demand. The results of the survey, according to the author, "overwhelmingly bore out opinions we have expressed that abortion should be permitted on demand up to the twelfth week of pregnancy." The report went on to say there was increasingly strong support for abortion on demand as the age of the respondents decreased.

The CBC made another survey. The CBC discovered many subtle modifications and shades of meaning in views expressed by the public on this issue, one which could not be settled with a quick yes or no answer. The CBC reported:

Older people tended to be more inclined than younger people to feel that the law was already too permissive. Younger people were

[Mrs. Morin.]

more inclined than their elders to feel that greater permissiveness was required.

So nothing at all was proved.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, had the hon. member emphasized instead the prevention of pregnancies among teenagers, students, or still, more extensive sex education in high schools, I could have supported his bill. But, at the present time, before suggesting a referendum on abortion or even the advisability of deleting from the Criminal Code the relevant provisions, the public would have to be informed, which is practically impossible at present. That is why I could not support the bill introduced by the hon. member.

Mr. Eymard Corbin (Madawaska-Victoria): Mr. Speaker, apparently, it would seem that I have the honour today of aborting the discussion on Bill C-40. Of course, there are many things that I should like to see go wrong in the world in which we live today, but I am not prepared to agree that there is a need to go so far as to eliminate human life in a mother's womb. For example, I could talk about the necessity of aborting a proposed political union of the maritime provinces or the necessity of aborting a proposed corridor in the state of Maine, but that is not the case in point.

● (1750)

I found the bill rather interesting and I feel that it takes a lot of guts to bring such bills before the House. The issue of abortion should be considered more seriously than has been the case. It was often described at first as an issue which should not remain at a strictly emotional level. We live in an ever changing society and I know by experience that the ideas of some of my colleagues on this subject change from day to day, so to speak.

We live in an essentially dynamic society, dynamic in its concepts of welfare programs, dynamic also in its way of considering public morality. The legislator cannot indifferently consider abortion merely from an emotional or moral point of view. There is more than that to it, something specific to the very integrity of a person. I do not intend to engage in a theological or moral debate. I might do so under other circumstances. Above all, I would like to consider at some length the objective sought by the sponsor of the bill today. But before making any comments on the object of the bill, I would like to consider immediately section 5 which states that according to the result of a referendum during the first session of the House of Commons, next following such plebiscite, the Minister of Justice shall introduce a measure to amend the Criminal Code of Canada to provide for enacting into law the result of such plebiscite. What I do not like about this clause 5, Mr. Speaker, is that the sponsor seems to have taken for granted that the results will be favourable and in accordance with the objective that he is seeking.

And I know by experience that there could be some surprises. Is it really necessary to try to find out what Canadians think about this matter, as proposed in the bill?

In clause 4 of the bill, the sponsor has drafted the question he would like the electors to be asked and which reads as follows: