

*Abortion*

Mr. Speaker, when last January the Supreme Court of Canada handed down its decision in the case of the Queen versus Dr. Henry Morgentaler, Dr. Leslie Frank Smoling and Dr. Robert Scott, everyone was taken by surprise, and after giving the problem some serious thought, the Government announced, through the Minister of Justice (Mr. Hnatyshyn) that it would react with celerity, and that it would shortly table new legislation that would meet the legal test, in other words, it would contain the kind of legal language that would stand the test of the courts. In an interview he gave on March 18 of this year,

[English]

The Minister of Justice (Mr. Hnatyshyn) is quoted as saying, in an article in *The Ottawa Citizen* of March 18, 1988, the following:

The federal Government won't wait for a Law Reform Commission report before it introduces a new abortion law... It is necessary to act on an urgent basis.

That was some six months ago. We are now faced, after several months, with a motion which, in my view, will not satisfy anyone. It will not give Canadians that new law on an urgent basis.

I am satisfied that at least my Party, the Liberal Party, will have a free vote on this issue. I think that it is a good thing for Members of Parliament to express through a free vote their views on issues such as abortion. We expressed our views on the death penalty. On these difficult moral and ethical issues we have to stand and tell our constituents where we stand. I think that is good. People can say: "Well, my Member voted against the death penalty. He is not in favour of this motion put forward by the Government on abortion because basically he has been saying for the last 16 years in the riding of Ottawa—Vanier that he is against abortion on demand. He has said that repeatedly before every election". I am one of those who believe that there are reasons, serious reasons, to justify interrupting a pregnancy when the health of the mother is threatened, or when the individual has been violently and sometimes strongly emotionally affected by rape, or is the object of such a heinous crime as incest.

In my riding the people understand that abortion cannot be used as a means of contraception. I know that the people in my riding who hold the other view do not think that I am being very supportive of the free choice movement, but I am neither pro-life nor pro-choice. I believe that the pro-choice movement, the extreme pro-choice movement, does not represent a view which I can defend. I do not think that the pro-life movement, the extreme of that movement, represents my views either. I have said so over the years to them. In my riding I have been called the worst traditionalist there is. If being a traditionalist means standing up for certain things, then I am a traditionalist.

I want to talk about the need for legislation and why I think this motion is wrong. However, I want to talk about the difficulty that we are having in the country with the lack of

leadership of the Government in terms of giving Canadians a clear and unequivocal stand on where the Cabinet sits and on what it does. That is the parliamentary system as I know it. They have been elected and chosen to administer and to make proposals to the House. The House is then supposed to dispose of them in a democratic fashion.

• (1750)

I do not think that the Government can get away by hiding behind a wishy-washy motion such as the one before us, which is procedurally correct, thank you very much. The first motion, Motion No. 25, was not procedurally correct. We told the Government that. This one is procedurally correct and, by unanimous consent, we have accepted that debate be limited, but everybody will have a chance. All those who want to speak can come into the House until six o'clock tomorrow morning—if they have the patience—and state their views. Tomorrow the same scenario will apply, starting at three o'clock until six o'clock, Thursday morning. There is the possibility for some 60 to 70 people to speak. That will be a minority of the House, but at least it will be a debate which is open to all those who want to participate.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, one of the reasons why I truly believe the Government showed a lack of courage and leadership by not tabling a Bill is that legislation would give Canadians some clear and specific parameters on the issue of abortion. In a motion, which has no force of law, it is hard to describe and define what one wants to say, while legislation, with its definitions and terms and the way it is drafted, can give us a much broader range of understanding by the way it defines those terms.

This motion, Motion No. 36 before the House today, does not provide a definition of health and does not define what the motion means when it says, in the second paragraph:

When, during the early stages of pregnancy: a qualified medical practitioner...

What are the early stages of pregnancy? To be defined. And further, when we read:

When during the subsequent stages of pregnancy...

What is the subsequent stage? Somebody in my riding explained: The early stages are from the beginning to the middle and the subsequent stages from the middle to the end.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, there was a very important debate in Great Britain recently on a motion to restrict access to abortion to 18 weeks, as opposed to 22 or 23 weeks. The motion was defeated. I am told that in France, women can have an abortion on demand in the first 10 weeks, but that afterwards it is rather difficult. In Canada, there is no limit, but the Government does not say what it means by "earlier stages of pregnancy" and "subsequent stages". No, it leaves that to possible amendments from Members. That is not courageous, nor is it very clear.