

Criminal Code

ic process and to the whole idea of enhancing the role of the private Member.

I simply urge, in closing, that Conservative Government Members who intend to speak out this Bill refer the subject matter to a special committee in order to hear all Hon. Members of Parliament and all interested Canadians so at least democracy will be better served.

Mr. Cyril Keeper (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I cannot really say that I welcome the opportunity to enter into this debate, but it is an important subject and serves to be addressed. Abortion is obviously a matter which is very controversial and raises the feelings of people to very high levels. Therefore, it is important to approach this debate in a calm and reasonable fashion. The Private Members' Bill before us in effect seeks to eliminate abortions except where the life of the mother is directly threatened. We know from studies that countries which have laws outlawing abortions do not eliminate abortions. So, even if this Private Members' Bill were to go to committee and were to be passed, in the final analysis it would not achieve its stated objective, which is to do away with abortions.

Very restrictive abortion laws would simply return us to the days before the present law on abortion in which desperate women would be forced to induce the abortion themselves or to approach a back-room abortionist. Those would be very unsafe abortions and we could have women die in these desperate circumstances. The one virtue of the present situation is that if a woman is to have an abortion we can at least guarantee that the abortion is a safe procedure.

I am a Catholic and a father, so I do not approach the subject of abortions lightly. It is a very serious matter and I am sure that any woman who finds herself in a situation in which she has to make a decision about whether or not to have an abortion does not approach this decision lightly, either. It is important in those situations to take whatever advice one can from one's family spiritual leader but in the final analysis, what it needed is the kind of law which is enunciated in the policy of my Party, that is, simply, that the issue of abortion does not belong in the Criminal Code, it is a medical procedure, and a woman should have the right to choose to use that medical procedure in consultation with her doctor. That is the way the choice should be made rather than having the woman go before a bureaucratic committee or be under some restrictive laws which purport to eliminate abortions and which in fact simply drive them underground where the procedure would then become unsafe.

The medical profession has examined this question very carefully. The Canadian Medical Association has come to the conclusion that whether or not a woman has an abortion should be a matter for the woman in consultation with her doctor. The people who have to undertake the procedure carefully studied the matter and have come to that conclusion. Not only have medical doctors looked at the question of abortion but the United Church as well. It has studied the issue very carefully and in depth. It has come to a similar conclusion. It believes that it is a matter of conscience and that

the individual person should make the decision, guided by her own moral values. The question of abortion has no easy solution. That is why we, in the final analysis, have come to the conclusion that the decision must be left to the woman and to her doctor. This does not mean that we promote or favour abortions because we certainly do not. If we really want to achieve what this Bill purports to seek, that is, to eliminate abortions or to reduce the number of abortions, then we have to look for effective ways of doing that. This Bill would not achieve that end. If we really want to reduce the number of abortions, then we must make sure that the means for preventing contraception are available. Rather than the Government cutting funding for planned parenthood, it should be making sure that people in general have access to the means to prevent a pregnancy. In that way they will not have to face the difficult decision of whether or not to have an abortion.

We also need good education in human relations. We have to educate our children about what love is and about what male and female relationships are all about so that they do not enter this domain in ignorance to then be taken advantage of. We need good education in order that young people can make wise decisions. We also need to augment our assistance to single parents. There are many young single parents in this country and we have to make sure they have adequate financial assistance. We have to make sure that the doors of opportunity in the form of employment are open to them. That is no easy task. We need to have extensive affirmative action programs which will ensure that someone who has the responsibility for a child can at the same time continue their education and acquire the skills which will allow them to earn a decent living.

● (1750)

There are a lot of things which could be done in an effort to reduce the number of abortions which take place. This, of course, does not make the question any easier to deal with but we do know from studies in those countries which combine access to abortion along with adequate preventive measures that the number of abortions are less than in those countries which seek to eliminate abortions by way of very harsh laws. While the question is difficult, it is important to keep a balanced perspective. We must understand that so long as abortions go on, they should be done in a safe environment and the appropriate person should make the decision about whether an abortion should take place or not. That, in the final analysis, is the woman. At the same time that Governments ensure equitable access to abortions they should also ensure that preventive measures are in place to reduce abortions.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Édouard Desrosiers (Hochelaga-Maisonneuve): Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I just want to share some of my thoughts on this subject. I come from a family of fifteen children. If my parents had known the system we have today, you would not have had the great privilege of seeing me in the House this afternoon.