

*Abortion*

In 1969, we passed the therapeutic abortion legislation. I would like to deal with it, Mr. Speaker, because I sat on the first committees on therapeutic abortion. I sat on and helped set up abortion committees from Newfoundland to Victoria. All the committee members were men. We had to fight for one or two years before they agreed to have women sitting on those committees. Each woman, each case that was studied, because we had no right to ask the patient. A case was presented and defended and each woman about to have a therapeutic abortion had to talk with a psychiatrist to ascertain whether she was not mentally disturbed. Or else it was said that she was going through a breakdown or that she would be deeply disturbed, but there was always some reference to a psychological disorder and that was the only way to get a therapeutic abortion.

Of course, women were 12 weeks pregnant when they arrived because they were coming from regions where nobody knew that they were entitled to a therapeutic abortion.

Subsequently, I was a member of the Badgley Commission which considered the implementation of the abortion legislation. We travelled throughout Canada and realized that women were going to hospital to undergo a therapeutic abortion thinking that it was still forbidden. But again, according to the provinces, it was a federal legislation that some of the provinces refused to enforce. There were also some hospital administrators who refused to provide for therapeutic abortions. Thus, according to the region where you lived, according to your financial means, you could or could not have a therapeutic abortion.

I remember being told by some provincial officials: There is no abortion here, we do not need it. Women had to go to the neighbouring province. They were going in particular to the Town of Lethbridge where abortions were provided for the whole Province of Saskatchewan where therapeutic abortions were not available. They had to go to the Atlantic provinces where the federal legislation is not implemented at the present time, and Montréal hospitals are overflowing with women coming from the Atlantic provinces because they cannot have access to therapeutic abortions in the hospitals of those provinces. Montréal hospitals were packed and officials used to say, what are we going to do with those patients? And those patients went to clinics.

The Badgley report on the implementation of the Abortion Act made some major recommendations but said, among other things, that if we were to stop unwanted pregnancies, what was needed were clinics providing for sexual education and contraception services throughout Canada.

But when I sat on the committee on child care services in 1986, we travelled throughout Canada and I ventured to ask questions about pregnancies among teenagers, since we were dealing with child care, and I was told that no sexual education course was given in several regions because it was not permissive to even say the word "sex", and that contraception means were even less offered. With the result that in one of the Atlantic provinces, in 1985, there were more childbirths among single mothers than among married women. That was not 20 years ago, but two or three years ago!

At present, it seems that women are being denied the right to interrupt their pregnancy but on the other hand, we do not provide support services either to those who have children or to those who want to go on with their pregnancy. We have at present in Canada no service that is designed for women willing to go on with their pregnancy. We have no drug service, they are not given any particular assistance, any welfare, they have no housing. If they are young, there is no way they can go on with their studies and they have to turn to food banks. They are undernourished and often give birth to sick babies.

The Conservative Government has introduced a motion instead of a Bill. They say that they are for the family, that they want to do more for children. But if you look at what the Conservative Government has accomplished since 1984 for the family and children, we find, first, the Badgley report on child abuse tabled in 1984. Only one committee has been created since and no recommendation has been implemented.

The birth control department was closed down in 1985. There have been dramatic cut-backs in the budget of Planned Parenthood. The tax reform has increased taxes for Canadian families. Naturally, there is no sex education program and obviously no contraception program because this is permissive!

Very little if anything at all has been done for battered women. There are not enough day care centres. One out of five children in Canada is poor and 57 per cent of children between the ages of six and 14 are left alone after school.

Then, the women are told to shut up and that it is not up to them to determine whether they can continue their pregnancy and take care of their children afterwards. And all this to protect the unborn child!

Mr. Speaker, I agree that we shall have to decide up to which stage of a pregnancy abortion can be practised.

Earlier, I heard an Hon. Member say that he would accept abortions when the life of the mother is threatened.

I simply want to point out that the mental balance and the very life of many mothers in Canada are threatened every day because they live in poverty, because they do not have access to daycare, because they are battered, because they are sexually abused. We talk about danger. It is always more dramatic to speak about a threat to the life of the mother. But what are we doing for women in their everyday life? What are we doing to help them? I must admit that it is very little.

Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, no one is for abortion and being pro-choice is not necessarily the same as being for abortion. Being pro-choice means to respect the choice and to provide support for every woman who decides to continue her pregnancy and to help those who decide to have their pregnancies terminated. People will say: those women could continue their pregnancy and give up the child for adoption, because there are not enough children for those who want to adopt. However, we should look at the figures. Most teenage mothers do not give up their child for adoption. They keep their child, maybe for three years and then they decide to put up the child up for adoption. The child will remember that.