

Abortion

The answer to these questions is that changing and restricting access to abortion would not stop unwanted pregnancies. Hospitals do not cause pregnancies. Men cause pregnancies. This is a fact that men in this House continually seem to ignore. This is not a legal question. It is a human physical question which affects the lives of women far more than men. An amendment to the Criminal Code to further restrict abortions in hospitals will not deal with the concerns of those who oppose abortions on moral grounds. It will force young girls and poor women to go to the back street butchers in surroundings where they risk their health. That is why I want to talk about this bill in relation to democracy.

Our party respects the right of every man or woman to take a religious view on the question of abortion. I do not intend to talk about what is or is not life. Obviously there is a great difference of opinion on this very emotional subject. We respect personal and religious views that are a matter of conscience. However, we are opposed to measures that impose certain moral views on other people, and particularly on women in this case.

The member proposing this bill has a right to a personal opinion on abortion. However, neither he nor this House has the right to impose views on a woman who is pregnant, who cannot care for her child, and who, after careful consideration, decides to have an abortion. It is her decision in consultation with her doctor. It is not the role of a member of Parliament to say to that woman, "You cannot have an abortion. I am your judge." Not only will this not work, since the woman obviously will find another way of having the abortion if it is important to her, but it is not the role of Parliament to tell a woman what she can or cannot do with her body and her life.

Many women and enlightened men today feel we should be broadening the concept of health to accept the UN definition to include mental, social and physical factors as well. This should be the criterion used by hospital boards when a doctor recommends an abortion. We should not be restricting it as this bill proposes. Better still, we should not be taking up the time of the hospital, with its expensive services, in dealing with abortions. It should be decriminalized and treated as a medical service at community clinics.

In many countries today abortion is not a moral issue. It is a human practical issue that involves population planning. It is part of practical medical services. A pregnant woman is free to choose what is best for herself, her partner and her family. Children are born wanted in a family that can nourish and care for them.

Recently I had a long chat with Grace MacInnis, the former member for Vancouver-Kingsway who, as many of us know, worked for many years in this House and across Canada for women's rights, the strengthening of families and the right of all children to be wanted, to grow and develop into mature, healthy human beings. She reminded me that we live in a pluralistic society. We know that individuals have very different points of view on abortion. She also reminded me that we must not give up the fight for a woman's individual right to choice in the matter of abortion. She said it took 80 years for

the House of Commons to legalize birth control. Now it is time to work for the repeal of abortion from the Criminal Code.

I agree with this. It is the policy of my party. Therefore, the NDP opposes this private member's bill as an undemocratic, regressive and sexist act. It would prevent a woman from having access to hospital services if she and her doctor request an abortion as a matter of health.

● (1730)

Mr. Garnet M. Bloomfield (London-Middlesex): Mr. Speaker, I am speaking today in support of the private member's bill presented by the hon. member for Kindersley-Lloydminster (Mr. McKnight). The hon. member for Vancouver East (Mrs. Mitchell) said that male chauvinistic views were being expounded. I would like her to know that there is one member on our side who is female and who does not really agree with that attitude, and she would like that view to be on the record.

We are dealing with a very controversial and emotional subject which goes right to the root of our very being. There are several questions to which we should address ourselves. What rights does the unborn child have? Are those rights subject to any qualifications? Is the unborn entitled to full human rights? If so, does he or she receive those rights at conception or at some subsequent point in his or her pre-natal development? Does the mother have the right, for whatever reason, to end the life that is within her?

The question of abortion is one of the most widely disputed topics in recent years. The supporters of strict abortion laws express deep concern over the abolition of the intrinsic and absolute right of life which has always been recognized as fundamental in Canadian society. Pro-life people see abortion as the destruction of innocent children. Those who are pro-abortion tend to blur the issue by citing abstract philosophical arguments about personal freedom and privacy or talk in terms of generalizations such as "social good" or "the quality of life".

The courts of our land can make a wrong legal, but they cannot make a wrong right. Pro-abortionists like to refer to the unborn as a fetus instead of a child, and I am convinced that they are using certain words to depersonalize the unborn baby. If we accept that there is no difference between having an abortion and the removal of a gallbladder or an appendix operation, it will affect our attitude toward the rights of those seeking abortions.

However, if we believe that this is a human rights issue, that we are more than two-legged animals and that man was made in the image of God, formed from His hand, then for those reasons human life is very precious and not to be dealt with lightly.

I wish to quote from the declaration of the rights of a child made by the General Assembly of the United Nations on November 20, 1959, as follows:

The child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth.