

*Abortion*

element. Some have proposed 10 weeks, 15 or 20 weeks. I think science is sufficiently advanced to come up, if a date must be set, with a number of weeks, the smallest possible number of weeks so as to lessen the major controversy regarding the beginning of life. I know that in some countries the reference is to 10 weeks, in others 20 weeks. I am told that in the countries where it is 20 weeks, they want to shorten that period and where it is 10 weeks, they want to extend it. But then again, if the Government had really wanted to assume its responsibilities and face this important issue, as the people expected and demanded, it could have put forward a bill including all these elements so that we could have found a common ground which, while not pleasing everybody, would have assured Canadian women of fair and equitable treatment, taking into account of course the North American reality. On the other hand, if we moved towards very strict and restrictive legislation and regulations, a large number of Canadian women would circumvent them by going to places that are a lot more permissive.

During this important debate, I had the opportunity to meet and discuss with a number of representatives, particularly from the Pro-Life movement, with whom I talked a lot. I totally agree with some of their arguments.

My colleague just gave me a document which says in paragraph 4: "The only solution to abortion is adoption. Thousands of couples are waiting to get permission to adopt children." We have heard of all the procedures, problems and long delays such couples must go through before finally being authorized to adopt children. It has been admitted that it could be a very good approach, but it must also be understood that a couple's problem cannot be solved at the expense of the mother. I think a massive effort must be made to encourage more women to complete their pregnancies, to give those couples who want a child, or hope for one as many chances as possible of adopting one. We could not say that men and women who wish to adopt a child will see their problem solved because abortion would be banned from now on. I do not see it as an acceptable way of solving this issue, all the more so since I believe what is required is an effort, and that is where things get very difficult, for greater awareness and enhancing, efforts on resources, on available services, to be able to correct a course that seems to have started, unfortunately, in the last few years.

I conclude and summarize, Mr. Speaker, by declaring myself as pro-life. My pro-life position is non-exclusive as that demonstrated by some of my colleagues, but pro-life in the hope that regulations will eventually de-criminalize that aspect, that there will be generous consideration of the very specific cases I described earlier, particularly when the health of the mother is at risk, when the pregnancy is the result of a criminal act, cases which, in my opinion, it would be entirely acceptable and reasonable to consider in the regulations the country will adopt eventually.

• (1850)

[*English*]

**Hon. Sinclair Stevens (York—Peel):** Mr. Speaker, I am particularly pleased to be given an opportunity to speak in this debate which is the most important debate, as far as subject matter is concerned, to come before this Parliament. I say that because we are dealing with a life or death situation with respect to abortion. Before getting into the body of my remarks, however, I would like to state my position. We have a motion before us which I cannot support for what I feel are three very important reasons.

First, I cannot support this motion because it does not clearly declare that the unborn is a human being. Second, I cannot support the motion because it does not invoke Section 33 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to ensure that any future legislation will be effective in the wake of the Supreme Court of Canada judgment to which some of our Members have already referred. Third, I cannot support this motion because it does not place the burden of proof on those who would snuff out the lives of the unborn by abortion. In my opinion, it is that group which should be required to show that such lives should be ended.

Having said that, let me say that I have already filed with the Clerk of the House an amendment that I hope will be considered. Immediately after the preamble of the motion, I propose that notwithstanding Section 7 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, such legislation giving pre-eminence to the protection of all life, and recognizing that the foetus is a human being, should prohibit the performance of an abortion except when first, two independent qualified medical practitioners in good faith and on reasonable grounds state that in their opinion the continuation of the pregnancy would, or would likely, endanger the life of the pregnant woman. Second, the termination of such pregnancy is performed by a qualified medical practitioner and, third, the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest where, in the opinion of two qualified medical practitioners, the continuation of the pregnancy would, or would be likely to endanger the woman's life or seriously endanger her health and the termination of such pregnancy is performed by a qualified medical practitioner.

I have already filed that suggested amendment with the Chair. Let me remind the House and Hon. Members what this process is all about. The Government has asked us to consider the motion which I have indicated I cannot support, but it fully anticipates that amendments will be made and considered and that in due course the House will pass on, presumably, its amended motion and that will show the Government the sense or mood of the House concerning the question of abortion. I feel that when a free vote is the order of the day, that is a very reasonable approach for the Government to have taken. I am surprised that those spokespeople from the Official Opposition and the New Democratic Party are critical of the process. It is rather dismaying that the very act of democracy, the very act of asking Members to voice their opinion before legislation is