

On motion of Senator Doody, bill placed on the Orders of the Day for referral to Committee of the Whole at the next sitting.

[Translation]

ABORTION BILL

SECOND READING—DEBATE CONTINUED

On the Order:

Resuming the debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Doody, seconded by the Honourable Senator Atkins, for the second reading of the Bill C-43, An Act respecting abortion.—(Honourable Senator Petten).

Hon. Paul David: Honourable senators, I am grateful to Senator Petten for allowing me to deal today with this bill which I feel is extremely important, if not vital.

On June 16, 1988, honourable senators, I had an opportunity to express to you my deep convictions concerning abortion. These convictions have not changed. Very likely as all members of this Chamber, I remain a strong advocate of the living, the child and the family. To defend these values, I am very pleased to sit on the board of directors of the Vanier Institute of the Family. I join with many colleagues of this Chamber to condemn abortion per se which destroys this life which represents for all of us, I am sure, a basic value.

As a physician, I feel that abortion is a technical or medical act which goes against the main objective of medicine. In fact, it is the duty and responsibility of the medical profession to protect life. In itself, abortion is a procedure which destroys life. It goes, therefore, against the main tenets of our professional code of ethics.

There are many scientists who try to identify and quantify the qualities of life at the various developmental stages of the cell, magma, embryo and foetus. All these demonstrations may prove reassuring for the conscience of some physicians who are looking for excuses. For lack of convincing and definite evidence, I continue to share the opinion of many scientists who state unequivocally that the life of the human being is a continuing process which starts from the union of a spermatozoid and an ovum and continues through the nidation of these cells in the uterus to become first an embryo, then a foetus. The birth of a baby is the last developmental stage of the human being.

For these reasons, abortion at any of these developmental stages of a human being remains for me a wrongdoing. That is why I am a member of an association of physicians for the respect of life. In view of my very strong convictions, both as an individual and a physician, I spent a long time pondering upon my position as a Parliamentarian on this issue. My speech of June 1988 was a significant event in my development. I decided to complete my reflections through a research which I began in August 1988 in co-operation with a lawyer, Mrs. Mollie Dunsmuir. The purpose of this research was to acquaint myself with the evolution of the legislation in other democratic nations and to get to know the problems they face. Thanks to a very active, competent and dedicated co-opera-

tion, a final document was handed over to me on March 15, 1989, under the title *The Abortion Dilemma*. Some 20 copies are still available in my office for those of you who might wish to read it.

The first part of this study is a 116 page synthesis, written in English, summarizing the observations and problems which are part of our "dilemma". The second part is a detailed description of the evolution of similar legislation in such countries as the United States, England, France, West Germany, and of course Canada.

This research, together with the reading of many books and meetings with personalities interested in this problem, including several theologians, has helped me reconcile my own convictions with my responsibility as a Parliamentarian, in a democratic country which respects its citizens, both men and women.

In view of the fact that all Parliamentarians are faced with this dilemma, I thought it would be useful to summarize some of the findings of this research which have influenced my own view!

Honourable senators, in all countries covered by the study, abortion laws went through various phases, reflecting the morals and requirements of society at a given time. The latest version, generally relatively recent, was in each case the result of a difficult, lengthy and controversial process. Intense debates polarized both population and parliamentarians for months and even years.

Opinion polls in these countries, including our own, almost always indicated that people wanted legislation that was neither too restrictive nor too liberal. On the whole, people did not want to impose their own convictions and showed tolerance for those who did not share them. Most people felt that abortion was a matter that concerned only the conscience of the woman involved. This was the consensus of about 60 per cent of the population.

At both extremes of the debate, 20 per cent—pro-life supporters—were in favour of full protection for the foetus from the time of conception, while almost the same percentage—pro-choice supporters—were in favour of abortion on demand. All legislation covered by this study was a compromise that reflected the middle ground, without meeting the demands of the two groups I just mentioned.

To reach this compromise, the legislator tried to find a reasonable balance, couched in wording that was both legal and pragmatic.

The balance was first of all between the right of the individual and the interests of the community.

Second, a balance was sought between disputed opinions on the origin of life and the various stages of foetal development.

Third, a balance was sought between the physical reality of the foetus and its legal recognition.

Fourth, a balance was sought between the many methods of birth control and the conditions that justify abortion.