

There are some people who do not understand why a person would speak to an issue such as abortion. In the few moments available to me I would like to explain why I am speaking in favour of this bill and why I believe the measure should go to committee. I support the bill because I am acutely aware of my heavy responsibility both as an individual and as a member of Parliament to speak as forcefully as I can against the tendency to dehumanize modern life.

I rise to speak today not because I am necessarily confident that if I do so we can definitely reverse the course of our society, but because I am fearful that if people who share a reverence for human life do not speak, our cause is certainly lost.

The present abortion legislation is a classic case of an unenforceable and morally indefensible law. It satisfied neither the proponents of unlimited abortion nor those who opt for life. What it does is to put an impediment which is far from insurmountable between some pregnant women and the abortion they want. It is discriminatory in that the application of the law varies widely throughout Canada and it is almost impossible to enforce as the key element—the health of the mother—is subject to so many different interpretations. Of course it also fails totally to come to grips with the question of the humanity of the fetus.

When I look at the bill before us I see the hon. member proposes to remove the phrase “danger to health”. I totally agree with him that that phrase must be removed from the present legislation. If we look at the definition given by the World Health Organization of the word “health” we find that the World Health Organization defines health as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. I think we are all aware of the fact that the word “health” is a word that is tremendously abused. The definition of the World Health Organization, which is applied in many of our hospitals, is simply too wide, and in practice leads to the evergrowing abortion on demand. So, on the basis of the mental and social well-being in this definition, I think that if I were a doctor I could convince any abortion committee to give my patient an abortion within the definition of the WHO.

● (1630)

I was a member of the Kitchener-Waterloo hospital board for four years and during that time we looked at the whole question of abortion. We tried to grapple with it in that hospital and we found that it was the law that was at fault, not necessarily the practice in the hospital. The hospital had great difficulty in knowing just what guidelines it should set for its doctors. In that sense I think it is unfair to accuse the doctors of being the ones who are the problem in this case and of being too liberal in the way in which they interpret this law. I think the responsibility for ambiguity in this law rests right here in the House, and in that sense we must correct the law and remove the phrase “danger to health”.

### *Abortion*

In the explanatory notes to the hon. member's bill we find a quotation of the then minister of justice. In 1969 he said:

The bill has rejected the eugenic, sociological or criminal offence reasons.

He went on to say:

—only where the health or the life of the mother is in danger—

will abortion be permitted. I think I have to say, if I may be a little partisan about this, that the minister of justice at that time was trying to suck and blow at the same time. What he was trying to do was to appear to be truly against abortions on the one hand, while on the other hand he knew that the word “health” was going to be wide open and therefore abortions would take place. In that sense he was either totally naive, which I do not think he is, or he deliberately made a law which was open to abuse in that sense.

My reasons for supporting this bill and wanting it to go to committee are as follows. First, the committee can then call in witnesses who, being the best from the medical and scientific community in Canada, could tell us whether or not we are dealing with a human being. That is the key question behind this. We should send this bill to committee so we can have those witnesses and we can decide whether or not we are dealing with a human being. If we are, then obviously the law must be changed. If we are not, then the law should be removed from the Criminal Code. That is the key issue.

As I see the facts in this case—and I will only mention a few—I think we are dealing with a human being. A couple of weeks ago in the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs the commissioner of the Law Reform Commission indicated to committee members that what we need in Canada is a law which spells out when a human being is legally dead. In the questioning that took place, the commissioner told us that there is a considerable consensus that when a person's brainwave activity ceases, the person is dead. I would accept that definition, but I think we should apply it at both ends. If we say that a person is dead when his brainwaves cease, then we can say that person is alive when his brainwaves begin, and that is on the forty-second day in the development of the fetus. Clearly the vast majority of our abortions take place after that day. In that sense a human being is being done away with. I think that is really one of the key points to which we should address ourselves.

Another point is that we have had about 140 abortions a year since 1972, that were as late as six months after conception, and later. We all know that a premature baby can be taken care of from about that stage in its development, and we know that in some hospitals we can have the dramatic situation of a premature birth where all the staff and the equipment go to help the child, while in another part of the same hospital an abortion is being carried out on a child exactly the same age. In spite of the fact that the heart is beating, that you can measure the pulse, we throw that fetus in the garbage. Surely we must call in witnesses to tell us whether or not we are really dealing with a human being. That is another key point we must consider.