

Abortion

I think the time has come when Members of Parliament will have to stand up and be counted. Are we prepared to give recognition to the foetus? Are we prepared to give protection to the life of the foetus? Are we prepared to accept what Christian-Judaeo teachings tell us that a person is a person from the time of conception until death? Or are we moving our society closer and closer to the kinds of dilemma that will follow if we fail to give protection to the foetus at this most important point in this Parliament's history.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Lucie Pépin (Outremont): Mr. Speaker, I rise feeling a certain difficulty this evening about speaking to the resolution that the Government tabled today with the intention not of legislating on abortion but rather of finding out where MPs stand on termination of pregnancy. Let me explain: the debate we have had this evening has not been a debate on a bill, it has been a poll by the government to find out what all our positions are.

Why? I think that if the Government had done the responsible thing, it would have tabled a bill and not a resolution which is neither fish nor flesh, which wants to be seen as the *via media* and doesn't satisfy anybody, neither the pro-life groups nor the pro-choice groups.

I also think it is hypocritical of the Government to hide behind a mediocre resolution instead of presenting us with a Bill.

The motion we are discussing this evening flies in the face of the Supreme Court ruling, because the approach the ruling took gave women a voice. And the motion we are faced with this evening is quite a different story. When I listen to the majority of the speeches that have been made in the House this evening, it seems to me that a majority of MPs want to take away women's voice. I wonder, Mr. Speaker, what percentage of the Hon. Members actually read the Supreme Court ruling before giving their views. I don't think I would be wrong if I asserted that at least 90 per cent of my fellow-Members have not read the ruling, because, (if they had), there would have been a number of speeches this evening that would surely not have taken the tack they did. Some even referred to the rights guaranteed by the Charter, and if you read the ruling, you will find it is based on those very rights.

They confront us with a resolution, as I said just now, that flies in the face of the Supreme Court ruling, because in the ruling it says that in the early stages of pregnancy the decision is entirely up to the woman. And here we have a motion that says she has to share that decision with her doctor, and in the second paragraph that she has to share it with two doctors. I won't read the motion, Mr. Speaker, because a number of my colleagues have already done so. But I am taken aback to see the Conservative Government, which claims to be a government that extends and promises liberty and equality to women, blundering so badly when it comes to the right of women to terminate a pregnancy, which is a fundamental right, as the Supreme Court ruling spelled out. But is it a right that seems to terrify a number of lobby groups, and the Conservative government too. Otherwise it would have tabled a Bill.

As I listened to certain MPs this evening, I thought how interesting it would have been to have their wives speaking in their place this evening. I am sure the approach taken would have been a very different one, because I know very few women who—even if a majority of women tell you that life begins at the moment of conception, they'll also say that the decision rests with the woman. I know very few women, Mr. Speaker, who think abortion is a good thing. To be in favour of the freedom to choose is not the same thing as being in favour of abortion. You have only to recall all the difficulties and physical pain women used to undergo to obtain an abortion, simply to obtain a therapeutic abortion.

I can look back to around 1966, when the first family-planning clinic was opened in Montreal, when it was still illegal to talk about contraception. At that time I was the nurse in charge of an obstetrics and gynecology ward, and on Monday we would be told, "There've been 15 admissions for miscarriages—" But, abortion being illegal, all those cases of miscarriage would turn out to be cases of abortion. And when you examined the patients you found that they had used lye, Javex, knitting needles. We were told crazy stories such as: I was painting and the smell of paint caused my miscarriage, or I fell and at that very moment, I had contractions and aborted.

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But if you took a closer look at it, you could see that these women had had a voluntary abortion. At that time, they had to be reported. I remember, after taking a nurse training course in the suburbs, I came to Montréal for my specialization, I had never been faced with a woman who was arrested because she had had an abortion. Then, as head of my department, I see two policemen coming. They tell me: You have a patient under the name of Mrs. X. Then I answered to them: Yes, she is in bed 15-3. Then I ask: Did anything happen in her family so that you come and visit her? They answer: No, we have had a report that that woman has had an abortion and she must be arrested. Can you imagine my surprise? That did not take place 50 years ago, Mr. Speaker, but in the years 1967-68 in Montréal.

Thus, I decided to have a meeting with the staff and nurses and to tell them that before they report women and send them to jail, they would better make their comments and reports to the department head so that it doesn't happen again.

But some of these women who had had an abortion on the kitchen table woke up later on and thought they had aborted; they were haemorrhaging, most of them did not abort but they could not have sex for the following months and years.

Later on, the rate of miscarriages was very high. If you look at it, since the passage of the therapeutic abortion legislation or even in the past few years, you will see that the percentage of miscarriages in Canadian hospitals was very low because there have been abortions. But at that time the number of miscarriages was very high because everybody was having so-called spontaneous miscarriages and everybody knew that they were voluntary abortions.