

*Abortion*

I am sure any woman who makes the painful decision to get an abortion, and I am referring to the physically and mentally painful aspects of it, does not do so with a light heart and takes that decision because she finds herself in a situation she considers desperate, she sees no end to the tunnel and no other way out.

I also believe, Mr. Speaker, that before judging women who get abortions, we must rather judge ourselves as Parliamentarians and as a government.

It is obvious that the Government has a social responsibility. We often hear that, in some cases, when women reach the very sensitive and painful decision to get an abortion, it is due to a lack of resources. In the old days, it could have been because they were judged too harshly and condemned by society. Today women think that they want children, but cannot afford to raise them. So they decide not to bear children who might be victimized.

This is an economic issue which should not necessarily prevail over morals. But things being what they are, we cannot change every Canadian's mentality.

It seems to me that, in such circumstances, the Government should design programs to aid women, particularly single parents, poor women and homemakers.

I would be very happy to see and vote for a piece of legislation giving a salary to women who stay home to care for their children. I am convinced, Mr. Speaker, that if such a law were enacted, the abortion problem would be greatly reduced. If we could at that point have support for women in need, financial support of course as well as moral help and support, I believe the scourge or problem of abortion could be significantly reduced.

● (2200)

A lot of money is spent on other things, things that of course are often legitimate and acceptable, but in my view, Mr. Speaker, the most important thing, the most valuable institution in this country is still the family. And in this case, since it is the most important in my view, I believe it should be the priority for our Government. The priority of helping women who support and contribute to this country, who raise children, who work very hard to conceive them, to bring them up, and who are often considered careerless, lacklustre, some even say insignificant because they link a person's worth to a career or a high standard of living, and of course a woman who spends her life at home rearing children cannot at the same time have a career, she cannot go into business and earn a high income either.

Therefore, the sad thing about our society is that we pass judgment on those women, and we may be unfair to them.

Therefore, before we pass judgment on women, of course, I too do not accept that a girl or woman of any age be put in prison because she decided to get an abortion. All we would

then be doing is trading one wrong for another. This would not solve the problem.

We should first provide women who find themselves in the difficult situation of having to make such a hard choice with an alternative. After providing them with the alternative support they deserve, I think then the Government perhaps should bring in much tougher legislation to deter some women from using abortion as a contraceptive method. This would be sad. My concern is that some might ultimately do that.

This is why I oppose abortion, because my concern is that some individuals could abuse that right if it were unrestricted.

So I hope, Mr. Speaker, that today's exercise will raise our consciences, will bring out the ideas and the issues and will lead us to reflect further and to seek expert advice.

After this conscience-raising debate, we will be in a much better position to present an excellent and real piece of legislation, which, of course, will have to be precise, and yet take into account the situation. We must not forget today's reality. We must not forget that we too often tend to be judgmental. These are victims in our society. Therefore, before passing judgment, I think we must encourage them through our own attitude.

I keep saying that, before judging a woman, we must offer alternatives in the form of assistance and, of course, a salary for the woman who has children, a measure which has long been hoped for. As a matter of fact, last week, I submitted a questionnaire to my constituents and it appears that a large percentage of the population is in favour of such a measure. Such a measure could get these women out of a distressing situation, confined as they are at home and unable to see any alternatives except through prostitution or even, when they are pregnant, by asking for an abortion, although we may not agree. But as a result of the situation they are stuck in without any possibility of getting out of they feel compelled to take such an unfortunate action.

Mr. Speaker, we should start by asking the question ourselves and the exercise we are involved in now is a step in that direction: we should adopt an attitude which is more fair, equitable and understanding toward these women who sometimes, because of their situation, are compelled to make decisions which they often regret afterwards, and we will end up with legislation to prevent some people from abusing the situation.

Often women have tried, and this is the reason I am against abortion, having heard during the public hearings which we held last year throughout Canada from a great many women who came and told us individually: "I tried on several occasions to get an abortion, but I failed. Finally, with time, I decided to accept this notion as a fact and to keep my baby." They are telling us today: "I am glad I kept my baby." This should silence those who claim that an unwanted child will be an abused child and that the wanted and planned child is a happy and well treated one. Such is not the case, Mr. Speaker.