

Government Orders

the month that I was on the committee, is that they were all socio-economic or economic reasons.

Hence, we do not solve any problem by implementing this law nor would we if we allowed abortion on demand. One of the issues that this government will have to face is what drives so many women desperately begging for an abortion when the majority of them are perfectly healthy. I pay a great deal of attention when I am told that pregnancy is a perfectly normal biological event, never a disease.

There is no case where an abortion is therapeutic. Abortions have nothing to do with physical or mental health. Abortions are done for reasons of social, economic or medical convenience.

[*Translation*]

The life of the foetus versus the life of the mother. Fortunately, this cruel dilemma is very rare nowadays. Doctors will practically always try to save both. However, the situation is interesting in that it gives us a chance to take a general perspective on the problems that arise when the interests of the foetus and those of the mother do not coincide, when it is a matter of survival for one or the other, and whose interests should come first, when we assume they are not compatible. In fact, it is both difficult and distasteful to put these two lives in the balance. Life is our most precious possession. Take that away, and we take away a person's whole world. Furthermore, what grounds are there to justify setting a higher price on one person's life as opposed to others? All lives are equal. After all, no one in our society considers destroying a foetus as intrinsically good, despite all the diverging views on abortion. In fact, even the most solid supporters of free choice, who see abortion simply as a way to terminate unwanted pregnancies, will admit that the decision is often heartbreaking. To most people, the best answer is better family planning.

We could avoid this lengthy debate on abortion if we could improve family planning and education for Canadians. Family planning and education should be a priority for every government that wants to make abortion unnecessary. When abortion seems inevitable, we should encourage the use of social programs that provide single mothers with daycare and financial assistance. We must maintain and develop new and effective social programs in order to help the neediest among us who are seeking some kind of support.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I must admit that I intend to vote for the bill on second reading. However, it is not because I support the principle of the bill but because I feel the bill should be considered by a committee of the House and that amendments should be made. However, I intend to vote against the bill in its present form on third reading, especially if we fail to offer at least minimal protection for the foetus.

[*English*]

Mr. Lyle Dean MacWilliam (Okanagan—Shuswap): Mr. Speaker, the decision to allow the termination of a pregnancy is indeed one of the most difficult and divisive issues that our country has ever faced. I know that all of us as legislators have given it a great deal of personal thought and have wrestled with its moral and social implications.

We have all been lobbied intensively by those who oppose the concept of choice and those who support a woman's right to self-determination. We must always, as legislators, try to seek public consensus in a process and through our decision-making. Unfortunately, there are always those issues in our imperfect world where consensus is all but impossible, where public opinion remains intransigent and unalterably divided. There are occasions when the processes of conciliation and compromise only serve to compound our difficulties and to frustrate the solution that we seek. Such is the case with abortion.

• (1830)

I believe that the legislation on abortion now before this House does just that. In attempting to seek compromise where none appears possible, this legislation in fact denigrates a woman's legitimate right to choose by throwing it back into the Criminal Code. It compounds and frustrates the difficult decision to terminate a pregnancy by casting over it the ominous cloud of criminal sanction.

I have thought about this issue a great deal and I firmly believe that making abortion illegal is unjust in principle and is unworkable in practice and that is why I cannot support this legislation.

The choice to terminate a pregnancy is a moral and intensely personal decision and in a free and a democratic society the conscience of the individual must remain paramount to the state. As was so eloquently stated by Supreme Court Justice Dickson, forcing a woman by threat of criminal sanction to carry a foetus to term unless she meets certain criteria unrelated to her priori-