

Abortion

For example, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops has called upon us here to "take serious account of the concern expressed by many pro-life Members of Parliament that abstention from voting, because the perfect law has not been presented, may indirectly contribute to the passage of a motion which allows for the totally unacceptable gestational approach".

Similarly, the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, representing some 2.4 million Canadians, urges Members to vote for an amendment which "is at least pointing our society in a life-affirming direction". It adds: "It would be a tragedy if our children recorded that at a critical moment in Canadian history evil prevailed because good people did nothing".

Likewise, the Salvation Army says the following:

It is our firm opinion, based on the Christian conviction that all human life is sacred, and borne out of our many years of experience in ministering to the needs of women, that (such an amendment as this) . . . most nearly offers a civilized nation a way whereby all human life may continue to be regarded with awe and treated with utmost dignity.

It is with this view that I have submitted this amendment. I encourage my colleagues to support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I have tabled the Hon. Member's amendment as per the agreement.

Mrs. Mary Collins (Capilano): Mr. Speaker, it is with mixed feelings that I rise to participate in the debate we have begun this afternoon on the motion which would give guidance to the Government as to what direction legislation should take with respect to abortion.

During the time available to me I want to talk about the issue of abortion itself, my feelings about it, the feelings that have been expressed to me by constituents and others across the country, and then to talk about the motion itself and some of the changes I believe should be made to it.

I do not believe that my position on abortion is a surprise to anyone in the House or indeed in my constituency. I have made it clear, when we have had debates formerly on Private Members' Motions with respect to abortion, that I am a strong advocate of the concept that women must have the right to choose whether or not they wish to terminate a pregnancy.

We had several debates about the former law, Section 251 of the Criminal Code. I was not happy with it, yet it seemed at that time, as it seems now, that it was difficult to obtain a consensus about what kind of changes should be made in the law. We tended to say that it is there, it seemed to work relatively well, and perhaps it should not be changed.

Of course, the situation occurred with the Supreme Court decision on the Morgentaler case which has required us now to reconsider this vital question involving so many different competing interests of philosophical, religious, and moral views about life and about the role of women. I know it is a very difficult hard decision for many people to make. Some of my colleagues have already talked about the Supreme Court

decision. It struck down the old law because, in the view of the Supreme Court, it did not meet the requirements of the Charter of Rights. The requirement of the hospital committees was deemed to be arbitrary.

The decision itself and the writing of some of the judges in that decision have been important in terms of determining the kind of approach we are discussing now. Philosophically, my own view would be that we do not really need legislation. Yet I know there is a strong feeling among colleagues and many members of the public that there needs to be some statement in law about abortion, about women's rights, and potentially about the developing rights of the foetus. Indeed, some of the words that were expressed in the decision of the Supreme Court would lead us to believe that this is what they were thinking as well.

Madam Bertha Wilson's comments in that decision are the ones that I feel very close to. I think she expressed many of my own views very well. She talked in her decision about the ways in which one could balance the women's role and the women's right to choose, and the possibility that at a certain stage in a pregnancy that the role of society could come into play. She said: "There is a point at which the state interest and the protection of the foetus becomes compelling. This point is to be left to the legislature. It seems to me however, that it might fall somewhere in the second trimester".

We are not dealing, in the motion before us, with the particular point in time. That would obviously come forward with legislation, but we are dealing with a gestational concept, to try to find that balance about which I know many people feel strongly.

Although my own view is that we do not actually need this legislation, and that the decision to terminate a pregnancy should be that of a woman in consultation with her physician, I recognize that the approach put forward by the Government is one that requires serious consideration.

Let us look at the state of abortion in Canada and elsewhere. We have heard from time to time that the number of abortions are rising dramatically and that without law this might become an even greater issue.

First, Canada is not among those nations that has the most liberal abortion law. About 40 per cent of people around the world live in countries where there is basically abortion upon request, certainly in the early stages. That includes United States, U.S.S.R., China, France, and Italy. We fall in a category with about 25 per cent of the world's population which has certain constraints. They are similar in some ways to Britain, India, and Japan.

The remaining 25 per cent of the world's population lives in countries where, generally speaking, there are very tight laws with respect to abortion, countries with either strong Roman Catholic or Moslem religions which have had greater influence on public policy.