

*Abortion*

I am informed that even Doctor Morgentaler will not perform abortions after 12 to 14 weeks, for whatever reason, which is chronologically well in advance of viability and may be just a range that might be acceptable as the time before which, for now, and I stress for now, it is purely a matter of choice and beyond which good reasons, to be determined in the Bill which should follow the passage of the government motion, but which we will probably never get to as a result of the election, must be had for seeking an abortion.

Beyond this time, and particularly after the time of viability, a time which is earlier due to modern technology, perhaps only something of the magnitude of a genuine threat to the physical life of the mother, or a gross deformity of the foetus detectable only at a later stage, should be grounds for an abortion. It is at the point of viability that I am convinced that law should come into play. Before the earlier deadline before which choice and viability will be the rule, there may well be a grey area where good reasons will have to be given but only regulation will be necessary. This three-stage policy would not satisfy those who feel that life at conception is equal in value to life at birth, at 20 weeks or at 12 weeks, but it may be near the compromise that in my judgment will be necessary as well as advisable.

● (0100)

I am not sure whether the government motion calls for a two-stage or for a three-stage policy. This is part of the problem. It is unclear in this respect and it is unclear as to what the words "further conditions" might entail.

All that I have said so far is said in view of what I regard to be the political and judicial reality of Canadian society in 1988 and of what is possible in a democratic society that has deep divisions within it about the value and status of unborn life, in which choice when it comes to abortion has become a symbol for many women and indeed for many men of real freedom for women to shape their own lives, when for others, getting tough on abortion is seen as a symbol of taking a final stand against the creeping amorality of the age.

This political reality is a fact of life, not just for Canadian politicians but for all Canadians. In my judgment, pro-lifers have to accept this reality without accepting various pro-choice arguments which I myself question. One such argument is, for instance, that society does not have a right to impose its morality on individual decisions. Obviously society does this all the time. It is how we handle an issue over which there is fundamental disagreement that is the question.

In my view, morality is what politics is all about. It is not just about abortion or about issues like capital punishment. It is also about our economy and how we organize our economy. I reject the view that morality is somehow only a private or individual matter restricted to a small range of issues.

I also reject the pro-choice argument that abortion is only a health issue. This unacceptably reduces what is involved in the decision to have an abortion and in my view is a contradiction of the argument also made by the pro-choice advocates that women should be able to choose abortion for whatever reason they personally choose it for, unless of course the concept of health is used so broadly as to make no distinction between

needs and wants, a distinction which is too often blurred in our consumer society. Therefore, I am not morally indifferent to all the abortions that will be chosen by women if the Supreme Court decision leads to abortion on demand up to a prescribed number of weeks.

Many of the abortions that will follow from this decision and the federal law which follows from it will be abortions that in my view are unjustified, wrong, and tragic. However, I cannot bring myself to single out pregnant women who feel that they absolutely must have abortions as objects of moral outrage or punishment. In my judgment, they are to be perceived more as victims, not necessarily of men or of themselves in any simplistic reference to sexual behaviour, but victims of a society that all of us are responsible for, a society which encourages irresponsible sex, underspends on research and development into contraception, and tolerates social and economic policies which make choosing life very, very difficult for many women.

Nevertheless, abortions which are chosen purely in order not to inconvenience the life of the potential mother or couple or as a form of birth control are wrong, in my view, but so are all the decisions that all of us make when, for reasons of convenience, we make decisions that deny life to others.

Without making any strict comparisons, I ask Hon. Members to think of the fact that every cent we spend individually or collectively as a country on unnecessary items is money that could be spent to save dying children somewhere in the world, including Canada, but we do not propose laws to make frugality compulsory or tithing mandatory. We are all murderers in the name of convenience, to use the language of the pro-life movement. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, to use the language of St. Paul. Let he or she who is without sin in regard to putting his or her own personal convenience over the rights of starving and/or diseased children be the first to demand of pregnant women that they display a morality higher than that which we expect of ourselves or our country.

Enforcing such a demand would be even more spiritually pretentious. Nevertheless, I believe that a good abortion policy would provide for the kind of balanced counselling in which women contemplating abortion would be exposed to the variety of views that exist on abortion, including those that condemn it, and to the alternatives to abortion, provided that society is serious about supporting such alternatives.

Having said this, I also want to say that the debate over abortion to date has centred almost exclusively on whether or not a woman has the right to choose an abortion based on her own personal judgment of whether or not she wants to have a child. Unfortunately, regardless of what one's views are or have been on this question, the issue has become much more complicated of late with the growth of technologies that may make it possible to predict with considerable certainty various characteristics of the child the foetus will become if brought to birth.