

Abortion Plebiscite Act

questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Brandon-Souris (Mr. Dinsdale)—Supply and Services—Possible contract to American Chain and Cable Company for mail sorting equipment—Suggested postponement of decision; the hon. member for Winnipeg North (Mr. Orlikow)—Air transport—Date of announcement of allocation of route to Milan and new routes to United States; the hon. member for Carleton-Charlotte (Mr. McCain)—Fisheries—Action to ensure continuing supply of vegetable oils from United States for processing products.

It being five o'clock, the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper, namely, public bills.

Mr. Foster: Mr. Speaker, I think there is agreement to pass over the first five orders and consider item No. 6, Bill C-40. There may be a slight delay. I believe the hon. member is on his way to the chamber.

Mr. McKinley: Mr. Speaker, it seems there was a misunderstanding. However, the member is on his way to the chamber now.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is agreed that the first five items be stood, but retain their priority on the order paper, and that we will proceed to the sixth order, Bill C-40, in the name of the hon. member for Burnaby-Richmond-Delta (Mr. Reynolds) as soon as he reaches the chamber.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS

[English]

ABORTION PLEBISCITE ACT

MEASURE TO PROVIDE PLEBISCITE ON REMOVAL OF ABORTION PROVISION FROM CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. John Reynolds (Burnaby-Richmond-Delta) moved that Bill C-40, to provide for a national plebiscite on the removal of the abortion provisions from the Criminal Code of Canada be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I apologize for being a little late but I had some constituents in my office and time escaped me.

Bill C-40 is very similar to Bill C-117 which is on the order paper now under my name. They both call for plebiscites. Bill C-40 deals with abortion and Bill C-117 deals with capital punishment. I wonder if it would be possible, since both bills ask for the same thing but deal with two different issues, to deal with both of these bills at the same time? I regret that I did not have time to bring this matter to your attention, Sir, but I did ask the people in our party and they suggested I might raise this matter at this time in order to avoid debating Bill C-117 on another occasion because, as I said, both bills seek plebiscites on two different issues but I think the theme of both bills is the same.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker.]

Mr. Speaker: My understanding is that the other bill deals with the abolition of capital punishment. I think it would be farfetched to suggest we should have a debate on abortion and on capital punishment at the same time. Although both bills seek the same remedy and suggest the same conclusion, I doubt that it would be good practice to have two motions dealing with different matters before the House at the same time.

Mr. Reynolds: The main reason for introducing this bill is the letters and comments from my constituents in which they say that this government, as well as past governments, have often introduced legislation which does not reflect the will of the people. I told my constituents in the last election that I would present private members bills on this and on other issues so that plebiscites could be held to give the people of Canada an opportunity to express themselves, but not on every issue. I do not believe parliament is elected to conduct plebiscites on every issue, but they should be held on certain issues that are presented to parliament, such as abortion and capital punishment, on which the will of the people is not always being followed in the House.

I think that the people of this country have the right to determine some of these moral issues themselves, and this is why I presented this bill. I will not argue it too long because I would like to hear some of the arguments that I am sure members on the government side will advance against it. All I will say now is the reason for presenting this bill is that the people of Canada should be allowed to settle this issue of abortion, as well as the issue of capital punishment.

Mr. S. Victor Railton (Welland): Mr. Speaker, I am very sorry to inflict myself upon you again on one of these very controversial subjects. I seem to have been dragged into this debate at the last minute, and having spent the last two hours on the telephone, my thoughts cannot be called very orderly. My speech, therefore, cannot be construed as an attempt to impress people with oratory. I simply want to give my views as to why I do not agree that this bill should be passed.

Bill C-40 states that the word "abortion" should be deleted from the Criminal Code, and that the division to delete it should be made by a plebiscite which should take place at the next general election following the passage of the bill. In other words, there would be the possibility of an election being fought on the issue of abortion. I think that is fairly evident. Also, the bill underlines the fact that this measure would have to be brought to parliament after the election and passed. I think these are three rather important considerations.

However, before going into the matter of the desirability of a plebiscite to settle a question such as this, or the technicalities of when it should be held, I would just like to say that this matter has been brought to the minds of all members of the House of Commons by their constituents. We are flooded with telegrams and letters expressing both points of view. The letters are not just from those who are for abortion or those who are against abortion. We get shades of opinion, thank goodness, and I do not think there is a preponderance of one opinion over the other. The matter of abortion is approached with a great many mis-