

Some hon. Members: Stand.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Stand by unanimous consent.

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[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

AMENDMENT TO REMOVE LOOPHOLES AND REPEAL SECTION ALLOWING THERAPEUTIC ABORTION COMMITTEES

Mr. Bill McKnight (Kindersley-Lloydminster) moved that Bill C-216, to amend the Criminal Code (Abortion), be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Fraser Valley East (Mr. Patterson) for seconding my motion. I welcome the opportunity to stand in the House this afternoon on my private member's bill. I feel that the ability of a member to present a bill for discussion in this House is in the true form of democratic Parliament. Such a bill represents the feelings of individuals rather than those of political parties whether they be in opposition or in government.

Bill C-216 is simple and straightforward. Its intention is to erase the loophole which literally permits abortion on demand and to ensure that the unborn child receives the full protection of the law and to repeal the section of the Criminal Code which allows therapeutic abortion committees to be formed.

Although the issue of abortion is emotional, it is one upon which we cannot be silent. Since the abortion law was put in place 11 years ago, over 450,000 innocent children, human beings, have been killed. We cannot be shrill or strident; we must be rational and have certain expectations of the people of Canada. In each and every one of us there is the emotion to recognize humanity. Humanity has many definitions. The definition which I in my own mind and conscience accept is that of a human being, whether it be a human being outside the womb or a human being in the womb.

I was first elected to this Parliament in 1979, the year of the child. That year was so designated by the United Nations to commemorate the signing of the UN declaration on the rights of children some 20 years earlier. In 1959 the United Nations adopted the declaration of the rights of the child based on the following preamble:

Whereas a child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection before, as well as after, birth—

At the time the Government of Canada was a signatory to the declaration to the rights of the child. Just 11 years ago, Canada passed legislation to deny the existence of rights for unborn children. In 1969 the Criminal Code was amended and passed. Section 251 permitted an accredited hospital therapeutic abortion committee to allow an abortion when the contin-

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uation of the woman's pregnancy would "be likely to endanger her life or health".

Anyone reading the debates of Parliament at the time would clearly understand that the new law was meant to be applied only in cases of medical need. The then minister of justice, the Hon. John Turner, who introduced the legislation, said during third reading:

This bill has rejected the eugenic, sociological or criminal offence reasons for abortion. The bill limits the possibility of therapeutic abortions to these circumstances. It is to be performed by a medical practitioner who is supported by a therapeutic abortion committee of medical practitioners in a certified or approved hospital, and the abortion is to be performed only when the health or the life of the mother is in danger.

That quotation can be found in the *Hansard* of May 6 of that year at page 8397. At the time of that vote, the government of the day, much, I am sure, to the resistance and sorrow of many of its members, forced hon. members to vote—and I know some of them—against their conscience in order to pass the bill. In other words, in 1969 Parliament amended the legislation on the understanding that abortion was to be performed only when the health and the life of the mother was endangered. At that time the government of the day and this Parliament, though it was asked, in fact, did not take the time—perhaps it did not feel the matter was important enough—to define the word "health" in all its meanings.

Since the bill was passed, its meaning has changed greatly. Many people thought they were protecting the life of the mother, but that is not the case. In 1970, one year after the law was passed, there were 11,152 recorded abortions in Canada. In 1978, the latest year for which figures were available, there were 62,290 recorded abortions in Canada. It strains the credibility of anyone in this House or in Canada to assume that the state of health and danger to life of pregnant women was six times worse in 1978 than in 1970, yet there were six times as many abortions. Right now, for every six children born, one is killed by abortion. In other words, there is a loophole in the abortion law which gives Canadian unborn children no legal rights.

I contend that the insertion of the word "health" in section 251 of the Criminal Code provided such a loophole that the primary intent of the legislation has been so distorted that it should not be taken as fact. The interpretation of the word "health" is so vast and diverse that it makes a mockery of the law passed by Parliament. The definition of health used in this country comes from the World Health Organization, which states:

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

I do not believe that health, as it is regarded in the present abortion law, should be interpreted so loosely. The present law protects women in cases of dangerous medical risk from pregnancy, but the vast majority of the abortions being performed are an attempt to cope with social problems. Abortion has become a necessary, cold-blooded medical service available on demand. There is a serious social problem and it warrants the attention and the response of all hon. members and all Canadians.