

*Criminal Code*

what are we going to do with the question of abortion. We are now in Private Members' Hour and I know the Hon. Member does not want to be excessively partisan. There is time to look at the merits but we should not become excessively partisan on every issue.

The Government sought the co-operation of all Members of the House by going to each of the three Party Leaders to seek unanimous consent to bring forward four different options for debate. The House could grapple with the issue and give a sense of the direction of the House to the Government so it could bring in a Bill. The Government requested the setting aside of the rules which would not permit the bringing in of different substantive motions. Through unanimous consent it would seek the consent of the House to deal with the different positions which Members hold. To that degree I think the Government was doing exactly what it should be doing. Our Party has always said during elections that if we ever got into a debate on the abortion issue, it would be a free vote as far as we were concerned. What the other two Parties do is up to them.

On this side of the House both on capital punishment and on abortion we have always said—I have said it during the three elections in which I have run and I know the Party platform is the same—that there would be a free vote on issues of conscience. We had an excellent debate on capital punishment and had a truly free vote on it. The first time I am aware of in recent history of Canadian politics that a true free vote was held and the respect for the conscience of each individual Member was in that debate. Every Member had the freedom to speak his mind and stand in his place either for or against. Now we have the same situation on the abortion issue. This is the second issue which this side of the House calls an issue of conscience and, therefore, requires a free vote.

When we get into this debate on abortion, the Government has clearly spelled out the desire to allow Members to express their will in at least three different directions. One is a pro-life direction, though perhaps a moderate pro-life direction from my personal point of view, and I think the Hon. Member for York South—Weston would agree that it is not a pure pro-life option. Then there is a middle or gestational option and then there is a pro-choice option. As I indicated, I think there was a fourth option which was a pure pro-life option. The Government presented these options to the Opposition and asked for the unanimous consent that would allow us to set aside the rules to have these four options before us.

● (1710)

The Hon. Member for York South—Weston expresses some frustration with the delay. I wish he would have succeeded with his Party and within the NDP in convincing them to follow the Government's suggestion so that we could truly have had unanimous consent. We would not have to go through the two stages that are now before us, first bringing in a notice of motion to get to the stage of debating the different positions.

That would have saved a lot of the time of the House and it would have permitted us to get at this issue sooner.

Although I agree with the thrust and intent of the Hon. Member's Bill, and to that degree I am pleased to second it, I do not agree that he should express so much frustration with the Government for not dealing with it. The Government gave that Hon. Member, his Party and the other Party a clear choice, through unanimous consent, to begin this debate on abortion. In fact, such a debate would have given us an excellent opportunity to deal with a pure pro-life option at one end to a pure pro-choice option at the other, with a moderate pro-life and a middle ground. I think the Hon. Member should calm down his partisanship and just deal with the issue at hand.

Further, the Hon. Member quoted some statistics. He is correct that the statistics he quoted are readily available to everyone. Statistics are very important in this debate so that we know exactly what we are talking about. One statistic shows that most abortions, 89 per cent of them, are carried out by the thirteenth week of pregnancy. We also find that in the last year for which complete statistics are available, 20.4 per cent of that 89 per cent were repeat abortions.

Some of my colleagues have said to me that as we get into this debate, they hope we can end up with a law that does at least two things: First, a law that is more restrictive than the old Section 251 was, and second, a law that does not allow abortion to be used for birth control purposes.

Let us look at those two points for a moment. If we want a law that is more restrictive than Section 251, then surely we have to start to have fewer than 89 per cent of abortions done by the thirteenth week. We have to move to abortions closer to conception. If my colleagues do not want the same rate of abortion, does that mean that they are willing to move abortion closer to conception?

They then ask how much closer it should be, and I tell them to look at the statistics. By what stage do we wish to cut it off, and what is our objective criteria for doing so? I notice that the objective criteria are lacking. Then I say that around the seventh week, one can at least measure brainwave activity. We use that as the sign of the cessation of life in the case of organ donors and the like. Why do we not use the beginning of brainwave activity as a sign of the beginning of life?

Some say then that seven weeks is far too early. I say that it is not too early. We should really be looking at all the facts involved in foetal development. We really should go right back to conception, because at conception, we are dealing with a human being that is unique and will never be like any other. Its physical capacities are all there, all that is required is growth and development. All of the DNA and characteristics of a person exist at conception. The genetic code has already been determined. To that degree, we need not go past that into other stages because we are dealing with a life right from the beginning.