

*Abortion*

those who hold radical positions on both sides of the issue, I have a practical and realistic approach towards this social dilemma which the Members of this House are called upon to resolve.

Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that the Government could not introduce a Bill at this point in time. Those who say otherwise have not, to my mind, thought about all the measures which will have to be taken into consideration when drawing up a Bill on abortion. And, in any case, is a possible social consensus on abortion? That is the main issue.

The 282 members of this House are asked to be the Canadian people's conscience. I would say to you, Mr. Speaker, that this is not fair, that it is sheer nonsense that a Member of Parliament he or she, in the course of his or her duties, should have to legislate on women's morality. Obviously, I quite appreciate the fact that there should be laws to protect life and that it is the duty of this House to enact rules aimed at guaranteeing the safety and freedom of this country's citizens. From time immemorial, the laws and regulations which govern us have been promulgated by men.

● (1820)

Women have had practically no say in the matter until today, Mr. Speaker. It seems to me that people are more concerned about the result than about the reasons for an unwanted pregnancy. Mr. Speaker, when one holds the reins of power, one must be reasonable. After all, to govern is to do what is possible.

I speak as the Member for Argenteuil—Papineau, but my comments on abortion come from the heart of a woman and the mind of a Member of Parliament. I want my constituents to know why I cannot support the demands of the pro-life movement which wants to make abortion illegal, nor those of the pro-choice movement which wants abortion on demand. I am in favour of a realistic approach that takes into account the daily lives of women and mothers, and that is why, Mr. Speaker, I am in favour of a solution that would go halfway, setting a legal limit of 18 weeks on abortion. Women must exercise their rights within limits that can be scientifically determined. Our technology today is, in any case, able to determine the exact number of weeks of a foetus.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, the pro-life position and its enforcement are a paradox. How could the Government enforce regulations arising from an anti-abortion law? If you ask members of pro-life who, I may add, and I want to make this quite clear, take a position that is entirely praiseworthy, if you ask them whether they want a pregnant woman to be thrown into jail, they will answer: Of course not. So we must be realistic. After all, the Government would look pretty silly if it tabled legislation that was unenforceable. These are all aspects which the anti-abortion groups have failed to consider. Abortion has always existed. If women can't get an abortion here, they will go across the border.

Mr. Speaker, abortions carried out by the woman herself or by some charlatan have had, and would have, a very serious impact on fertility. We have heard the horror stories about women who used the services of the worst kind of backroom butchers to obtain an abortion. To allow, within reasonable limits and based on the common sense of the woman involved, access to therapeutic abortions, preceded and followed by psychological care, would minimize the physical and mental side effects for women. Mr. Speaker, one or more abortions may be followed by wanted pregnancies. There are hundred of examples of women who at some time in their lives had an abortion and subsequently gave birth to one or more children. That is why abortions must be carried out under proper conditions. Making abortion illegal would mean going back to the dark ages. It would not reduce the number of abortions, and anyone who says so is sadly mistaken. With good psychological support, couples will learn to take a responsible attitude towards pregnancy.

Mr. Speaker, how does one make the father feel more responsibility for an unwanted pregnancy? Would those who want to make abortion illegal and in so doing, as I was just explaining, take drastic measures, even going so far as to create prisons for pregnant women, agree to punish the man who should have put on a condom before having sex?

The advocates of free choice, for their part, are too radical. Again, it is the duty of sex partners to protect themselves from unwanted pregnancies. I find the use of abortion as a means of contraception totally repugnant, especially since taxpayers must contribute to a woman's third, fourth, fifth, sixth abortion, and so on. The positions of the pro-choice movement are too broad and too vague for me to endorse them. One must still have enough common sense and intelligence to realize that there have been abuses and that they would continue if abortion were unlimited.

Mr. Speaker, I can understand the churches' position; it is deeply rooted and laudable. I can tell you this evening that I will not personally feel myself less Catholic tomorrow morning by voting for the Government to submit later a Bill limiting but not banning abortion, because my conscience as an elected representative of the people is not involved but rather the conscience of a woman who will make a decision with her doctor in a definite period of time. As legislators, how can we judge and condemn another person's moral feelings? How can we as legislators claim to improve the people's moral standards? It is impossible. Women have abortions for many reasons. A woman who decides to have an abortion is profoundly unhappy.

Have we in conscience really got to the bottom of these causes? As a society, have we thought of how to remedy the deep problems of women who, as you know, Mr. Speaker, have in the great majority of cases to care for their children after a divorce or separation? The statistics are overwhelming: three quarters of single-parent women—and most single-parent families are headed by women—live below the poverty line and the situation of childless women who have left their parents' or