

Criminal Code

life is not being threatened should be charged with murder. That Conservative Member of Parliament went further. Not only did he suggest that they should be charged with, and presumably convicted of, murder, but that Tory Member of Parliament who has such reverence for life, such respect for life, suggested that those women should be executed as murderers. So much for the respect for the life that this Conservative Member of Parliament so piously proclaims. He is prepared to sacrifice the life of the woman, the mother of that child, to protect the foetus.

When I rose in the House today, as I have risen on other occasions, to speak on this question, it is with a certain sense of anger at the arrogance of those men in this House who would tell the women of this country that they have no right, after having agonized over this difficult decision, to make for themselves the fundamental decision on abortion.

What does the Bill, which the Conservative Member of Parliament is proposing here, say? It says that no longer can a woman whose health is being threatened seek an abortion. No longer, Madam Speaker, can a woman who might suffer serious physical harm, who might, in fact, be disabled, seek an abortion. What right does this Member or any other Member of this House have to tell a woman, who is crying out in desperation, who has been told by her doctor that if she carries that child to term she will be permanently disabled, that her health will be deeply affected? What right does that Member have to tell that woman, "No, you must bear that child even if it means that your health will be permanently damaged as a result".

That is what this Member is telling the women of Canada. He is repealing the requirement in the Criminal Code which states that if a woman's health is threatened, she is entitled to make that difficult choice and she is entitled to have an abortion. Just so that it is clear beyond any doubt, the Member goes on to say this in his Bill:

—the life of a female person is endangered where her life is in actual physical danger, irrespective of any consideration of her mental, social or economic condition.

Once again, let us look at the situation of a young woman who is pregnant in Kamloops, British Columbia or in Cornerbrook, Newfoundland and is 14 or 15 years of age. She goes in to see her doctor and her doctor makes it very clear that for this young woman, this girl, to have a child means she would suffer terribly, whether it be mentally or physically—her health would be threatened. This Member who proposes this Bill would say to that young girl, "You must bear this child. We don't care about your health. We don't care about your mental well-being or your physical health. We place above that the value of the foetus." This is arrogance and insensitivity that surely we in this House must reject, Madam Speaker.

This Bill refuses to deal with the reality of the life of a woman. It basically reduces the life of a woman to her physical existence or the physical functioning of her body. To remove the question of a woman's general health, her mental health, her social relationships or her economic situation from the

consideration of her life is simplistic to say the least, and is degrading and dangerous in practice. There must be more to a consideration of danger to life than merely physical harm. I find incredible the suggestion by this Hon. Member that that is not the case. Over and over again we hear a similar argument made by those who would deny choice to Canadian women.

I am pleased that the significant majority of Canadians reject this destructive, dangerous and arrogant approach. For example, the Reverend Dr. Robin Smith of the Family Ministries Division of the United Church of Canada, in speaking to the motion which was introduced previously by the Hon. Member for Grey—Simcoe said this:

—this motion precludes consideration of the rights and situation of all other members of a family. It robs women entirely of responsibility for their own bodies and their moral action. For many this could mean serious hardship. It takes no account of the life and needs of siblings, which can be deeply affected.

Finally, this motion gives absolute value to one element in a complex moral situation: the right to existence of the foetus. It thereby reduces all other factors to insignificance. While life is sacred, it is not, as many of our national policies and practices illustrate, of absolute value.

Yes, Madam Speaker, our abortion laws clearly need attention. Recently in the Supreme Court of Canada, for example, the Supreme Court justices questioned these laws. In questioning counsel, Justice Willard Estey said this:

So you've got zones in this country where there is no access. You've got whole provinces that are carved out of the process. Is this some kind of local option which has slid into the Criminal Code? I can't think of any other section of the Code which lays itself open to this practice.

Rather than restricting access even further in the manner proposed by the Hon. Member for Kitchener, I suggest that we should recognize the weakness of the existing law, the fact that women in Prince Edward Island are denied access totally to safe therapeutic abortions. Even those women whose lives are threatened, which is the concern of the Hon. Member for Kitchener, cannot have abortions in Prince Edward Island. Women in Newfoundland, women in Kamloops, B.C., where the hospital board has adopted a very narrow approach, cannot.

I would suggest, in closing, that we as parliamentarians listen to the voice of the people in Canada who have spoken through their juries which have refused to convict those doctors who have courageously assisted women in seeking access to safe therapeutic abortions. I suggest that we place emphasis on sex education, on birth control awareness and availability and on economic support for women and particularly those poor women who in some cases actually decide that they cannot support their children.

• (1740)

I reject the Bill of my colleague, the Hon. Member for Kitchener. I hope that Members of the House as well will reject this Bill which fundamentally denies the reality of Canadian women.

Mr. Ross Belsher (Fraser Valley East): Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak to the private Member's Bill of the Hon.