

*Abortion*

I have been critical of the pro-life movement because, in the first place, it was always unrealistic for pro-lifers to expect abortion to be as restricted as they wanted it to be. In light of the Supreme Court's action, I think it is now even more unrealistic to expect severe restrictions on the availability of abortions at all stages, particularly in the earlier stages. Neither if it were achievable would such an almost total ban on abortions be desirable. Abortions would continue. Back alley butchers would be back in business. Poor women would be put in comparably more danger than women who could afford to travel to where abortions could be performed safely.

My personal moral preference is for a world in which no one chooses abortion as a solution to a difficult situation, but that does not blind me to this reality. Morality also demands that, knowing what we know, we make decisions on that basis and not as if we did not know or as if it were not the case.

I have also been critical, among other things, of the extent to which the pro-life movement has been associated in general with a right wing politics whose passion for children seems to end at birth, after which they have to take whatever the free enterprise system dishes out to them and their families according to the law of the market-place. From the safety of their mother's womb that certain pro-life MPs would wish on them, some babies are then to be cast out by these same Members into ramshackle housing and cut-backs in lunch programs in inner city schools. Such ideologically selective compassion is unacceptable to me and is really only anti-abortion without being comprehensively pro-life.

This criticism does not apply to the Roman Catholic Church which has on occasion been articulately critical of free enterprise. However, it most certainly applies to some fundamentalist Protestant pro-lifers and to many of my colleagues on the other side of the House whose real God, I would suggest, on occasion is the market-place, or, idol if you prefer.

My problem with Roman Catholic teaching on this issue is in another area and that is with respect to its rigid attitude toward contraception and the fact that it often seems to counsel its members to vote on only one issue, i.e., abortion, when on issues of peace and economic justice, domestically and globally, there is little difference at all between the views of the NDP and the views of the Canadian Catholic Bishops. Are the deaths caused by the lack of global and domestic economic justice that both the bishops and the NDP are calling for relevant to our political choices? I hope not.

The abortion issue is also used by some on occasion just to create anti-NDP feelings for larger political purposes. The recent provincial election in Manitoba is a good example of this. I know many in my area were encouraged to vote Liberal in the mistaken view that this would be an anti-abortion vote. The irony, of course, is that in Liberal Ontario and Liberal Quebec, Doctor Morgentaler operated freely long before the

Supreme Court decision. It was an NDP Government that would not tolerate his illegal activities. New Democrats, many of whom wanted the law changed, at least respected the law and did not try to impose their view by default or neglect.

I have tried to be an honest critic of both sides of this debate and in doing so I think I have been in tune with a lot of Canadians who have felt that neither Morgentaler nor Borowski spoke for them. This has meant that I have received criticism from both sides, but I am quite willing to accept such criticism rather than artificially choosing sides and then plugging my ears to other arguments.

If, as some pro-lifers have said recently, one is not totally with them, then one is against them, then I accept the judgment that I am against them. I take my stand with what I would call the humble majority who, like me, are interested in finding a policy that is an acceptable compromise, who realize that what we are talking about here is part of the tragic imperfectability of the human condition, who do not envision a world without sin as the pro-life people do, or a world without guilt as the pro-choice people do.

This humble majority realizes that a compromise is in order which reflects the reality that abortion will be sought and will be obtained, but wants to maintain a value context in which abortion is still something that people are expected to have good reasons for, even if in practice this will not always be the case.

As I understand the Supreme Court decision, it does speak of the need to balance the rights of the woman with the rights of the unborn child. The implication seems to be that some rule which restricted the time frame within a pregnancy in which abortion would be permissible on request might well stand up in court. Whether such a rule either would or should take the form of a criminal sanction against individual women is debatable. I have never been happy about making criminals of women who, for whatever reason, good or bad, feel they must have an abortion. This, incidentally, is what I understand to be the historical essence of the NDP position.

However, whether it be through the Criminal Code or an abortion Act with sanctions, or preferably in some other way outside the Criminal Code altogether, it is obvious that some regulation or restrictions are in order. I agree with those who argue, both in terms of the Supreme Court judgment or separately from it, that abortion has not and should not be established as an absolute right. For me it is a question of establishing what policy we will have in Canada to address the conflicting claims of both women and the unborn, a policy which needs to be determined in Parliament so that abortion is dealt with the same in all provinces, with all Canadian women treated equally, having equal access to those abortions determined to be legal by Parliament.