

Government Orders

everything we do in this House. I will therefore join my caucus colleagues in opposing this bill.

In closing, I would like to thank all the women who shared their feelings and experiences with me, as difficult as it often was for all of us. I would especially like to thank three women. One, a sister in Prince Albert, in this case a nun who offered to pray for my faith, an offer I gratefully accepted. Second, another sister in the city of Prince Albert, this time a working woman, who asked me point blank if she could count on me not to sell out women on this issue. I would like to place on the record that I promised that woman that no woman would ever go to jail for having an abortion because of anything I did as a legislator.

Last, I would like to gratefully acknowledge the role of the member for New Westminster—Burnaby for her understanding, her sincerity and calm in the face of immense pressures. As the critic on this issue in our caucus she has to take much of the credit, along with our leader and others who participated in genuine debate. But this was really spearheaded by the member for New Westminster—Burnaby. In spite of the profound differences of philosophy which certainly are there in our caucus, her depth of character and the scope of her concern for humanity was evident.

Ms. Barbara Greene (Don Valley North): Mr. Speaker, this is an issue that many of us have struggled with for a considerable period of time not only as politicians but as individuals. In my own case, as a former municipal politician in metropolitan Toronto, representing a constituency of 560,000 people for five elections and 11 years, I have had to take a position on it since 1972.

In every election I have run in I have had a number of people calling and asking my position and telling me that they would not vote for me if I was in favour of permitting abortion. We all have had that experience.

As a member of the Metro Toronto Community Services and Housing Committee in the North York Board of Health, I again had to make decisions which were the subject of heavy lobbying regarding abortion and contraception counselling programs.

Perhaps the most difficult forum in which I had to deal with this issue was at the board of directors and executive committee of the Catholic Children's Aid Society of Metropolitan Toronto. That society takes the position

that it can never support abortion under any circumstance because it is firmly of the opinion that another child is involved. The society views this as a fundamental tenet of Catholicism and one of the major reasons for having a separate society.

However, in every instance that I am aware of, when a ward of the society went before a judge requesting an abortion, the judge granted the child an abortion. In one seminar that the board held the matter was debated by theologians and one of the situations that we had struggled with as a board was discussed. This case involved a 13-year old child who was the victim of incest who was threatening to commit suicide if she was forced to have the baby.

One theologian felt that in that particular instance he would interpret the teachings of the church that permit abortions in instances where the mother's life is in danger to the greatest degree possible and permit the abortion.

Several members of the board immediately and angrily protested such an interpretation of the church's position. In their view, that 13-year old victim's mental anguish was not a sufficient reason to permit her to have an abortion.

• (1640)

There are a great many other people whom I know and greatly respect who have equally adamant views on this issue. Many are caring and compassionate people, as indeed are all the members of the CCAS board. Some of them lead truly exemplary lives and have adopted and/or fostered many children because of their deep desire to help less fortunate children.

I strongly believe they are entitled to their Children's Aid Societies, their schools and hospitals and their way of life and beliefs. That is why as a board member I supported the board's position. However, I do not feel that that viewpoint can survive at all in the real world. Just as that 13-year old victim who was freed from her horrible situation by a judge who said that it is wrong in Canada to force a child to bear a child, so too in the real world the subjugation and enslavement of women, the deprivation of freedom of choice that is implied by such an act could not possibly survive in a free society. The anti-abortionists' views are best left as moral convictions to be practised by those who share them.