

Criminal Code

Canadians died. In 36 years of drownings, from 1958 to 1986, 47,892 Canadians died as a result of accidental drowning. Yet in 16 years of abortions close to one million people, individuals, lost their lives, as a result of a law which has now been declared unconstitutional.

If one examines the statistics one can see that in 1985 there were 60,956 abortions. Abortions are on the rise, if one examines the statistics for 1970 to 1985. What is most disturbing is the statistics showing repeat abortions from 1974 to 1982. In 1982 there were 400 women in Canada who had their fourth or more abortion. There were 1,600 women in Canada who had their third abortion in 1982. There were 9,544 women who had their second abortion in 1982. If one examines the statistics from 1974 to 1982, one will find that the situation has not changed dramatically.

We have a situation in Canada today in which over 60,000 human lives are taken on an annual basis. It is incumbent upon Parliament to deal with this issue in an expeditious way at the earliest opportunity. I regret very much that the Government has chosen the method by which it has decided to bring this Bill forward.

Canadians want this Parliament to deal with the issue of abortion on the merits at a very early stage. Each and every Canadian of voting age will be asking candidates regardless of their political affiliation what their views are on this particular matter.

● (1700)

No longer can individual Members of Parliament or candidates in the next federal election campaign hide behind existing legislation. They must say in an unequivocal fashion where they stand on this fundamental and crucial issue, the most important issue which this Parliament will decide. Set aside the issue of Meech Lake, free trade and pornography. This is the most important issue because it is an issue dealing with life itself. We hear Members talk about apartheid in South Africa or abuses of human rights in Israel, South America, Nicaragua. We hear about the starving in Ethiopia. But here we have a situation in Canada in which 60,000 lives are taken on an annual basis. Yet at times this Parliament shies away from dealing with it.

I note that I have but a few minutes to conclude my remarks on the legislation I am introducing. I urge Hon. Members to recognize that we are dealing with an issue affecting life itself and to agree to a motion to refer the subject matter to a legislative committee. I do not know the timetable of the Government concerning the abortion issue. We have been told on occasion that the Government would like to see the issue dealt with before the next general election. This House at this moment in time can decide through the Private Members' procedure to allow the subject matter of this Bill to be referred to a committee in order for the legislative committee to begin consideration and to hear arguments on its merits. I am

prepared to discuss and debate this issue with anyone at any time at any place in Canada.

Abortion is wrong. It is fundamentally and basically wrong for this Parliament, for the Government of Canada to take away human life. What about life out of the womb? We do not say because you are white, black, European, South American, handicapped, blind, crippled or deaf that your rights as a human being are somewhat less. No one can tell you that your life is any less important. Who are we as parliamentarians to tell anybody that the unborn foetus has rights less than we as breathing, walking, living human beings?

I urge Members to support the motion that will be presented by the Hon. Member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell to refer the subject matter to committee at the earliest opportunity.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McKinnon): We are now at the stage of having 10-minute speeches. The Hon. Member for Kitchener (Mr. Reimer).

Mr. John Reimer (Kitchener): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Hon. Member for York South—Weston (Mr. Nunziata) for the opportunity to second this motion and debate the issue. I am pleased to second the motion in that I agree with the Hon. Member that we have to close the loopholes that were contained in Section 251 of the Criminal Code. The Member knows that the offending sections of Section 251 were struck down by the Supreme Court ruling in the Morgentaler case. We are debating a motion put to us to amend the Criminal Code before the Supreme Court acted on January 28 with regard to Section 251.

As private Members we bring forward Bills and motions and put them into a hat, so to speak. They are then drawn and put in order of debate. We are now debating the Bill proposed by the Hon. Member for York South—Weston.

I said I am pleased to support the Hon. Member's motion to the degree that what it seeks to do is really face the question of abortion as I think it should be, namely, that it deals with the rights of at least two people. In fact, I believe there is a third and an obligation of a fourth group. There is the right of the woman to life and health. There is the right of the unborn child to life and health. There is also the right of the father. Then there is the fourth group, that of society to protect the life of both the mother and the child, in fact, to protect that child and to protect all life. To that degree, I think the intent of this Bill is a good one and I support it.

Because the Supreme Court decision has in a sense superseded what the Hon. Member wanted to do by striking down the offending parts of Section 251, Parliament now has to face this whole question of what to do with the issue of abortion. The Hon. Member said that this is the first time we have debated the topic of abortion since January 28. To the degree that we are committing one hour of House time to it is correct. By implication, the Hon. Member was expressing some frustration with the lack of action in coming to grips with