

Capital Punishment

broaden the scope of the committee's hearings. It is for that reason that I propose the amendment.

• (1300)

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Chair finds the amendment in order. Questions and comments?

Mr. O'Neil: Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased to hear the Hon. Member outline in very eloquent terms his defence of life and that life is sacred. He invoked the support of the Catholic Church for his position. He also spoke about his desire to put an end to violence against people and his rejection of capital punishment as an act of violence. While listening to him I could not help but be struck by the reality that as we speak hundreds of unborn children in this country are being killed. Those lives, which are also sacred, are being arbitrarily and very violently ended. Unborn children across this country are being suctioned from the womb by women who want to put an end to their pregnancy. Those children are being dismembered. Does the Hon. Member support that destruction of the lives of unborn children? If so, how does he reconcile his support of abortion on demand and the violent execution of 60,000 unborn children in this country every year with his support of the case against the reinstatement of capital punishment?

Mr. Robinson: Mr. Speaker, before responding directly to the question of the Hon. Member, might I just say that I am very pleased to note that he has publicly stated his opposition to the reinstatement of the death penalty in Canada. I am very pleased that he has taken that position.

The Hon. Member asked me a question, which I recognize is serious and important, with respect to the value and sanctity of life in our society. He suggests that in some way there may be a contradiction between the position of those of us who support freedom of choice on the question of therapeutic abortion and our position with respect to the abolition of capital punishment. I recognize the point made by the Hon. Member but, with respect, I must say that I do not believe there is any inherent contradiction between the two positions.

I share with the Hon. Member the concern that the number of abortions in Canada must be reduced to the greatest possible extent. We as a society must do everything in our power to reduce the number of abortions in Canada. That means we must take effective measures towards educating our young people on sexuality. We must do what we can towards making birth control available, not just to young people but generally in our society. However, at the end of the day we have to ask ourselves whether it is not the case that the woman bearing the child should not herself have the right to make that very fundamental choice—

Mr. O'Neil: To kill.

Mr. Robinson: —of whether or not her pregnancy should continue. There are many, many reasons why women have abortions. In some cases the continued pregnancy represents a threat to the health or life of the mother. In other cases,

tragically, the mother simply feels she cannot bear the child because she is in a situation where it is impossible to provide the kind of care, attention and love, and economic support in some cases, that is necessary for the child. Ultimately I believe we as a society should recognize that, having taken all possible steps to reduce the number of abortions in Canada, we must leave the decision to the woman herself.

Mr. St. Germain: Mr. Speaker, I realize the importance attached to this issue and the emotions that surround it. However, the Hon. Member referred to economic reasons as justification for what in the eyes of many of us is virtually murder. Am I correct in what I heard? Is the Hon. Member basing his decision to eliminate the life of a child in these circumstances on economic reasons?

Mr. Robinson: Mr. Speaker, what I am saying is that the tragic reality in Canada today is that there are single parents in our society who are in such a desperate, economic or financial situation that they simply cannot feed their children. That is a tragedy. We know that in British Columbia there are children who go to school without breakfast and who have no lunch. Yes, there are women who, as a result of desperate grinding poverty, say they do not have the resources to bring a child into the world. That is sad. That is a tragedy. We should deal with that by doing whatever we can as a society to improve the situation of those desperate mothers. The reality is that children should be wanted. They should be provided for. By putting women in and tolerating a situation of desperate poverty, we have to recognize that fundamental decision is often and unfortunately made on the basis of the fact that the woman will not be able to provide a secure environment for the child. That is indeed most unfortunate and most tragic.

Mr. Manly: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Burnaby pointed out, as other speakers have and will, that capital punishment does not act in any effective way as a deterrent to further murders. Yet I think there is a perception among the general public that it does act as a deterrent. In fact, I think a lot of the support that some people have for capital punishment is based on the fact that they think capital punishment is going to deter future murderers. Could the Member address that fact? How can we give more leadership and get the message across that this is not a deterrent? Is there something more the Government should be doing in this regard?

• (1310)

I noted that the Member read from the speech of the Minister of Justice (Mr. Hnatyshyn) and I appreciated that. However, perhaps the Government could be more high profile on this issue, particularly Members like the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) who is, himself, an opponent of capital punishment. Is there something that he could and should be doing to illustrate to the Canadian people that capital punishment is not an effective deterrent to further murders?

Mr. Robinson: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question of my colleague, the Member for Cowichan—Malahat—The Islands