

Government Orders

foetal infant life through spontaneous abortion that that was not a human being.

Because I believe in and try to live in the spiritual, sacred, mystery side of life, in my intellectual weakness I submit to the view that it is probable that the sacredness of life begins at conception. Therefore, I cannot accept abortion at any stage of life from conception onward.

On the other hand, through my personal medical experiences as a nurse on hospital wards or in public health among the poor, through my years of work among the poorest of the poor in the Third World, through my conversations and dialogue with friends on this issue of abortion, and then my own associations and experiences in my community, I recognize that there are many relevant, serious, socio-economic reasons why women seek abortions. I realize that many women, including young girls and middle aged women, feel that they have no choice for socio-economic reasons but to have an abortion. They have a sense of desperation, isolation and hopelessness in the face of an unplanned pregnancy. This legislation does nothing to change these circumstances.

I believe that any legislation which proposes to criminalize abortion and impose a penalty for illegal abortion must be supported by companion legislation which would address the major socio-economic reasons now have for seeking abortion. However, I also believe that that companion socio-economic legislation on its own would not meet all the needs. Society, communities, those who care about foetal life, must voluntarily reach out to support and sustain women through their pregnancies and be prepared to assist women and their children after birth to achieve the fullness of life.

Communities must work together to help pregnant women and young girls with life supportive counselling, group homes, family planning education, and other support services. These initiatives are beginning to spring up in my riding of Northumberland but to date are far too few to meet the need if this legislation or amended legislation were to be enacted.

To reiterate, abortion legislation is unacceptable without companion legislation which would assure women and children the minimum resources to assure each a full and meaningful life. To date in this country we lack

adequate housing and adequate child care. Our social programs legislate against the independence of single women with children against the working poor. One million children live below the poverty line in this country to the sorrow and despair of thousands of Canadian parents. This abortion legislation does not address any of these problems. Many women seeking abortion are blinded in their decision making by the reality of these circumstances.

Until we have legislation in this country and community services which meet basic needs, you cannot convince me that this abortion legislation is in any way adequate to reduce abortion and protect foetal life. It legislates a penalty against many living in socio-economic distress.

Even if amended to severely restrict the health definition permitting abortion, I would not be satisfied for I believe that once this government has dealt with abortion through this bill, if passed it will have "done abortion", so to speak, and will be deaf to any further legislation which would reduce the incidence of abortion, especially if it were to involve any budgetary expense or priority readjustment. This government is free market driven with debt reductions, not human lives as a priority.

In conclusion, I reiterate that I do not want any abortion in this country. Bill C-43 as it now stands does nothing in my opinion to protect foetal life. Even if amended to restrict the health definition, it will not address the underlying causes of abortion in this country. Any abortion legislation must have companion legislation to support pregnant women and their children. I dedicate myself in this House to do all I can to encourage the enactment of that companion legislation.

Mr. Greg Thompson (Carleton—Charlotte): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to stand here tonight and take part in this debate. Many of the people in this House are lawyers and many are doctors. When speaking to the member for St. Catharines who is a lawyer and the member for Delta who happens to be a medical doctor, I mentioned my sense of inadequacy in addressing this issue. They were quick to point out that some of the best and most emotional speeches in this House, with feelings of real concern, came from those individuals who do not have technical skill in this area.