

Abortion

Criminal Code. We must fight to obtain free abortion services if we want to guarantee its accessibility to women from all social and economic strata.

[*English*]

That is one of the grave concerns of those of us in the New Democratic Party. There must be access to safe therapeutic abortion. It must not be denied on the basis of economic considerations. Those who would deny access to safe therapeutic abortions, those who are anti-choice, are in fact denying a fundamental matter of choice and integrity for the women involved. In some cases it is argued, why does she not have the child and give it up for adoption. That is an insult to the woman because, of course, the reality is that carrying a child to full term and then giving that child up for adoption is more traumatic in many cases than an abortion itself. As well, it denies the right of a woman to make that fundamental decision about her own body. Surely, we must recognize the unfairness and harshness of that.

It is time that we as a society recognize that we should be placing more emphasis on the role of men. It is about time we recognize that men must accept their responsibility. Why is it that contraception in too many cases is only spoken of in the context of women? When contraception fails, it is the woman who must bear the burden. I think we have to recognize that as a problem that we as a society must address as well.

I want to say as well that this is not the first time I have risen in this House to promote free access to safe therapeutic abortions in Canada. It is not the first time I have pointed out the fundamental harshness and inequity of the current provisions of the Criminal Code. I must say that I very much regret that the Liberal Party, the Official Opposition, has chosen to remain silent. It has chosen to refuse to take a stand on this fundamental question. Time and again when the Liberal Party, the Official Opposition, is called upon to take a stand, it is silent. It refuses to indicate any support whatsoever on this very important and sensitive question. Oh yes, when those Members are out around the country and talking to groups which support freedom of choice, then it is a different story, but when it comes to the crunch and the Liberals are asked to take a stand here in the House of Commons, they are silent. They say nothing. They cop out. I very much regret that. At least Conservative Members, even though many of them are opposed to free choice, are prepared to stand in the House and indicate exactly where they stand on this fundamental question of choice.

The situation in Canada today is desperate for far too many women. The provisions of the Criminal Code are harsh, unjust and inequitable. They deny access to safe therapeutic abortions. Those provisions should be repealed and we should put far more resources into organizations such as the Planned Parenthood Federation and others. We should promote the development in Canada of reproductive health centres which will deal with the full range of reproductive health concerns for women.

At the time when the only Newfoundland hospital with an abortion committee had to shut down its facilities because the one doctor who provided abortions took sick leave, the medical director of the hospital said: "I think it is disgraceful myself, to be frank with you, disgraceful bordering on the unethical". I want to ask how much longer will elected representatives of the people of Canada, including some 52 per cent of the population who are women, continue to deny to the women of Canada that basic freedom of choice which is theirs? How much longer will we continue to maintain on the books laws which in effect drive women from their own communities, from their own provinces, out of their own country, in order to have access to safe therapeutic abortions?

I hope during my tenure in the House—obviously, it will not be while this Government is in power—that it will be an NDP Government which will have the courage and integrity to move forward and repeal the provisions of the Criminal Code with respect to abortion and to provide for true freedom of choice for the women of Canada.

Mr. Ross Belsher (Fraser Valley East): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak against Bill C-208, an Act to amend the Criminal Code, the abortion section.

This Bill would abolish therapeutic abortion committees and allow qualified medical practitioners to perform abortions without having to get the prior authorization of these committees. I must speak out against any Bill which encourages abortions, unless, as I have stated in this House before, the mother is in danger of losing her own life as a result of continuation of the pregnancy. This Bill will make abortions even easier to obtain and I find this appalling, to say the least.

The number of abortions performed in Canada in 1985, over 60,000, prove that abortion is no longer a medical necessity but undertaken for elective, socioeconomic reasons. Further, the argument that a woman has the sole right to control what happens to her body assumes that the unborn child is just an extension of the woman.

Genetically the child is unique and separate from the mother. Even at his or her earliest development, the unborn child is just at one special stage of life. There is no difference between the existence of that child two weeks in the womb after birth, or at 2 years, 10 years, 40 years or 80 years. The only difference is the stage of development. By assuming that you become a "person" only when you are full-term or capable of sustaining life independent of the womb makes me wonder how we view a full-term infant who is incapable of sustaining life independently due to some physiological problem. Do we have the power to say, then, that this is not a life? The same holds true for the unborn child.

● (1720)

If we were to make an analogy, we can compare the child in the womb to an astronaut in a spaceship. Both require that specific environment to shelter them, provide nourishment and warmth, but neither are "part of" the environment. The child