

Abortion

I for one am prepared to do and offer whatever I can to support and protect our unborn from conception onward. The government caucus has said that MPs of our Party are free to vote according to our consciences on this issue on Thursday. I expected nothing less from the Government. It shows it recognizes the sensitivity of the issue. I find it astounding that anyone would criticize a free vote in the House of Commons. What could be more democratic? Every Canadian is represented in this House of Commons, and it is our difficult duty as MPs to decide on how Parliament should proceed on this most difficult and emotional issue.

I look forward to standing on Thursday and voting in favour of amendments that will protect our unborn from the moment of conception until birth.

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Birds Hill): Mr. Speaker, my intention this evening is to provide what I hope will prove to be a reflective intervention on the resolution before us. The word "reflective" is used on purpose, because for those who have gone beyond the reflective mode to hold without doubt either the pro-life or the pro-choice position, the abortion debate has long since ceased to be a debate in any real sense of the word. Instead of a contest for considered public opinion, it has become a psycho-political case of nerves and a shouting match which excludes the vast majority of people who are so humble as to not be absolutely sure what is right.

Unfortunately, the real debate has been a long time in coming, as both so-called sides of the debate have been so given over to name calling and the impugning of the motives of those with whom they disagree, that many who could have made a useful contribution to the debate over the years have found themselves without a place and unable to stomach the self-righteousness which has abounded around this issue.

The debate tonight has been commendably civilized, and I hope that it continues in this way. I commend everybody who has been involved so far.

When I say that those who take a position have gone beyond what could be called debate, I contend that they are players in a dispute which is a classic example of what is wrong with contemporary moral disagreement.

This sorry state of contemporary moral debate has been well described by Alastair MacIntyre in his book *After Virtue*. I quote:

Every one of the arguments is logically valid or can be easily expanded so as to be made so; the conclusions do indeed follow from the premises. But the rival premises are such that we possess no rational way of weighing the claims of one as against another. For each premise employs some quite different normative or evaluative concept from the others, so that the claims made upon us are of quite different kinds.

It is precisely because there is in our society no established way of deciding between these claims that moral argument appears to be necessarily interminable. From our rival conclusions we can argue back to our rival premises; but when we do arrive at our premises argument ceases and the invocation of one premise against another becomes a matter of pure assertion and counter-assertion. Hence perhaps the slightly shrill tone of so much moral debate.

What follows is an attempt at a non-shrill contribution.

The official policy of the New Democratic Party of Canada, with respect to abortion is that the decision to have an abortion is a private decision to be made by a woman in consultation with her doctor or, in other words, the pro-choice position.

This is not a policy with which I have ever been comfortable for a variety of reasons. Indeed, in the federal elections of 1979, 1980, and 1984, I made it clear to those who inquired of my views on this issue, both publicly and privately, that I did not support the Party policy in this case, that I did not support abortion on demand, and that I was very concerned about some of the implications of such a policy, both in terms of an increased number of abortions and in terms of the arguments advanced in favour of the pro-choice position in so far as some of the assumptions which underlie these arguments reflect values that, in my view, are questionable and have not been thought through by the pro-choice movement, however well-intentioned they may be and are.

I am a critic of what might be called the cosmology of the pro-choice movement, about which I will have more to say later. Therefore, I will not be supporting the amendment which was moved on behalf of the majority of the NDP caucus today by the Hon. Member for Hamilton Mountain (Ms. Dewar). I appreciate the tolerance which has been extended to me by my Leader and caucus colleagues to put before the House a position different from theirs.

• (0050)

Life has always been cheap but it has been a feature of capitalism to rationalize and sanctify the devaluation of human life by introducing an economic ethic that reduces persons to things, to commodities exchanged in the marketplace. Thus, if we wish to fight for the sanctity of life we must fight for it on all fronts, and in particular at the source of all current exemplifications, which in my view is the materialistic and technological view of humanity implicit in advanced capitalist societies.

The question for New Democrats is, as I see it, whether on the issue of abortion we have with the best of intentions ended up buying a piece of the very world view we otherwise oppose. Therefore, with fear and trembling, knowing that one's position on abortion has become for many on the left the litmus test of whether one is truly progressive, I will offer arguments against uncritical acceptance of the pro-choice position.

First, I would like to say a word about why I have not been a supporter of the pro-life position or the movement associated with it, for a number of reasons. I do not like their cosmology either. I was reminded of another way in which this is the case when I heard the Hon. Member for Surrey—White Rock—North Delta (Mr. Friesen) this evening use the language of contract to describe marriage, how liberal and commercial the language of Christian pro-lifers has become, using the language of the market-place and of contract instead of the deeper, biblical concept of covenant to speak about the relationship between men and women. That reflects a deeper malaise that I do not have time to go into tonight.