

Criminal Code

However, I must tell the House that I hold a different viewpoint, which I have reached through a great deal of personal thought and consideration and which I have discussed with my wife and others at length. I am sure my colleague will accept my comments in good faith.

There exists in Canada today a very profound divergence of views on the question of abortion. These views are strongly held and often emotionally charged. While the depth of feelings on the issue must be understood and respected, the very fact that opinions on abortion are so widely divergent poses a problem for Members of Parliament.

I remember during the deliberations on the Constitution Bill and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1980 and 1981 that the rights of the unborn were raised on several occasions. Some argued that the Charter should clearly include the right to life of the foetus. Others contended that a woman's right to privacy and security of the person should not be put in jeopardy. Because of the fundamental differences of opinion on the issue, the decision was made not to entrench one view or the other in the Constitution.

It was felt that the question should be left as a question of criminal law, for Parliament to decide in the context of criminal law, which is where it is today and which is what my colleague seeks to change. I believe the decision not to entrench was the correct one.

Public opinion over the years has shown a growing acceptance of choice as the view of most Canadians on abortion. I believe that public opinion is possibly split in thirds—a third of Canadians feel that the present law does not go far enough, a third believe that the law is correct as it stands, and a third believe that it has gone too far. It is prudent for Parliament to allow for an adjustment to existing laws rather than to entrench, as was suggested a week or so ago, a single view to which a larger segment of the population is opposed. I would use the same argument in speaking to this particular Bill and say that a third of Canadians believe the law is correct as it stands and a third would have it widened.

Abortion is not an abstract concept. It represents one of the most difficult, painful choices which can confront a woman. As a man, I would suggest that the men involved find the decision no easier. I cannot believe that a decision to have an abortion is ever taken lightly or ever forgotten. We should not be forcing people to take sides if we believe that each of us is entitled to his or her viewpoint on the subject.

Surely it is possible to accommodate the views of the many thinking, feeling Canadians who believe, as I do, in the right of women to exercise control over their own lives. However, having said that, it concerns me that nearly one-quarter of the abortions performed in the country involve women under the age of 20 years. Obviously our methods of educating and preparing young people to handle their sexual maturity are not adequately meeting their needs. I lay no blame on any political Party or on any level of government. I just say that somewhere

we who are charged with those responsibilities are not making our point.

The impact on all society of teenage pregnancies is serious. It interrupts, perhaps forever, young people's education, putting their future economic security on a very shaky footing. In many instances it also places upon them burdens which are too heavy for a young person to carry.

Certainly studies have shown that the babies of these early pregnancies face a very high risk of abuse, poor health, and poor development.

Discussion and debate is healthy when they provide a frank and expansive airing of views. Therefore, when my colleague brings forward this subject and we focus debate on it, I think it is helpful. The issue must be faced with an open mind and, more important, with an open heart. We must work at mitigating the circumstances which lead women to face this most difficult of choices. At the same time, having made their choice, Canadian women should be able to count on appropriate access to the necessary caring and safe services.

In the final analysis, I believe the current law should not be changed. Women must be allowed to make their own choice and decision. No one on either side of the issue suggests that the choice is easy. However, we as legislators must allow that choice to be made by the person most intimately involved and concerned with the results of the decision—the woman.

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby): Madam Speaker, in rising to speak to the Bill proposed by the Hon. Member for Kitchener (Mr. Reimer), I must say that I do so with some regret and disappointment.

This is not the first occasion upon which male Conservative Members of Parliament have risen in the House and made suggestions which I believe are deeply offensive to Canadian women in respect of the fundamental question of abortion.

• (1730)

I think, for example, of the remarks made recently by the Hon. Member for York East (Mr. Redway). He rose in this House approximately a month ago—a Conservative Member of Parliament from Toronto—and suggested that he was concerned about the number of abortions in Canada because had these abortions not taken place, in fact, school classrooms would have been filled with children, and teachers would have been hired to teach those classrooms full of children. The arrogance of that approach, which reduces a woman effectively to a machine to produce children and which totally denies the individuality, the humanity and the uniqueness in that woman herself, is breathtaking.

Another Conservative Member of Parliament, the Hon. Member for Gray—Simcoe (Mr. Mitges), went even further. He suggested that those women who choose to have an abortion—and my colleague who just spoke pointed out that this is a decision which is never an easy decision, it is often an agonizingly painful decision—and who do so when their own