

Criminal Code

We next come to the consideration of the health of the mother. All of the doctors testifying before the committee said that the main reason the health of the mother would be affected would be for psychiatric reasons. Even the psychiatrists called rather pooh-poohed the arguments that abortion would help if, in fact, there was a real psychiatric problem with the mother. At least one of them testified that after some reassurance and the pregnancy continued the mother would be better off from a psychiatric point of view.

There are arguments used which can only be described as arguments of expediency. A family would be better off in dollars and cents if it did not have the added responsibilities of bringing up a retarded or deformed child. Some families and even some children might be better off without the unwanted child atmosphere that sometimes develops for economic reasons. But surely this is not a reason to kill. We are not dealing with crops which may be arbitrarily destroyed if considered inferior or surplus. We are dealing with human life even if unborn. We cannot encourage or even condone the destruction of such life merely because it may cost dollars and cents or cause inconvenience. Surely such a step is backward in the context of human rights.

As someone on the committee said, he would like to see the abortion law opened wide but he believed in proceeding bit by bit. So we have already had notice that this is only the start of the movement. If the members of this house permit the altering of these abortion laws as proposed there is no logical reason that can be submitted later why the unwanted, the unproductive, the deformed and the mentally retarded members of our society should not be exterminated.

I believe that, regardless of party affiliation, each hon. member of this house must vote on this issue according to his own conscience, as it goes far beyond party lines or other man made disciplines. For this reason I am opposing the proposed amendment concerning the law of abortion in its present form and intend to vote against this bill. This decision was not arrived at rashly or lightly. Opposition to this clause and the inclusion of this clause in the omnibus bill may distort the meaning of the votes cast by members who feel as I do. It is unfortunate that my opposing vote to this clause must also be cast against so many other clauses with which I concur. Unfortunately my conscience leaves me no choice.

Contrary to some unfounded and untrue reports, Mr. Speaker, I should like to inform you and the members of this house that my position on this matter is the same now as it was before nomination day and as it was before the election, and I made this fact known publicly during the campaign. In conclusion I should also like to inform you, Mr. Speaker, and the members of this house that at no time did I get any request from the Minister of Justice (Mr. Turner) to change or alter my position on this matter, and I would like to thank him publicly for this consideration.

Mr. Erik Nielsen (Yukon): Mr. Speaker, the speech of the hon. member who has just taken his seat is a clear indication of the reason the opposition advanced its proposal to the government to separate the various provisions of this bill. I have great sympathy for the hon. member and the manner in which he is torn. He has taken a position which happens to be similar to the position I take.

When one reads the bill, particularly a person such as I who works with the provisions of the Criminal Code throughout the weeks and the years, one finds many useful provisions in it. To be placed in the position of voting against the useful amendments contained in the bill simply because of the deep conviction one holds in respect of the objectionable parts is a very sorry position to be in.

The position taken by the hon. member who has just resumed his seat somewhat belies the position the minister took in saying that the bill had stood the test of a general election. He left the impression that because the Liberals were returned to office with a majority government that gave them a mandate to proceed with the bill as it stands. Not only that, he left the implication that the majority of the electorate in Canada, particularly those who elected Liberal candidates, were in favour of the provisions of this bill. That is not the case in respect of the hon. member who has just taken his seat. He made it quite clear to the electorate of his riding, that he was opposed to the principle of abortion, yet he was elected. The minister is wrong on that count.

● (12:50 p.m.)

I suppose this bill could be called, as the minister has described it, part of the government's social legislation, the Magna Carta of the just society. When one reflects on it and what took place at the last session what have