

● (1650)

**Mr. Nickerson:** Mr. Speaker, my question deals with any possible relationship between the number of abortions that are performed and the ease with which divorce might be obtained. I think even those people who favour easy abortion look upon it as being something that is rather undesirable.

I notice that the Hon. Member for Lethbridge-Foothills (Mr. Thacker) reflected on this subject a little in his presentation. Does he see any relationship between the rate of abortion and the ease with which divorces might or might not be obtained?

**Mr. Thacker:** Mr. Speaker, that is a tough question because it goes back to what one's personal experience has been. I have had very limited experience with abortions as affected by the law. However, the ones that I have come to know have to do with people who simply felt that they were in such a desperate position that they could not see themselves carrying through. Even women who feel the need for this for social reasons do not lightly decide to have an abortion. There is usually a good reason behind it.

Therefore, I really could not give an adequate answer to the Hon. Member's question about tying abortion to divorces. I think there is a relationship between the law and whether it is invoked, but I am not sure about a relationship between abortion and divorce. With great respect, I cannot answer the question.

**Mr. Maurice A. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi):** Mr. Speaker, I did not originally plan to participate in this debate today, but I think the Bill is too important to let it go without saying a few words about it. I have enjoyed listening to the speeches so far today. I thought that the Member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) made a valuable contribution to this debate. Many of the things said by the Member for Lethbridge-Foothills (Mr. Thacker) were very important. It is unfortunate that he had to mix in some partisanship in a matter as important as divorce. I do not think that partisanship should play a role. I cannot understand how the size of a government deficit or, in fact, the size of the government relates to a divorce rate.

Having disposed of those extraneous issues, I would like to make a few brief comments. First, I do not believe that there is any doubt in any thinking person's mind that marriage is the most important institution in our western society and perhaps in any society. It is the glue that binds together the basic unit of society, namely, the family. For many centuries, the marriage contract was held to be virtually inviolate. It has been so almost until the time of Henry VIII who, in British tradition at least, made divorce somewhat easy to get because he took the law into his own hands.

However, I believe the issue is so important to society in general that it must be discussed very thoroughly. I believe that an opportunity must be made for those people and groups in the country who wish to have input into this matter. I am afraid that if we do not do that and do not write this law very

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carefully, we will end up with the same kind of disaster that was produced with the provisions under the Criminal Law respecting abortion.

The Act, as I recall it, states that an abortion may be obtained with the approval of a hospital abortion committee when the life or health of the mother would be endangered by the continuation of the pregnancy. Yet today, in some hospitals, there are more abortions than there are live births. That is an obvious flouting of the law, because no one in this day and age can claim that, in a majority of the cases, the life or health of the mother would be endangered by the continuation of the pregnancy. Pregnancy is not a disease, it is a natural phenomenon. While there are certainly cases when the life or health of the mother could be endangered by the continuation of the pregnancy, it does not occur in the majority of pregnancies. To claim otherwise is total nonsense.

Obviously I speak not as a woman but as a man. I do not happen to be a woman and cannot speak as a woman. Of course, I have never had a child in the sense of giving birth to it, but between my wife and I we are rearing five children. It is not always easy. Neither are most aspects of life always easy.

I do not want to see this Bill become the kind of boondoggle that, in my opinion, the abortion provision under the Criminal Code has become. I believe the fault lies basically with the provincial attorneys general, almost all of whom have completely disregarded their responsibility under the Canadian Constitution in that regard.

I am concerned that we are not now putting enough emphasis on premarital counselling, as the Hon. Member for Lethbridge-Foothills said. We write laws saying how we can get out of a marriage, but we do very little, if anything, with regard to the law about how one can get into a marriage. Some churches are making an admirable effort in providing premarital counselling. In the Roman Catholic Church, for instance, in the Archdiocese of Ottawa, premarital counselling is now mandatory except in special circumstances. I believe that that is a move in the right direction. I hope that all churches will do that. Perhaps all of the churches could spend more time on the issues of the day, talking about the morality of the issue, rather than worrying so much about how it will affect the collection. Clause 5 of the Bill reads:

Subsection 7(1) of the said Act is repealed and the following substituted therefor:

'7. (1) It is the duty of every barrister, solicitor, lawyer or advocate who undertakes to act on behalf of any petitioner or the spouse of any petitioner on a petition for divorce under this Act . . .

—to instruct them on the provisions of this Act concerning the effecting of a reconciliation. Is that the job of a lawyer?

**Mr. Lambert:** It was a requirement of the other one.

**Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi):** I know that it is a requirement, but is that what it should be? The clause goes on to say that in the absence of any prospect of reconciliation he must notify them of the mediation facilities known to him. Maybe we are putting the cart before the horse. Perhaps the law should require the couple to go to the mediation service