

Adjournment Debate

House in the past, but it is nice to see it again on the record tonight. I certainly hope that the women of this country will note that particular comment from the Tory benches.

As far as the comments made by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) are concerned, I am sure he will be happy to know that there will be substantial amendments to several aspects of the Old Age Security Act brought before this House. The government was committed in the Speech from the Throne to introduce a measure that will come into effect by October 1, 1975. That measure will be brought before the House and I hope, with the co-operation of the House, it will be passed in plenty of time to come into effect by that date.

As the hon. member has also stated, we passed the most important amendment to the Canada Pension Plan last fall that has ever been brought forward since the inception of the plan. That signified a substantial increase in the benefits to those contributing to the plan.

There are other amendments to other legislation that will also be introduced before the end of the session. I hope it will be possible to debate them in due course, providing the opposition allows enough time for the consideration of all the bills now before this House or to come before it. As far as the issue raised by the hon. member is concerned, it has been debated so often I do not think I need add anything.

ABORTION—SUGGESTED INVESTIGATION OF REASON FOR HIGH RATE IN BRITISH COLUMBIA, ONTARIO AND ALBERTA

Mr. Douglas Roche (Edmonton-Strathcona): Madam Speaker, the Federal Advisory Council on the Status of Women has committed an absurd error in urging the government to grant full pardon to the convicted abortionist, Henry Morgentaler.

The 30-member council, set up by the government, is supposed to advise the government on steps to improve the role and status of women in our society. How is the cause of women's rights furthered by giving such a blessing to a man who, by his own admission, has destroyed the lives of thousands of unborn children?

Truly it would be a travesty of justice to permit Dr. Morgentaler to go free. I recognize that the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation has made him into a modern martyr through continued adulation of him, but the excessive pro-abortion sentiments of the CBC and the Council of Women have destroyed their judgment on the profound significance of the Morgentaler case.

The Morgentaler case must be seen against the background of what is going on in Canada. Section 251 of the Criminal Code permits a therapeutic abortion committee to allow an abortion when continuation of the pregnancy of a mother "would be likely to endanger her life or health".

• (2220)

Since the law went into effect, abortions quadrupled from 1970 to 1973 to 43,201, and they are now 12.6 per cent of live births in Canada. This alarming rate of increase is most noticeable in the three wealthiest provinces of British Columbia, where the abortion rate is 26.7 per cent of

[Mr. Lalonde.]

live births, Ontario where the rate is 18.3 per cent, and Alberta where the rate is 18.3 per cent, and Alberta where the rate is 13.8 per cent. These figures support the argument that abortions are being permitted for reasons far beyond health; to argue otherwise is to suggest that it is more dangerous to a mother's health to be pregnant in a rich, instead of a poor, province. But at least through these past few years many have thought that the government was unhappy at the rapid growth and might move to tighten the law.

The Minister of Justice (Mr. Lang) is on record as having warned provincial attorneys-general, who administer the Criminal Code, that social and economic considerations are not to be taken into account in determining the permissibility of abortion. The President of the Canadian Medical Association, and a number of leading lights in the communication world have attacked the minister for being too strict. They have argued that the World Health Organization definition of health "as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being" should be the criterion. This is regarded by many others, myself included, as a ridiculous definition. Who among us is ever in a state of "complete physical, mental and social well-being?"

The pressure is building, and the CMA has turned to the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) for support. It looks like the Prime Minister is encouraging the wide definition of health, for he told the CMA in a letter that hospital abortion committees should have "sufficient latitude". He backed up his view with a statement in the House of Commons that "the Criminal Code refers to health as involving many considerations apart from purely physical ones". This is highly misleading, to say the least.

When I asked the Minister of Justice to clarify the matter he said it is up to the provincial attorneys-general to carry out the law. He did not differ from the Prime Minister's interpretation, nor did he respond when I asked him point blank: "What is the minister doing to reduce this needless escalation of abortion which is a continuing violation of the civil rights of the unborn child?". I find it shocking that there is so little governmental concern at the rising abortion figures.

The law needs to be tightened to make it more explicit that abortions would be permitted only when the life of a mother is "seriously endangered". One of my colleagues, a physician, tells me that if this phrase were in the law there would be practically no legal abortions since modern health methods have reduced the danger of pregnancy to almost nil. But instead we have this erosion to abortion on demand because we are gradually accepting the wide definition—and the government is getting away with it.

Now the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde) has begun promoting more therapeutic abortion committees. I agree with the open letter to the minister from the Canadian Physicians for Life that the minister ought to adopt "a policy aimed, not at encouraging but at eliminating the practice of non-medical, social abortion". To claim that the absence of abortion committees invites "a breaking of the law" is ridiculous. Dr. Morgentaler operated in Montreal where there are at least five abortion committees, and his trial made clear that his client knew about, and had access to, abortion committees.