

*Criminal Code*

The main justification put forward is that the bill will clarify the existing law on abortion. The spuriousness of this claim may be demonstrated thanks to the evidence gathered by the parliamentary committee on health, welfare and social affairs.

Abortion, we are told, should be legalized for "health" reasons, but what does the word "health" mean? In the Minutes of the Proceedings of the said committee, it is obvious that there was no consensus on the significance of that word. This ambiguous term can be taken in its broad or narrow meaning. According to an Ottawa doctor, "health" may even mean "happiness". How can a word that nobody can define clearly help clarify the law?

In reading the evidence given to the Standing committee on health, welfare and social affairs, we found that generally speaking, everybody agrees that abortion is an attack on human life. Out of the 26 doctors who have appeared before the committee, only one has tried to deny this. Will the broadening of the law on abortion increase the necessary respect for a human life or will it lessen it?

It is time that we should get down to the facts concerning the amendments to the abortion law as proposed in Bill C-150.

Is the government really anxious to protect the life and health of women? If so, where is the evidence that the proposed changes will achieve this goal?

Never was the health of Canadian women as well protected as it is today. At the present time Canada has one of the lowest mother death rate in the world.

Can we really believe that the changes as proposed in paragraph (c) of the bill will bring still greater improvements?

During this debate on abortion, there was nothing to show that such improvements would take place. It is somewhat surprising that nobody up to now has thought of asking that obvious question. It is significant also that no doctor has tried to prove that some social advantage would be forthcoming.

In Japan, as in many other countries, abortion is legal and is granted on request, even for sanitary reasons, according to a broad interpretation of the facts. Now, according to U.N.O. statistics, the death rate among mothers in Japan is three times as high as in Canada.

In Yugoslavia, with a similar legislation, the mother death rate is four times as high as ours.

[Mr. Rodrigue.]

How are we then to believe that permissive abortion laws promote health?

• (3:50 p.m.)

Let us keep in mind also the tremendous medical progress achieved over the last ten years. The maternal mortality rate has decreased from 10 to 1 in a single generation.

Today, there are less medical indications than ever before. Medical authorities accept that fact and statistics prove it. So it is ironical to claim that the amendments to the abortion legislation proposed in the bill now before us reflect the needs of modern society.

On the matter of saving the mother's life, I should like to quote part of a document prepared by the Medical Council of Laval Hospital, and I quote:

An abortion performed because the mother's life is endangered, may be considered not as euthanasia, but as a case of self-defence.

But before an act can be considered to be in self-defence, there must be, on the one hand, some proportion between the defensive act and the aggression and, on the other hand, the defensive act must also be the only possible means of protection.

Now, according to experts, cases where the foetus must be killed in order to save the mother's life are extremely rare.

Dr. René Simard, director of obstetrics at Laval University, states that he has never seen any.

For his part, Dr. Roy J. Hefferman, a famed American gynaecologist, states:

To perform a therapeutic abortion, is either to overlook modern methods of treating pregnancy complications or to refuse to take the time required to apply them.

Moreover, the inefficiency of the therapeutic abortion is proved by—

—several studies.

Considering the scarcity of the cases where therapeutic abortion is necessary to save the life of the mother, we can ask ourselves if legislation to allow it is justified. Thus, if the legislator wants, through legislation, to rule on those extremely uncommon cases, he should include in that legislation some very strict guide lines similar to those advocated by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists.

Through the ages, several persons have tried on many occasions to define the word "health". Health cannot be defined by a legal term and this is the reason why I have proposed this amendment striking out the words "or health", in order to clarify paragraph (c) in subsection (4) of clause 18, in this bill amending section 237 of the Criminal Code.