

*Criminal Code*

ignorant, friendless women to bear the burden of a situation which too often they are obliged to face alone.

• (4:30 p.m.)

One of the "guesstimates"—they were not even estimates—given to the standing committee on health and welfare was the number of illegal abortions performed annually in Canada. The committee heard from Dr. Donald M. Lowe, a former chairman of the Ontario Medical Association's committee on abortion. His figure was that between 25,000 and 75,000 illegal abortions are performed in Canada every year. That is an enormous figure when one thinks of it in terms of the women involved, of their plight and of the cost to society. That estimate was the low one among those we were given. Estimates were also given at several times that figure. But I agree with the statement by the Association for Modernization of Abortion Laws in Canada that there is no need to waste time now on a futile numbers game of trying to guess the number of illegal abortions in Canada every year. The tragedy is that we do not know, nor have we any means of finding out. No steps have been taken to obtain this information and the worst of it is that in the past we just have not cared.

What we do know is that last year Jean Paul Gilbert, Montreal police director, stated in a letter to the committee that authorities in Montreal's major hospitals had reported as follows:

Hardly a day goes by without a woman coming or being brought to the hospital after an attempted abortion.

What is true for Montreal hospitals is true for hospitals in Toronto and Vancouver and in a comparative degree for other hospitals across Canada. What about the many, many more women all across Canada who suffer mutilation and sometimes even death as a result of do it yourself projects with knitting needles, acids or any one of a dozen other instruments never meant for that purpose? There are also those who suffer at the hands of backstreet butchers who claim to be abortionists.

The choice now before us is not whether we are going to have abortions. That has already been decided. If we refuse to face the present situation and try to sweep it under the rug, pretending it does not exist, illegal abortion is going to continue to grow in this country. We have had much evidence to that

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effect. It will not be stopped. Ever since the dawn of history women have not been stopped in this matter because the sanctions of society against them are such that they cannot face these situations. They cannot stand them economically or socially and they mean personal tragedies which these women are not able to bear, causing them to seek the abortionist wherever he can be found. If not a legal abortionist, then they must find an illegal one.

One of the French speaking members to my left referred to people who wish to see changes in respect of abortion and other matters, such as proposed in the amendments to the Criminal Code now before us, as those who love darkness, evildoers, and that sort of thing. In my opinion the people who love darkness are those who are closing their eyes to the terrible predicament of women from one coast to the other who are caught in the pregnancy trap and have no recourse because the lawmakers of this country up to this point have given them no recourse. It is our job to change that picture.

I was pleased to hear the hon. member for Fundy-Royal say he wished there were many women in this house. So do I. Thank heaven there are a great number of civilized men in the house who realize that this problem is not merely a case of rushing to the assistance of women. There is that too, but the problem has been tied up for a long time in an impossible situation. Surely it is not a situation that can be met by quotations from religious or philosophical authorities who lived centuries ago. Surely it is an intolerable situation calling for action in line with modern needs and modern thinking. It is a problem with which we have to grapple.

I am not going to get into theological arguments because the committee has had plenty of theology on both sides of the case. The hon. member who preceded me stated there were two sides to this question, those who wanted wide open abortion on demand and those who wanted nothing whatever to do with abortion, leaving it illegal. I believe there are those in between, those who want a reasonable approach to this problem with reasonable measures for solving it.

The amendments now before us clarify the existing law. That is good. They add the word "health" to the existing legislation. At the present time an abortion can be performed only in cases where the life of the mother is gravely in danger. The new amendment will add the word "health". In other