

Criminal Code

Out of a hundred cases submitted to a physician to secure abortion, at least 95 per cent will be unwarranted. Yet since people will go and see their physicians for that purpose, they will naturally do their utmost to succeed.

That is why, with pressures brought to bear upon him from all sides even though he is well qualified, the poor physician will be in an extremely complex situation and most of the times, his decision will be contrary to his own conception of his patient's condition. If he is alone, it will be extremely difficult for him to arrive at a decision. On the other hand, by adding two members to the committee, we would partly relieve him of the responsibility.

Once he is able to consult a psychiatrist the latter becomes perhaps the most important person, more than the clergyman, because according to the representations we received from the various Churches, namely from the Roman Catholic Church, we know they are opposed to abortion. Moreover, I do not think the woman requesting an abortion would be disposed to consult her parish priest or a spiritual advisor.

Now the fact remains that even a clergyman or a spiritual adviser can give sensible advice which would surely not be prejudicial to the diagnosis which the senior physician will have to make.

I say that the most important individual in that case will be the psychiatrist and I refer again to that famous number which impresses me very much. As there is practically no case when abortion has to be performed to save the life of a woman, the reason of health has been added. Now, the psychiatrist becomes the key man in such a case, because the person who will go before the therapeutic abortion committee is already somewhat mentally affected and ill, since she is ready to accept something which is unnatural. The fact that she started by asking medical advice for an abortion while being comparatively healthy indicates that her mental health is especially affected. This is why I feel that, when he suggests a psychiatrist, the hon. member for Brandon-Souris realizes quite well the disastrous consequences of the problem which has been before us for some time.

The problem is extremely serious, because a pregnant person is perhaps not in a position, especially on account of her special condition, to judge matters adequately by herself. We only have to remember the peculiar behaviour of a pregnant woman; she is somewhat disturbed—and this applies to all

women—and then her reasoning and her judgment are not as logical as they would be in other circumstances.

This pertains to psychology, to the mind and to mental health. Nobody would then be in a better position than a psychiatrist to advise most judiciously and most objectively the attending doctors on the person wanting an abortion.

I find therefore this amendment most appropriate. I find it serious. I find that once again it fully supports us in our fight and we shall keep on fighting until the minister can or will decide to take our comments into account.

A four member committee still better than one comprising only two members, since there will be four persons to look after the interests of the patient. I am also in favour of a committee made up of properly qualified people, that is, who know the human mind because they have made a special study of the subject and who are familiar with all the possible distortions it may present due to various circumstances.

I therefore think that by specifying that a psychiatrist will be consulted, we do not repeat what is normally inferred when we refer to qualified doctors. That is what the minister said just now, that it was necessarily inferred. But we take that precaution knowing human nature as it is and knowing also that the easiest way out has many supporters in the world.

● (5:50 p.m.)

We therefore know that there may be a whole string of reasons, besides the real ones, which can bring someone to ask for an abortion. That is why if ever abortion was accepted, we would want the law to be very specific so as to discourage those who would want to resort to it. As the hon. member for Portneuf (Mr. Godin) pointed out, there is no reason why we should be in favour of such a thing.

I do not think that the problem is worse from the population point of view. On the contrary, our country does a lot of publicity to attract immigrants. At this time, I would like to make the distinction—once again, people may think that it is my hobby, but I feel very strongly about it—between the province of Quebec and the other provinces.

It could be that in the other provinces people are not so much opposed to abortion because they depend on immigration.

Mr. Speaker: I hope that the hon. member will see to it that his remarks are relevant to the amendment.