

actually is not a disease but a minor ailment justifies an abortion.

That is why this amendment is most serious, because we do not want to allow abortion on request for mere reasons of health.

The government members should speak on this bill, because they are concerned with the same people we are concerned with, and instead of sitting there, sucking their thumb, as the Liberal party whip (Mr. Pilon) does, they should now and then give their opinion on such an important amendment.

**Mr. Jean-Charles Cantin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Shefford (Mr. Rondeau) has absolutely no idea of the government's position, simple and clear as it is.

The government wishes to leave the practice of medicine to the doctors. The government wants them to look after the health of Canadian citizens. The government believes that this health will be in better hands than in those of our Cr ditiste friends. After all, it is rather surprising that these would-be defenders of life are willing to wait until a woman is at the point of death before a medical committee can decide whether or not a therapeutic abortion is necessary.

I wanted to give in a few words the position of the government and the reasons why this amendment is unacceptable to the government.

**Mr. Romuald Rodrigue (Beauce):** Mr. Speaker, I moved this amendment to make it clear that it is the mother's life that will be endangered, and not only her health, if therapeutic abortion is not performed.

Paragraph 18 (4) (c) of Bill C-150 reads as follows:

—has by certificate in writing stated that in its opinion the continuation of the pregnancy of such female person would or would be likely to endanger her life or health.

This paragraph may be interpreted in various ways, and have quite a wide scope according to the person interpreting it.

Some people think, it seems to me, that the new legislation on abortion will only legalize abortion on serious grounds, namely to save the mother's life. Even if that is seldom necessary, it is generally admitted that abortion made on such grounds is already legal. The changes proposed in the bill opens the door much wider.

Bill C-150 proposes to legalize abortion to safeguard health. The decision on such a matter is left to the discretion of a small abortion

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committee. In fact, the act will allow two medical practitioners to authorize abortions on grounds of moral, physical or mental health.

During a television program, on December 27 last, the Minister of Justice (Mr. Turner) said that the abortion committees would lay down the law. He stated that the word "health" would not be interpreted by courts of justice, but by every therapeutic abortion committee. In other words, the decision of those committees lies beyond the scope of the legislation and could have a different meaning according to the members.

In Colorado, in California and elsewhere, the result of legislation similar to the one which is proposed to us has been to increase the number of abortions. Up to 90 per cent of abortions performed in hospitals are made on so-called "mental health" grounds, a term which is used abusively to cover anything.

If there are more abortions in hospitals this does not mean that the number of criminal abortions has decreased.

In Great Britain, for instance, under a liberalized legislation, the rate of deaths due to criminal abortions is higher than in Canada.

In 1966, the Dominion Bureau of Statistics reported only nine deaths due to criminal abortions in Canada, whilst in a six-month period, sixteen were reported in England. This amounts to 32 deaths a year.

Then what is the reason which could justify the change? To clarify the present legislation? In fact, it is not through the use of words which we are unable to define that we will reach that goal.

Could it be to meet an urgent medical need? Doctors recognize themselves that such need does not exist and our decreasing maternity death rate proves it. Today, it stands at only 3 deaths on 10,000 living births, which is over ten times less than the 1940 rate.

On February 7, 1968, Dr. FitzGibbon stated to the Committee on health, welfare and social affairs the following, and I quote:

As it has been said on several occasions during the audience of the above mentioned case, there is no sound medical reason to interrupt a pregnancy. Abortion requests addressed to doctors are almost invariably of a social nature—

Could the proposed amendments to the law be a concession granted to a small pressure group of doctors who want to free themselves from all legal restriction?