

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

It is a difficult problem to solve. We know that the legislation is inadequate. The Dominion Bureau of Statistics reports that in the first three months of this year, the three westernmost provinces and the three Maritime provinces reported only 235 therapeutic abortions. When you compare those figures with the evidence of the Toronto obstetrician and of detective Douglas H. Walton of the metro Toronto police morality bureau, that it is quite possible that there are hundreds of illegal abortions in Toronto every week, you begin to realize the pitiful inadequacy of the legislation.

I think the minister should desist from his ostrich-like posture of keeping his head in the sand and thinking that the abortion problem will go away if he stays there long enough. It will not go away. It will increase in size, just like pregnancy. And the pregnant women of Canada in their hundreds and thousands who want and need abortions will not be able to wait. I suggest that we need to do two things. The whole matter ought to be taken out of the Criminal Code and left up to the decision of the woman and her doctor. Even before that legislation becomes possible, we ought to make abortions available not only in hospitals but on an outpatient basis in properly equipped medical clinics and doctors' offices. By using the new suction method machine which is in use in the Ottawa Civic Hospital and in other hospitals across the country, I do not see why this should not be done safely.

Dr. Henry Morgentaler, a respected physician in Montreal, has written to the minister on behalf of the Humanist Association of Canada urging that the medical profession and the Humanist Association be consulted as to how best these changes can be brought about. I urge that this problem be considered as the serious one it is and that there be no further attempts to evade it, because the proportions of the problem will become much greater than they are even at present.

Mr. Russell C. Honey (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, at the outset may I say on behalf of the Minister of Justice (Mr. Turner) that the sections relating to abortion law received more consideration

both in and out of Parliament during discussion of the omnibus criminal law amendment bill last year than did any other matter contained in the legislation. During parliamentary discussion on the omnibus bill the Minister of Justice, as reported on page 4722 of *Hansard* for January 23, 1969, said:

I realize full well that this matter goes right to the essence of life, goes right to the bone. There is not going to be any consensus on this issue in this house or in the country. There are those on the one hand who abhor abortion for any cause, or for any reason whatsoever. There are those on the other hand who would make abortion wholly permissive or at the personal option of the woman. We have not reached a consensus between those views in this bill. We have reached only what I might call an accommodation. When the life or health of a mother is in jeopardy, therapeutic miscarriage will be absolved from the penalties in the criminal law.

Since enactment of the abortion legislation last year many exaggerated and uninformed statistics have been advanced by proponents of "abortion on demand". For example, it was claimed recently that about 2,000 women a year die from the after effects of abortion. In her remarks this evening the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. MacInnis) quoted some rather fanciful figures that in my submission have no foundation in fact.

I think, it would be better to look at the DBS figures. If we do so, it is difficult to understand the basis on which this claim is made, because the latest statistics available to DBS show that though 22 women died from causes due to abortion in 1964, this number decreased to 13 in 1968. While it is acknowledged that these statistics are incomplete in that they do not represent all provinces, there is nevertheless a wide gap between the two sets of figures.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I can only repeat what the Minister of Justice said in the House yesterday:

We are closely studying the medical experience under the recent amendments to the Criminal Code. When we gather enough information from those statistics we may be in a position to report to the House. At the moment there are no imminent plans to amend the law.

Motion agreed to and the House adjourned at 10.17 p.m.