

Adjournment Debate

approximately 150 pregnancies. Does this justify 64,850 other abortions? Obviously not.

The situation as it is now is policy making by default, since no one is taking any responsibility for enforcing the existing laws. All too often federal and provincial Governments are content to say that action lies in the jurisdiction of the other. It is up to the federal Government to demonstrate the intent of the federal legislation and encourage consistent and responsible application of all its provisions in all of our provinces and territories.

We have a law which is not obeyed, as we can see from the free-standing abortion clinics, or is abused by the hospitals which provide virtual abortion on demand. To leave such a *status quo* in place ignores our responsibility to provide workable laws for a just and orderly society. This is the law, but when hospitals and provincial agencies do not interpret its provisions as they were intended, it leaves the door open for the ongoing perpetuation of injustice. That is what is happening.

It is not the tragedy of one woman's death that we are condemning the committee for. Of course, she might well have lived with her baby if the committee had been responsible and met with her to discuss the merits of her case. The real tragedy of this case is the fact that there are literally thousands upon thousands of cases where a rubber stamp is all that is needed to end the life of an unborn child.

No one in Canada can say that there is not a special value to the life of an unborn child. Indeed, all must acknowledge that foetal life has a very special value. It is because of this belief that we have therapeutic abortion committees with the job of ensuring that the utmost recognition is given to the potential of the unborn child. It is quite reasonable to require the most compelling justifications for a woman's decision to have an abortion. Therapeutic abortion committees are not established to remove the obstacles to a woman getting an abortion. They are there to ensure that the abortion of a pregnancy is a last resort when the state of a woman's health leaves no other option.

● (2205)

I congratulate hospital officials in Prince Edward Island, who last week announced the decision to dismantle that province's last therapeutic abortion committee. If other provinces and the federal Government do not have the initiative to adhere to the workable legislation in this area, the hospitals of P.E.I. are doing the right thing by protecting the rights of unborn children.

The federal Government should make it clear to the provinces what we expect from them in concrete terms. I hope the Minister of Justice will take the leadership in this issue so that our Criminal Code can continue to provide protection for the lives of all Canadians, including unborn children.

In that vein I would urge the Minister of Justice to encourage the Attorney General of Ontario, Ian Scott, to close the second abortion clinic opened last week in Toronto in total

defiance of the law. We cannot and should not tolerate this act of defiance if we are to expect Canadians to respect our judicial system.

Mr. Jim Edwards (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Communications): Mr. Speaker, I would like to add some comments to the reply which was given on April 24, 1986 by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Crosbie) to the Hon. Member for London East (Mr. Jepson) regarding the tragic death of the young Ottawa woman and the procedures followed by therapeutic abortion committees.

The Minister informed the House that the question of procedures followed by therapeutic abortion committees is a question of the administration of health and hospital services, which is the responsibility of the provinces.

In addition, it is my duty to present the Government's comments on the divisive issue that is abortion.

It is well known that abortion is one of the most hotly debated issues of recent times. By the nature of the subject, abortion is at once a moral, medical, legal, sociological, philosophical, demographic and psychological problem not readily amenable to one-dimensional thinking. It is commonplace to identify groups, be they religious, ethnic or political, on the basis of whether the group is in favour of or against abortion. Occasionally the division is expressed in terms of so-called liberal versus so-called conservative policy. What this approach fails to take into account is that there is no one single group in any society whose members have been able to arrive at complete unanimity of opinion on the issue. Even if such labels as pro or anti are acceptable, there is still failure to take cognizance of the wide range covered by such designations.

For example, existing so-called progressive abortion legislation includes laws which allow abortion on demand with no questions asked; those which allow abortions generally but require the pregnant woman to apply to a specially constructed board which would pass the applicant through a series of consultation and advisory board; and those which permit abortions on grounds of material welfare and extend the grounds for granting an abortion for socio-economic reasons. On the other side, existing so-called restrictive abortion laws include laws which prohibit abortion completely; those which permit abortions only to save the life of the mother; and those in which rape, incest, or foetal malformation would provide justifiable grounds.

Such divergence exists in the many disciplines which are touched by the subject of abortion. It is not uncommon to find participants in the discussion of this subject at immediate odds because of their different perspectives. The reason behind this lack of consensus is the fact that the subject touches on so many areas of a highly personal and emotive nature, such as morals and religion. Debate proceeds with reference only to the participants interests, convictions or expertise. There is a failure to recognize that a great number of different moral and social values exist in any society, and that it is by no means