

Adjournment Debate

This is perhaps a partial answer, but I shall extend the invitation of my colleague with his interesting comments to the Minister—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Morin): I regret to interrupt the hon. member but the time allocated to him is now over.

[English]

ABORTION—REQUEST FOR CLARIFICATION OF GOVERNMENT POLICY

Mr. Jake Epp (Provencher): Madam Speaker, some time ago I addressed a question to the government with respect to the definition of health as it relates to the Criminal Code, and specifically to the provision covering abortion.

The definition which had been generally accepted, or which was widespread at the time amendments to the Code were being established, was that the health of the mother meant her physical health and also her mental health. Much discussion and debate have taken place since that time as to the legal and medical definitions which should be operative in defining the health of a mother.

The Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) who at the time the Code was amended was Minister of Justice, has, along with others, gone further in his interpretation of the law as it applies, or as it should apply, to abortion, and in agreement with the United Nations view he adds that economic and social considerations should be taken into account when reaching decisions as to whether or not legal abortions should be granted.

It is my contention that if we go to this extreme we have in essence arrived at abortion on demand. I do not believe this was the intention of the government, or of those members who voted for the amendment to the Criminal Code. It would constitute, to my mind, the removal of any restriction, and abortion as a crime might as well be removed from the Criminal Code.

● (2220)

In the *Ottawa Journal* for March 6 the Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) is quoted as follows:

Mr. Turner said because opinion is so sharply divided on the issue—

That is the abortion issue.

—criminal law should not be used to force one moral view over another.

"When there is no consensus, criminal law should withdraw and it should be a personal matter," Mr. Turner continued.

I believe that is an abrogation of the guarantees given by the then Minister of Justice to those who strongly opposed the legalization of abortion. In the few minutes I have this evening I am pressing the government to define in very clear terms, or to undertake amendments to define in very clear terms, what its interpretation of the Criminal Code respecting the health, both physical and mental, of the mother should be or is.

Personally I am very strongly opposed to abortion on demand. I feel that in many of the hospitals at the present time that have established therapeutic abortion committees, abortion on demand is virtually taking place. When I look at the 43,000 plus legal abortions occurring across Canada and at the rapid increase in abortion, specifically

[Mr. Marceau.]

at the Vancouver General Hospital where over 10,000 abortions alone were performed, I say that in some hospitals at the present time abortion on demand is already virtually a fact.

Yesterday's *Ottawa Journal* came out with headline "171 abortions after 5 months." Apparently, 171 abortions were performed in Canada after five months of gestation. The Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde) is quoted as being "deeply disturbed" at this evidence. I do not think he should be deeply disturbed. Surely it was well known to many people that this was happening. Pro life groups have been pointing out for some time that abortions are taking place after a gestation period of 20 weeks plus. They have shown very clearly that some of these aborted fetuses actually live after the abortion, and possibly could have lived had proper medical help been given.

I say it is high time that the government clearly defined its position on the meaning of health. Again quoting the article in the *Ottawa Journal* for April 21:

At this stage—

That is, at 21 weeks of gestation.

—say specialists in the field, the baby is completely developed and could most likely survive outside the mother.

I think the government had become part and parcel of what I would simply refer to as wanton murder. I for one believe that life is sacred and I am very strongly opposed to abortion on demand, something which I maintain is already taking place in some of our hospitals. While this is a thorny issue, I feel it goes beyond political confines to the point where we should ask: how does society look upon itself and its responsibility to protect those who cannot protect themselves?

I was reading that in Manitoba this past week tremendous efforts were made to save twins at The Pas born prematurely. One passed away; the other is still being kept alive. So on the one hand we are doing everything that medical science can do to preserve life, yet fetuses of the same gestation period are being aborted or allowed to die in hospitals. I should like a response from the government as to what is its definition of the law.

One last fact remains. Despite the laws that we might pass in this parliament, indeed that pass the parliaments of other lands, there is a certain law that supersedes the law of man, and that is the law of God. I am asking the government: where does it stand on that issue?

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Marceau (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Justice): Madam Speaker, in 1969 Parliament amended the provisions of the Criminal Code concerning abortion. The amendments to the act were a compromise between those who are opposed to abortion and those who do not want any legal obstacle.

In 1972, in reply to a question he was asked, the Prime Minister said: "... your slogan... free abortion on demand... is not mine, and you will have to convince me... if you want me to support the idea... that a person who asks for an abortion has no responsibility. From a certain moment, when you destroy the foetus, you suppress a life... I shall never accept that a person who kills