

Oral Questions

portfolio of the ministry of transport. However, I want to assure the hon. member that the new Minister of Transport has indicated that he is very pleased with the progress of the discussions, and those discussions will continue and, hopefully, we will be able to reach a satisfactory resolution.

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HEALTH AND WELFARE

VIVISECTION OF HUMAN FETUSES

Mrs. Ursula Appolloni (York South-Weston): Mr. Speaker, I intended to put my question to the Minister of National Health and Welfare or, in his absence, to the Prime Minister. In his absence, perhaps I could refer it to the Acting Prime Minister. I have before me research reports which reveal that human fetuses from ten to 25 weeks gestation were victims of vivisection in the Winnipeg Health Sciences Centre for purposes of scientific experimentation.

Following hysterotomy, a method of abortion which removes a living baby, the infants were subjected to heart puncture and dissection to remove various glands, including the adrenals, ovaries, testes and pituitary. Can the Acting Prime Minister tell the House whether or not such experiments are still being funded by the Medical Research Council of Canada?

● (1500)

Hon. David MacDonald (Acting Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, speaking for the Minister of National Health and Welfare, who unfortunately is sick today, I am told that the facts as stated by the hon. member are not totally accurate, that the investigation or clinical study was carried on with respect to fetuses that were already dead at the time of the study. They were the result of abortions that apparently had been approved by the therapeutic abortion committee of the hospital. There has been a rather extensive preliminary investigation of the ethical questions involved. I suppose that this arises out of the form of the question put by the hon. member, but perhaps most important of all I understand that these particular studies were carried on in 1976.

Mrs. Appolloni: Mr. Speaker, I gather that it is presently being reviewed by the attorney general of Manitoba. The information I have is that the babies were indeed very much alive and, indeed, it could have been the procedures which these babies had to undergo that were the direct cause of their death.

In view of the possible criminal implications, therefore, can the minister tell me whether the Prime Minister's office is in touch with the attorney general of Manitoba to find out, indeed, what are the real facts?

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): Mr. Speaker, I am sure that the Department of National Health and Welfare and the minister will be most anxious to clear up any misunderstanding that exists with respect to these studies. I understand from the information that I have been given from the department that

[Mr. Mazankowski.]

there was very extensive consideration given to all the implications of this matter and that no operations were performed on any live human material. I think it is very important that that be understood. This experiment was conducted on human material that was no longer living, and it was the result of officially approved therapeutic abortions that were in no way related to the use of the material for clinical study. I am told as well that the study took place between 1972 and 1976.

Because the hon. member has raised this question and because there are questions that have been expressed publicly about the ethics, human disrespect and degradation, I think it is important that there be a full exposition on the facts of this matter. I can assure the hon. member and all hon. members that there will be a very clear statement on this matter.

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[Translation]

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

SECURITY OF CANADIANS IN TEHRAN—CREDIBILITY OF IRANIAN STATEMENTS

Mr. Louis Duclos (Montmorency): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Secretary of State for External Affairs. In view of the fact that on at least three occasions the U.S. State Department had received assurances from the government of Iran that the U.S. diplomatic staff had nothing to fear if the Shah were hospitalized in the United States, could the minister tell the House how much faith she has in the word of the Iranian authorities as to the security of the Canadian diplomatic staff in Tehran?

[English]

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I cannot, of course, give final assurance to the hon. member that the word of any person acting in Iran today can be taken as being the ultimate or final word on any subject. I do know that on the occasions where we have asked for assurances we have been told both by the authorities in Iran and by the chargé d'affaires of the Iranian embassy here in Ottawa that Canadian nationals who are either attached to the embassy in Iran or living in Iran are in no danger. There has been no indication of any harassment or any threat to those people at any point in this very grave situation that exists throughout the country of Iran.

[Translation]

INQUIRY WHY MINISTER DOES NOT RECALL IMMEDIATELY CANADIAN DIPLOMATIC STAFF IN TEHRAN

Mr. Louis Duclos (Montmorency): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary. Since the usual rules as defined under international law do not seem to guide or do not guide in any way the conduct of Iranian authorities in the circumstances why does the minister not simply order the immediate recall to Canada of our diplomatic staff in Tehran?