

Criminal Code

gered. One thing is to be noted, however: under the Code as it now stands, anybody can perform an abortion. The present government wanted to hand back the practice of medicine to physicians, surely a sounder proposition than to rely on our Créditistes friends who, under the present provisions of the Code, could procure an abortion.

As far as I am concerned, I have much more confidence in physicians. Let each practise his own profession. So we have here a clarification of the law.

Others have said that it allowed all kinds of abortions.

I do not see it that way at all. Therapeutic abortion alone is at stake. The new legislation is less strict than the former one in that the present law authorizes an abortion only if the life of the mother is endangered, while the new law will authorize therapeutic abortion when her health might be endangered.

In that respect I think, the new law is more permissive. On the other hand, only physicians will be entitled to decide, and to treat the patient.

Some people have said that we were more rigorous. They may be right at that. To sum up there exists a restriction. Who is going to decide that there will be a therapeutic abortion? An independent medical panel, i.e., independent from the patient's doctor. Thus, I think the new legislation is somewhat stricter than the existing law.

To sum up, these amendments are a compromise, a question that is both reasoned and reasonable. I do not think that you can hold up such an amendment to ridicule.

During the last electoral campaign, I must say that in my own constituency, I held about fifteen meetings mostly with representatives of religious communities.

I held in my area a meeting which was attended by 150 or 200 priests and nuns. During a seminar, the whole question of the bill as presented today, was studied, and I think that the result of the elections, in my constituency, has proved that I was also supported by these people.

It is said that representations were addressed to the government members. I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that there was no pressure whatsoever. The present Minister of Justice as well as the then minister of Justice the present Prime Minister, merely resorted to information as regards members.

Both of them made it their duty in caucus to provide information to all who wished to

[Mr. Cantin.]

be informed. I must say I had the opportunity, with the present Minister of Justice, to convene several meetings to which we had invited all the party members who wanted explanations on all the amendments.

At no point was any moral pressure brought to bear on anyone, of course, in public life mutual influence has to be exercised; we must try and influence people if we believe that a given change to a legislation may be useful. It behoves us to spread the idea. That is a part of public life.

But there were no pressures. Besides, the attitude of certain Liberal members proves it. Unable for conscience's sake to vote otherwise, they chose to express themselves freely in this house. And as the Minister of Justice pointed out this afternoon, none of them will be subject to reprisals because they took a stand they believed to be in accordance with their conscience.

I do not want to extend this debate unduly. In this jet age, laws should be streamlined to suit the society in which we live.

We sit here as legislators to protect the rights of society and the rights of the individual. And the individual will feel an ever-increasing need for a private shelter, so as to be better prepared to meet with the self-denials that social order calls for nowadays.

[English]

Mr. Arnold Peters (Timiskaming): Mr. Speaker, I should like to congratulate those who have taken part in this debate, particularly those who have raised arguments based on moral and ethical grounds. This is all very nice, but this debate has really not taken place in a true atmosphere, and more has been left to the consciences of individuals than has been dealt with in this legislation. I also congratulate the hon. member for Témiscamingue (Mr. Caouette) on the opposition that he has put up, which I believe was sincere, and which has helped the cause of social justice in that it has brought about the discussion of a very important matter.

I was in my riding for several days recently, and while it contains a large Roman Catholic population, nobody came to ask me where I stood on abortion. What these people were worried about were much more mundane things, such as whether the post office was going to close or how many jobs on the highway were going to be discontinued or what works were going to take place in my riding. They were not really interested either in homosexuality or abortion.