

Criminal Law Amendments

second reading, we speak to the Bill in principle. That is essentially what I plan to do. I plan to keep my comments brief to ensure that this Bill today is referred to committee where it will be dealt with expeditiously.

At the outset of today's discussion on this Bill, the Minister of Justice reminded us of some statistics that point out how serious the section of the Bill dealing with drinking and driving is. He mentioned that at certain times of the day on the roads of Canada 25 per cent of Canadians behind the wheels of vehicles have been drinking. At almost any point of the day, 6 per cent of those people could be classed as legally impaired. That is an extremely serious situation. I do not know how Canada compares to other countries around the world, but having 6 per cent of people who could be classed as a menace on the highway as a result of their drinking must be among the highest.

Fifty per cent of all fatal traffic accidents in Canada are the result of drivers of those vehicles having had alcoholic drinks. Two thousand five hundred lives are lost each year as a result of people drinking and driving. Two thousand five hundred lives is one statistic. There would be tens of thousands of other lives that are ruined in many respects, loved ones who have received serious injuries from which they suffer the rest of their lives causing disruption to individuals and their families. As other Hon. Members have indicated today, this is a tragedy with which we must deal as quickly as possible.

● (1630)

The Bill before us will not solve the problem per se. In fact, it attempts to deal with a small part of the problem. Basically, it increases the punishments meted out on people caught drinking and driving. For example, we find that the minimum fine associated with drinking and driving will be raised from \$50 to \$300. That does not seem to be a very punitive sum in today's society. Nevertheless, it is an increase in the minimum fine. Also, on a first offence the driver will lose his or her licence for a three-month period, and on a second offence, for a six-month period. The punishments being meted out are being increased in severity.

If a person is caught and convicted of driving impaired or being over .08, the second offence could result in 14 days imprisonment and being prohibited from driving for six months. Each subsequent offence could result in another 90 days in jail and as much as being prohibited from driving for a year. The maximum will be five years imprisonment, an unlimited fine, and three years prohibition from driving. I suppose they are severe penalties by some people's evaluation.

Other countries, particularly those in western Europe, have much more severe penalties. One receives an automatic jail sentence if caught behind the wheel with a minimum amount of liquor in one's blood system. That automatic jail term has deterred drinking and driving to a certain extent. However, the situation goes beyond that. I suspect that increased penalties will result in a reduction in the number of people drinking and driving as a result of partying. That is why passage of the provisions is so critical at this time of the year when people are

in a festive spirit and parties occur more frequently and are perhaps more widespread than at other times of the year. It will serve as a deterrent to a certain extent. People could stand to lose their licence for a period or end up serving time in jail. I suppose some people will think twice about drinking and driving.

I heard with interest on the radio this morning a story about a reporter in the City of Montreal who went out to see how much people would support him as an intoxicated person who wished to drive. He approached a number of people. He was acting out a state of intoxication. Almost everyone assisted him to his vehicle, to get his key into the ignition and to get his vehicle on to the highway. If that is an indication of what is happening, we really have not adequately alerted people to the seriousness of drinking and driving.

Why is it that we stand here today passing legislation, which will hopefully result in a decrease in those persons drinking and driving, when at the same moment we are encouraging those firms which sell liquor, alcohol, beer and wine to support Canadian athletic events? When we are in our constituencies over the next few weeks, we will see the banners of various liquor companies on the ski hills as they support community events. When we catch up on some of our casual reading, we will find in popular magazines pages and pages and pages of liquor ads encouraging people to buy more varieties of liquors. We will see all these rather seductive pages of peoples holding wine glasses and cocktail glasses, obviously in their pursuit of an elegant and modern lifestyle. In a sense there is some hypocrisy, which I do not direct at any one Party or at any one set of individuals. On the one hand we are introducing legislation to punish people who are caught drinking and driving. On the other hand, we are condoning in a sense or almost encouraging by our silence more alcoholic consumption for Canadian citizens. I find it particularly despicable that liquor companies of one kind or another advertise at and support athletic events from one end of the country to the other. We are only touching one very small part of the particular problem.

We as parliamentarians do not want to feel that by passing this legislation today, getting it into committee and having it returned to the House early in the new year, our job is complete. Perhaps a more important job for the Government of Canada would be to bring out an educational program. It should invest in a program which will clearly demonstrate the problems associated not only with drinking and driving but with drinking per se.

Let us face it that those people who are convicted by the tens of thousands in our courts each year of drinking and driving are not simply party goers who have a few extra drinks and get caught. These are people who have serious alcoholic problems. They do not wilfully go out in unguided missiles to drive up and down our highway systems. These people have a serious illness, an illness which is not being adequately addressed at this time. I do not want to suggest for a moment that this will solve the problem. I do not think any other parliamentarian would suggest that, anyway.