

co-operation in regard to sentencing, which has become a major problem in interprovincial relations in regard to certain crimes in various parts of the country?

Mr. Lang: We are not making any suggestions to them, or indeed proposing to them what their agenda should be. Their agenda deals with the general subject matter of their role in the judicial process. If they invite persons from the Department of Justice, we will be glad to co-operate in lending them resource people, but I do not think that to this point they have requested them.

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Chairman, I have one question for the Minister of Justice. A few weeks ago at a press conference he made the statement that he may expunge jail sentences imposed for simple possession of marijuana and hashish. Is it government policy to eliminate jail sentences for offences of this nature? If so, when might we see amendments to the Criminal Code brought in?

Mr. Lang: As minister responsible for the agents prosecuting in drug offence cases, I have asked—and this instruction has been issued to my agents—that in cases of simple possession of first offence marijuana the court should know that it is our view that the conditional and absolute discharge provisions may well be applicable. It is, of course, a matter for the judge himself in light of the particular case, but this is our view and I thought we should have a consistent one across the country. That is why the instruction was issued.

We hope to be able to come forward with legislation before too long which will allow the House to consider a lower maximum in cases of simple first offence possession. There are cases where what seems to be a rather higher penalty than the norm is imposed. We will be introducing in the House our proposals in due course. However, it is not our intention to make the offence of trafficking any less serious, though even there there will be an opportunity to examine whether the exact penalties that are in place are desirable.

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Chairman, I am aware of that, but the press used quotation marks when it reported the minister as saying that in cases of possession of marijuana and hashish the government may eliminate jail sentences. I am aware of the policy regarding the instructions that have gone out to the provincial attorneys general and the minister's agents in the two northern territories, but is the government considering the elimination entirely of jail sentences in cases of simple possession of marijuana and hashish? If so, is it the intention of the government to introduce amendments to the Criminal Code in that respect?

Mr. Lang: That is what we are considering, Mr. Chairman, in cases of simple first offence possession of the lighter drugs to which the hon. member refers. However, it is not amendments to the Criminal Code that may be involved; it is the removal of this matter from the present act into either a separate statute or another statute.

The Deputy Chairman: Does that complete the study of vote 1a, Department of Justice?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Supply

The Deputy Chairman: The committee will now proceed to the consideration of votes 5a, 10a, and 15a of the Department of Manpower and Immigration, and vote L30a of the Unemployment Insurance Commission.

• (1650)

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Chairman, it is with the greatest reluctance that we let these items go at this time. This has been the first opportunity for any examination of this program. We have had an extremely limited opportunity of some 45 minutes in committee. In the interest of getting the estimates through, we are prepared to hold off our examination of this program until another time and place, perhaps on the main estimates when they are referred to the committee.

Mr. Peters: Mr. Chairman, we are very pleased to have an opportunity to speak on this item, and before this matter is concluded will be pleased to reduce the item by a considerable amount. There seldom has been a government department established which has been of such little use as this department. I remember when Manpower was established in order to make a place for one of the three ministers from Quebec. It was set up in such a way—

Miss Bégin: Hey!

Mr. Peters: The lady disagrees. She was not here and it would be very difficult for her to say whether or not this is what happened. I assure her that it did. For her edification I would say that we formerly had unemployment and employment in the same department. Then we split them and placed unemployment in one department and employment in another. The employment end was called Manpower, and unemployment remained under the Unemployment Insurance Commission. Employment was taken out of the Crown corporation and placed in a government department. It has so great a failure that the unemployed are divorced in such a way that they cannot establish that going to the manpower office every week looking for work is an indication that they are seeking employment; it will not meet the requirements of a proper search even if they go to the manpower office three times a day.

An hon. Member: That is not right.

Mr. Peters: Mr. Chairman, it is right. The hon. member may think he knows something about this, but I consider he knows very little about it. He may not be aware of this, but it is a fact that in respect of the next item, involving \$454 million, we have established ex-policemen of all forces, including the RCMP and security guards, to go around and do the job of checking up in respect of search to make sure that person is employed.

The Deputy Chairman: Order, please.

[Translation]

Order. The hon. member for Saint-Michel on a point of order.

[English]

Miss Bégin: Mr. Chairman, may I ask the hon. gentleman a question? Why did he not ask this kind of question during the question period a month ago?