

*The Address—Mr. Poulin*

repugnant to me generally, and there are very few such penalties remaining in our system of criminal justice, commercial trafficking in heroin is such a heinous crime that I feel it is the duty of parliament to take all the steps it can to deter commercial traffickers and thereby protect society. Those persons who would dare traffic could not do so while in prison.

Commercial trafficking in heroin might better be compared to those criminals responsible for the Lode airport massacre in Israel, the Munich massacre at the 1972 Olympic games or, indeed, if sabotage was involved, the tragic deaths of 344 people in the recent Paris air crash than to a single murder or multiple murder committed in the course of a robbery or a murder committed by an individual under any imaginable circumstances, for the trafficker in heroin leaves his many victims as unfortunate pitiful slaves to a habit that destroys them mentally, morally and physically.

I will quote now from a transcript of the evidence given at a trial by an eminent pharmacologist who holds a Ph.D. and many other high degrees. In addition, at the time of giving this evidence he had 12 years of practical experience in the drug field. His comments on the long-term and immediate effects on an individual of the use of heroin are as follows:

So far as immediate effects in terms of depression of respiration, and depression of heart action; constriction of the pupil of the eye; depression of intestinal movement. Those effects are less apparent in some ways than the behavioural effects, which relate to a lassitude, a languor, almost a stupor; a feeling of well-being, a feeling of comfort and loss of anxiety. That pleasurable feeling is, in fact, one of the reasons that the heroin user returns to the use of the drug.

In the long range, there are additional kinds of effects because heroin use is characterized by two phenomena; the development of tolerance and the development of dependence. The tolerance means that the user has to increase the dose to get the same kind of effect. So that an habitual heroin user will take many times the dose of heroin which would be toxic or perhaps fatal to someone who was not used to taking it. The dependence on the drug is of two kinds: one is a profound craving for the drug, a psychological dependence, which comes to the point of actually mastering the total lifestyle of the user, such that he lives for the drug-taking experience. His whole life experience revolves around the drug-taking and all that he does centres upon an attempt to make certain that he always has the drug in his presence or available to him for his use.

There is, however, a physical dependence which develops for the drug as well. That we know because if you take heroin away from an addict, within a few hours' time he will begin to show the symptoms of withdrawal. In effect, his body cries out against the removal of it—the drug. The withdrawal symptoms include such things as an appearance, almost, of a heavy cold, with running eyes, running nose, the person aches all over; his joints ache, his belly aches; he has stomach cramps, intestinal cramps and sometimes he has unavoidable defecation; he feels absolutely miserable. This lasts for a couple of days in its most acute form. By seven or eight days it is nearly over with, but during that time he feels acutely uncomfortable. Most people who have been involved with heroin and when the drug is taken away, they all go through this withdrawal, but most of them, if left to their own devices, so profound is their psychological dependence on the drug that they will go back and seek the drug again. So the recidivist rate, the percentage of people who voluntarily go back to the use of heroin, when they have been taken off the drug is, even in the best of treatment institutions, 70 or 80 per cent.

All in all the life expectancy of a heroin user is considerably less than that of normal people.

With respect to the usefulness of a heroin user to himself or to society and the possibility of his returning to a

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productive life in society, the following evidence was given by the same man:

There is no doubt that the social productivity of heroin users is markedly decreased. Their total lifestyle revolves around the drug. When they are on the drug, they do not want to work; they have a lassitude and a languor about them, almost a stupor; they are not really interested in productive employment; they become a great strain on themselves and their family and society. The number who are able to break away from that is relatively small, even under the best treatment or circumstances most return voluntarily to that kind of a lifestyle.

I have here some interesting statistics involving heroin and its abuse in Canada. In 1969 there were a total of 310 convictions in Canada involving all offences with respect to heroin. In 1972 there were 923 convictions registered with respect to heroin offences in Canada. This is a most alarming comparison. Another most significant statistics with respect to heroin is that in the entire year of 1972 there were 52.94 kilograms—116.56 pounds—seized, whereas in the first nine months of 1973, that is, from January 1, 1973 to September 30, 1973, there were 63.72 kilograms—140.18 pounds. That is an increase of approximately 20 per cent in the first nine months of 1973 over the amount seized in the previous 12 months. Comparing the same period, the number of persons charged with trafficking in heroin in the entire year 1972 was 958, whereas in the first nine months of 1973 the total number of persons charged with trafficking in heroin was 645.

As I stated earlier, the number of people addicted to this drug has been estimated to be between 16,000 and 19,000. The number of convictions for offences involving heroin shows a tremendous increase between the years 1969—310—and the year 1972—923. The amount of this illicit substance seized, comparing 1972 and 1973, shows a remarkable increase and the number of individuals charged with trafficking has also been on the increase.

● (1220)

By virtue of the present penalty provision of the Narcotic Control Act a person convicted of trafficking in a narcotic, whether it be cannabis or heroin, is subject to the same penalty, that is, a maximum of life imprisonment. There is, however, no minimum penalty provided presently in the Narcotic Control Act, whether the offence be in relation to trafficking in cannabis or to trafficking in heroin. The minimum penalty in either case, for either substance, is a suspended sentence.

I have the greatest respect for the judges in our country who have in most instances been imposing severe sentences, justifiably so, in the case of those who are found guilty of trafficking in heroin. My recommendation for a minimum sentence of seven years for anyone trafficking commercially in heroin is designed not to take from the judge that discretion, although it would have the effect of doing so, but more to impress upon those who would dare to traffic in this substance the determination of this government and this Parliament to deal with them in the most severe manner in order to deter this trafficking and to protect society. I would also propose, if a person is convicted, for example, of trafficking in four ounces of heroin as I mentioned previously, that the judge, having regard to all the circumstances including the previous criminal record of the person convicted, if any, continue to have the discretion to sentence the person to life imprison-