

Food and Drugs Act—Narcotic Control Act

the whole of the law into disrespect. Among these organizations was the Canadian Catholic Conference of Bishops who emphasized very strongly that it was a bad law and should not be continued. They said:

In the light of these conditions we consider Article 150, which forbids giving information about contraception as well as the sale or distribution of contraceptives, an inadequate law today. We consider it so quite independently of the morality or immorality of various methods of birth prevention. We believe it a deficient law because it does not meet all the conditions outlined above.

The law is not in fact enforced—

The minister said that there have been very few prosecutions.

—and the good of public peace might well be lost by attempts to enforce it. A large number of our fellow citizens believe that this law violates their rights to be informed and helped towards responsible parenthood in accordance with their personal beliefs.

It is our clear understanding, of course, that the modification of the law in question is not to extend to that part of it which has to do with abortion.

That was the stand of the Catholic Conference of Bishops at that time.

In the third place, this legislation will give people the knowledge they need. From a pioneer in birth control education comes the following comment:

Canada cannot raise enough money to support all dependent people in comfort; and it is about time that the increasing demands were checked through birth control which would be welcomed. There has been a definite drop in Canada's birth rate and Quebec province rate in 1967 was slightly less than Ontario. People who can help themselves do so... Birth rates on the average vary inversely with the earning capacity of the parents.

From the Canadian Welfare Council's brief comes the following:

There is no evidence that the poor are basically less willing and anxious to plan their families than are the economically well off. Most often they simply do not know how.

[Translation]

Here is the opinion of Dr. Serge Mongeau, director of the family planning centre, in Montreal, and I quote:

For the population in general, would repealing the law bring demographic growth to a standstill? In this connection, perhaps it is time for Canada to examine its conscience a little. We leave it to the have nots, who often are the least prepared for it, to bring into the world and to educate our citizens of tomorrow.

This legislation, Mr. Speaker, will give low-income people, as well as those who are better off financially, the necessary information and the right that will enable them to plan their family according to their means.

[Mrs. MacInnis.]

[English]

Finally, the fourth point is that in a world where so many people are suffering the tragedy and disaster of populations far greater than they can support, it ill behoves us in Canada to lecture them on the need for population control when at the same time we have neglected to take the steps necessary to legalize such measures ourselves. I may say that it strains their credibility to the breaking point. The passage of this measure will be an important step along the road to speaking to other countries not by our words but by our example. With the spectre of a world with diminishing resources whose population will double between now and the year 2000, any contribution we can make in this direction will be of some value.

We in this party commend the government for this bill which we shall support wholeheartedly.

Mr. Gordon Ritchie (Dauphin): Mr. Speaker, I should like to support this bill in a general way. But in dealing with the contraceptive portion of the bill may I say that this legislation is far behind what has been the custom and a part of the social mores of this country for many years. So this is a case of catching up with what has been practised by society for a long time.

• (4:20 p.m.)

I would say that though variations in birth rates are caused by a combination of many factors, some of them fairly obscure, there is no doubt that the ease with which contraceptive devices can be obtained has some effect, though perhaps not as great an effect as many people believe. I suppose that in Canada knowledge about birth control is available to most students and it is practiced as personally deemed fit. I should like to point out, however, that this measure would allow officials of the Department of National Health and Welfare in their dealings with the native populations to establish family planning. Our attention is focused upon the problem in this regard when we consider that the birth rate among native peoples is almost 44 per 1,000, some three times the national average. So this part of the bill brings us up to date and falls into line with what has been the practice for a long time.

The second part of the bill is concerned, among other things, with l.s.d. which constitutes a continuing problem. As one familiar with controlled drugs for many years, I am amazed by the great problem they have