

*Narcotic Control Act*

Given the sensitivity of the issue and the many legal, professional, regulatory and security considerations associated with the reintroduction of heroin in Canada for therapeutic use, a statement concerning availability and a protocol for the use of the drug will be made available on or about March 1, 1985. I want to put it in that context for the simple reason that for this matter to be effective, I think it is important that the protocol be done properly, and for that I think that time will be needed. Hopefully we can do it a little earlier, and that is why I say that on or about March 1 the matter will be addressed. Obviously it will be done expeditiously and it will be done in the right fashion.

This delay is necessitated, Mr. Speaker, by requirements to control access to and use of this powerful drug to those physicians and hospitals which have demonstrated certain levels of accreditation. The protocol will outline and explain the availability of the drug and what security measures must be taken. This will ensure that it is used solely for medical purposes and that the drug is not subject to redirection and misuse. Members might also be aware that in the last 48 hours we have had the most recent report by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police on the illegal use of heroin and cocaine. Some have said to me over the last few hours: "Is that not a major concern to the Government?" Obviously it is. I think it is of concern to every Member of this House. But the point that I make is this. The illegal use of those drugs should not in any way be associated with what the Government is doing this afternoon. There is no diversion, no misdirection in the therapeutic sense to those who are illegally using the drug. I think it is ironic in the extreme to know that there are people in society who are using the drug illegally while those who are in greatest need because of pain do not have access. That is an issue that has obviously motivated me in making this determination today.

It will also be necessary for this Government to consult other Governments, a process which has already begun, as well as associations of health professionals and provincial licencing authorities of health disciplines, before March, 1985. Out of courtesy, this Government will also examine the regulatory requirements of the United Nations and the international implications of the reintroduction of heroin in Canada. I believe that at present there are 38 countries which in fact have permitted the use of heroin for therapeutic purposes. The various manufacturing and distribution aspects of the reintroduction of heroin must also be determined and the necessary procedural steps taken before the drug is legally available. In light of this decision and announcement, a blind field study planned for 1985 will not go ahead.

There has been much media and public debate surrounding the ban on heroin use in Canada which has been with us since 1955. The issue is a sensitive and difficult one which goes to the heart of our personal feelings about life and death. It is my hope that the renewed availability of this drug will bring relief to many of those in Canada who suffer pain or are terminally ill. I sense that many families will also find comfort in this decision. I trust that all those involved in this debate will

understand that the Government also has a responsibility to ensure the safe and controlled use of this powerful and controversial drug. I will elaborate on these regulatory measures in early March, as I have already indicated.

• (1720)

Once again, I would like to pay tribute to my colleague, the Hon. Member for St. John's East who has been tireless in his efforts to bring this matter to the attention of the Canadian people and their Parliament. I commend him for his determination and sensitivity to those who are suffering in Canada.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this action to the memory of one who could not be here to share this moment, the late Hon. Walter Baker, who only last year spoke in the House. Before I quote him I would like to indicate to the House that we did speak to Lois and asked her whether she wanted to attend today. I understand that she is watching, and we all send our regards to her.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Epp (Provencher):** It was possibly best put by Walter Baker when he said:

There has been a strong feeling growing within the public of Canada and within some segments of the medical profession that those who fight against cancer should have every possible armament and every possible arrow in their quiver to relieve the anguish and the pain of the terminally ill.

I thank the House for this opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Reg Stackhouse (Scarborough West):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to say a few words in connection with this Bill. I would first like to pay tribute to our colleague, the Hon. Member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath), not only because of the content and significance of this Bill, but because his action today shows each of us what a private Member can do. We are sometimes frustrated and bewildered, but the example of the Hon. Member indicates to us that there is an important and impressive contribution open to us all. If we have the perseverance and concern demonstrated by our colleague, we can copy his example and share equally in his achievement.

As well, I would like to say something about the Bill itself and the opportunity that the Government has indicated it is opening, because I have some concern about the possible restrictions on the use of heroin to relieve cancer victims. I recognize the motives behind the Government's intention and I respect them. The policy may well be right. However, I ask the Minister and the committee that will review this Bill to reconsider these restrictions in light of the need that many Canadian cancer victims have.

I speak of this because of the experience I had some years ago when serving in another kind of public service. It was my duty and privilege then to sit beside many people suffering terminal cancer. I saw them degenerate from robust health and strength to become but shells of humanity, sometimes over a matter of months, sometimes more drastically over a matter of weeks. I saw them suffer fearsome pain, which today, as one