

Criminal Code

It is difficult, Mr. Chairman, to understand how this government could appoint a commission to inquire into what we call Canadian culture, and at the same time permit the publication and distribution in wholesale quantities of a series of books of this type. This is only one. I spoke to a distributor of these books, and he said, "Oh, well; this book you are speaking about is nothing; you ought to read so-and-so." We have a commission on culture, and yet one of our courts has decided that under our laws this type of book, which the school principal describes as literary sewage, can be distributed in wholesale quantities throughout the dominion.

I do not need to point out that the question of juvenile delinquency is a matter of concern to every community from one end of this country to the other. Nor do I need to mention that those of us who are lawyers can recall cases that have come to our attention in which a boy or a girl becomes involved with the law, and then in your office you see the tragedy of the parents being at a loss to understand how their boy or girl could possibly be mixed up in this matter. Frankly I say to the minister that while his definition of crime comics may stand up, so far as the amendment dealing with obscene literature is concerned I doubt that there will be any improvement in the future. In view of this judgment it is likely there will be even a wider and more wholesale distribution of this type of material.

While the accused may engage the best lawyers in the country, as was done in this case, and contend that it is realism and has literary value, I do not think any member of this house or any parent in Canada would say that this trash is the sort of thing we want our Canadian boys and girls to read.

Mr. Knight: I have expressed before in this house the opinion that generally speaking I am in favour of the freedom of the individual in regard to his reading. Censorship, even if it were efficiently conducted, is a difficult thing. First of all, there are differences of opinion as to the definition of "obscene". There is little general agreement in regard to this matter. Censorship, even if it is carried on with ability, depends for its effectiveness upon the co-operation and endorsement of the public.

I believe that the public has already indicated its support of this bill. It is a difficult problem to give to the adult individual freedom in the matter of his reading, and at the same time guide our young people and protect them from the literary malnutrition from which they suffer at the moment. My own approach has always been a positive

[Mr. White (Hastings-Peterborough).]

one. You cannot easily prohibit people. I believe the best way is to substitute something which is good for something which is bad. I mean by that the encouragement of good literature and good libraries. I would draw to the attention of the government the desirability of encouraging the building up of good libraries. I would urge, too, the removal of all restrictions, particularly sales taxes and customs duties, upon good literature coming into this country.

While I am on the subject, I might mention the matter of textbooks. I have a letter from the Minister of National Revenue, in which he says that textbooks "on the curriculum",—whatever that means—are admitted free. I believe that is true, but it is not true of all educational books. Friends of mine who are university professors have complained bitterly that they are not able to get certain books they need—those which are definitely assigned to the student in relation to subjects on the curriculum, but reference books. Anyone who has any knowledge of teaching knows that wide reading on the part of a man who is trying to teach a subject is more important to him—it may not be to the student—than the textbooks themselves.

I believe that in this day and generation every government has some responsibility in this matter. I know it is a disputed question. I have discussed it with newspaper editors. If you ask the average newspaper editor what his responsibility is in the matter of leadership in the reading of good literature the discouragement of slang, and that sort of thing, he will say it is not his business to run a Sunday school. He is working for a businessman, and his business is to run a newspaper and to sell that newspaper—in other words, to give the public what it wants. I decry that point of view. I do not know whether that is the attitude of the government in this matter—to give the public what it wants—or whether the government feels it has a responsibility of leadership; that it should try to induce the people to move along lines that are in their best interests. It is a question I do not wish to discuss any further here, because if I did so I might get into a lengthy argument.

I know that the assistance the government might give to university professors and teachers, by throwing off certain taxes, would cost money. It would cost the government money to support libraries. But may I refer to another letter I received, this time from the Secretary of State, in reply to a question I asked him the other night with regard to the printing bureau. He tells me that it costs \$18,240 to print the divorce evidence which as members we receive