

Government Orders

pursuant to Standing Order 45(5)(a) the division on the question now before the House stands deferred until later this day at 5.30 p.m. at which time the bells to call in the members will be sounded for not more than 15 minutes.

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[Translation]

CONTROLLED DRUGS AND SUBSTANCES ACT

The House resumed, from February 18, consideration of the motion that Bill C-7, an Act respecting the control of certain drugs, their precursors and other substances and to amend certain other Acts and repeal the Narcotic Control Act in consequence thereof, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mrs. Pierrette Venne (Saint-Hubert): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health tabled Bill C-7, an Act respecting the control of certain drugs, their precursors and other substances, but this legislation has nothing to do with public health.

The government is not being honest in tabling a bill under such misleading pretence. This bill concerns criminal law and nothing else. In its present form, it should bear the signature of the Minister of Justice or the Solicitor General.

Whichever way you look at it, it is hard to find in this muddled document anything but a new criminal law to control drugs. Therefore, for the purposes of this debate, I will assume that this legislation is nothing else than what it appears to be. Obviously, the government would want us to believe that this is a health bill, and for one reason only: Criminal laws have to be precise, clear and conclusive. They are passed by Parliament and leave very little leeway to cabinet regarding the definition of their scope. By making Bill C-7 look like an administrative measure, all the provisions allowing Cabinet to establish regulations become justified. This is perhaps the most comprehensive example of legislation by delegation.

● (1210)

There is no other reason why the government would claim that Bill C-7 is a public health measure. The pretence is simply too obvious. The Liberal government is trying to get full decision powers on the most important aspects of the legislation. It has neither the courage nor the honesty to tell Canadians that Bill C-7 is merely an attempt to fight drug trafficking. Why not be honest? Why is the government hiding its true motive? The government should admit that it is so suspicious of this House, that it tries to hide its real intentions. And those intentions are contained in the wording of the legislation.

Police forces are currently enforcing two complementary acts: the Narcotic Control Act which will be repealed by the bill

before the House and the Food and Drugs Act, which will be repealed in part. The government maintains that the new act will give more flexibility to police services, because provocation and undercover activities will be authorized under the new regulations.

However, the explanatory notes of the bill are silent on the government's concerns regarding public health. The purpose of this legislation is obviously to control the movement of drugs and suppress trafficking. Why not clearly say so?

This is nothing but a new Narcotic Control Act, framework legislation, unique in itself, criminal legislation which gives cabinet exceptional discretionary powers as to its scope and its implementation, not unlike the former War Measures Act. This is the context in which we have to consider Bill C-7.

Having said so, I agree with the majority of Canadians that we have to provide police and judicial authorities with the tools they need to efficiently suppress drug trafficking. Therefore, I support the purpose of Bill C-7, to the extent that it tries to put a stop to the movement of drugs. From massive importing to individual possession, the legislative drafters covered all social problems associated with illegal drugs.

On this particular topic, I want to say that I am very pleased with the way the various stages of trafficking are dealt with. The bill considers separately such issues as drug production, and importing and exporting, offenses which carry a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. The exemplary nature of such sentences and deterrence must continue to apply. Harsh sentences such as those will not shock honest citizens.

Zero tolerance for illegal drugs means suppression by police and judicial authorities at all levels of distribution. So, I am pleased with the new classification provided in this bill. Offenses, like simple possession, trafficking, possession for purpose of trafficking, importing and exporting, production of substance, possession of property obtained by trafficking and laundering are now very well identified. Each category is treated according to the seriousness of the offence and carries proportionate sentences.

I do have some reservations about the way possession of cannabis is handled, but that issue can be reviewed by the parliamentary committee, and I look forward to the testimony of experts in this field.

This bill could meet with our approval if it were to lead to some true legislation, but unfortunately it is not the case. Bill C-7 is essentially the same as Bill C-85 which was brought in by the late Conservative government. The government party cannot claim to have created this initiative.

It would be a mistake to try to make people believe that this is a new measure, inspired and motivated by recent circumstances