

Criminal Code

those who felt so strongly that some items in the omnibus bill should not have been tied together. I feel very strongly about these two measures, drugs and family planning. If it were not for the fact that I want the birth control section of this bill to be passed without further delay, I and other members of my party would be very tempted to make amendments. We feel very strongly that the second half of this bill is not what is required to deal with the drug situation in this country at this time.

● (5:00 p.m.)

In particular, we feel strongly about leaving marijuana under the Narcotics Act provisions, and about the penalties applied to people found guilty of its possession. We know the government has brought in an amendment which, to a certain extent, softens the penalties, providing for summary conviction instead of proceeding by way of indictable offence. To that extent this is an improvement, but we think it is wrong to provide for long jail sentences and heavy fines for first offenders.

I have been re-reading the material prepared by the John Howard Society, and by other concerned bodies. They have grave doubts whether clamping down by fines and jail sentences is the way to handle the matter. This provision is discriminatory in that young offenders from well-to-do families will be able to pay fines, and offenders from low income families will have to take jail sentences because they will not be able to raise the money to pay fines.

However, the biggest question mark about this whole matter was provided by the announcement the minister made just prior to third reading of the bill, that he is setting up a committee to study the whole question of drugs, a committee that is to report within two years.

Mr. Munro: And a preliminary report in six months.

Mrs. MacInnis: I am very glad to hear that. Some of the pessimists in this group said it would be two years. I hope the final report isn't two years from now.

Mr. Munro: A final report within two years; a preliminary report within six months.

Mrs. MacInnis: Even the preliminary report will help. Again the minister has admitted that he is not sure this is the best way to

[Mrs. MacInnis.]

handle the matter. No blame attaches to him because of this. Nobody is certain of the best way, and consequently my colleagues and I are not one bit happy with the drug half of this bill, particularly the provisions with regard to marijuana. We want this problem handled properly, and we are not at all sure that fines and jail terms are the right way.

Although I am disposed to move an amendment to place a six months hoist on the bill, or rather on those clauses dealing with drugs, I wish to let the birth control clauses carry. If I moved such an amendment I would jeopardize the birth control half of the bill. So, Mr. Speaker, I hope my colleagues, although I cannot speak for all of them, will line up solidly behind Bill S-15. However, we do want a chance as soon as possible to deal with good drug legislation based on the report of the committee set up by the minister and on other up to date information.

Mr. John Gilbert (Broadview): Mr. Speaker, I want to direct my remarks to a narrow part of the bill dealing with the drugs L.S.D. and marijuana. It is commonly accepted that L.S.D. has proven itself to be a very dangerous drug. The medical evidence indicates that not only does it cause mental and physical damage but that it also affects the chromosomes of people, with dangerous effects on generations yet to come.

At a meeting of the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs last week it was indicated that there has been a tremendous upswing in convictions with regard to marijuana. There were 600 convictions in 1966, 1,600 in 1967 and 2,700 in 1968. Some 1,200 of the 1,600 convictions in 1967 related to young people between the ages of 20 and 29 years. This raises the question of the distinction between soft drugs and hard drugs.

Many people accept heroin as a hard drug, and L.S.D. and marijuana as soft drugs. Much confusion and contradiction have arisen with regard to the different studies that have been made, especially on the drug marijuana. Many indicate that marijuana is not physically addictive, but medical reports have indicated that it is psychologically addictive. This is why it is so important that we have a study made by the committee set up by the minister, with a report submitted to parliament within six months.

If marijuana is psychologically addictive it may be responsible for some of the changes taking place in high school students. Here I speak of some of the students in the Toronto area, of which I have some knowledge. It has