

The punishment should fit the crime

Hurrah for the federal government! Hurrah for the Senate or hurrah for somebody up there in Ottawa!

For the "few" who have not heard the word the Senate is now looking at amendments to a bill in connection with the harsh penalties for possession and trafficking of cannabis. (See story page 3.) We, at The Brunswickan feel it's about time somebody got around to doing something. We don't want to make our Hurrahs premature for we realize the bill is only being studied and could be rejected, but we would like to take our stand in favour of the amendments all the way.

Probably the main change is the abolition of jail sentences for persons charged with just possession of hashish, marijuana or other soft drugs. Presently the sentence could be a maximum of seven years for simple possession.

The new proposed amendments call for jail sentences for persons failing to pay the fines. Basically for a first time conviction for possession it would be \$500 (3 months if fine is not paid) and \$1000 for more than one offence (with 6 months for not paying).

This arrangement certainly makes more sense to us. A possible seven years just for possession puts it in the same league as heroin and we are sure even the experts will agree that the effects of cannabis are not habitual.

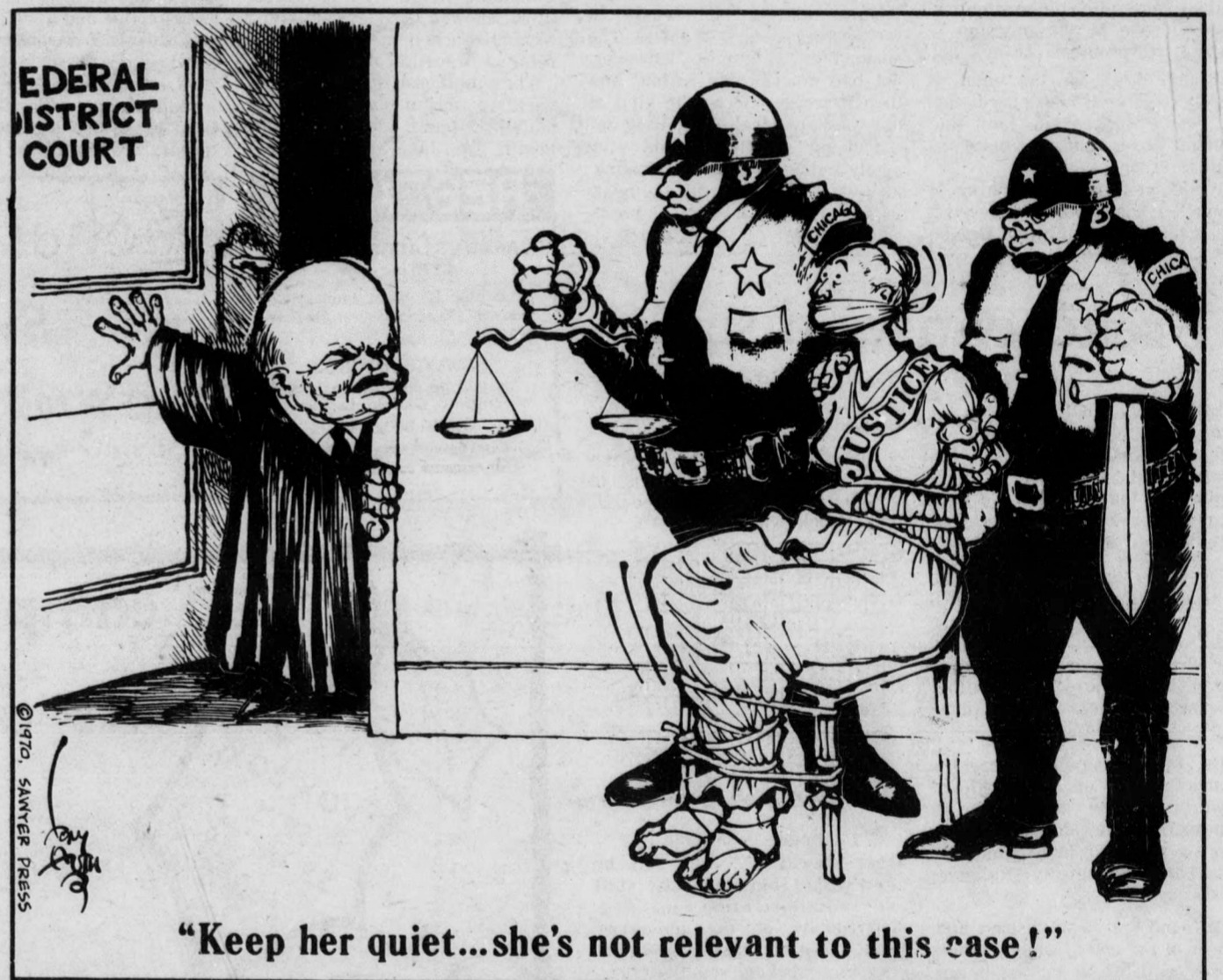
The most opposition to the proposed changes in the drug law will probably be the effects "soft drugs" have on a person. So far researches on heavy continued use have found no worse effects than the prolonged use of alcohol

on the system mentally and physically and it is not addictive. What is questioned now, is its long range effects. We feel these questions (concerning future children et cetera) should be fully studied before considering the legalization of marijuana and hashish; but this is not the intent of this editorial. We wish to support the proposed changes. The severity of the punishments have not fit the crime as we see it now.

The bill would also eliminate sentences of ten years to life imprisonment for trafficking in cannabis. This certainly makes more sense. Life magazine ran an article a number of years ago about a 20 year old honors student at a well-known American university who was serving a life sentence for trafficking marijuana while the prisoner in the next cell was in for approximately 10 years on a murder charge. A little ridiculous to say the least.

It is about time someone began to straighten out the "wrongs" for right now it appears absurd to have cannabis under the Narcotics Control Act. We are definitely in favour of placing it under the Food and Drug Act, which the proposals suggest.

In short we are crossing our fingers about the Senate decision, and later the government, for we feel the present penalties are grossly out of date.



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The paper is not a complete loss. Friday's viewpoint, I think, is necessary. A balance.