

Organized Crime

crime and government at all levels; the improvement of specific areas of social and welfare legislation that would contribute to a lessening of the crime rate; the susceptibility of national, provincial and municipal police forces to infiltration by organized crime; organized crime and political influence; the role of our penal institutions in encouraging and abetting organized crime; the relationship between organized crime and labour, industry, immigration and government.

We need a royal commission because we need an ongoing commitment to a thorough examination of organized crime in its national and international context, with a view not simply to prosecution before the courts but to political action in the parliament and legislatures of Canada. We need more than a commitment to rise every few months and denounce organized crime as evil and hateful. We need a commitment to do what can, and must, be done politically to restrict the horizons of organized crime and protect our society against its growth and power.

We can begin to discharge that commitment by being first committed to finding out about the fears and vacuums in our social and economic fabric that give the bacteria of organized crime a place to grow. It is that type of commitment, to find out, that this parliament would now do well to consider.

Mr. Stuart Leggett (New Westminster): Mr. Speaker, I should first like to congratulate the mover and the seconder of the motion now under debate in the House. I think the motion is timely. The problem is one about which the great mass of the Canadian people is becoming increasingly concerned, and with great justification. I should also like to congratulate the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe (Mr. Wagner) for what I think is a very reasoned and progressive approach to this problem. The kind of speech we have just heard is one that all of us would do well to read again; it contains an element of philosophy with which I would say many in our party would agree. Certainly, the recommendation he makes of a royal commission to study this very serious situation is one with which we agree. This is an insidious problem which continues to grow, and I think by attracting a great deal of public attention to it, and scrutiny through a royal commission studying this serious matter, we might do much to attack the problem of organized crime in this country.

● (1540)

I should like, as a member from British Columbia, to deal with the important crime aspect of this problem. One of the unenviable characteristics of the lower mainland of British Columbia is that it now leads the country in crime statistics. There are many benefits of living in British Columbia, but this is not one of them. We have to examine carefully the reason for this situation. One does not have to look far to find it. Seventy per cent of organized crime in British Columbia is related directly to the drug trade in the province. It has now reached the point in British Columbia where it is of epidemic proportions, and it will become an epidemic in the country unless we have from this government a massive and positive approach to the problem.

[Mr. Wagner.]

We cannot say that this is a serious problem without considering some of the statistics involved. Recently, a co-ordinated law enforcement unit was set up in British Columbia. It was a unit specially organized to detect and prosecute organized crime, zeroing in on the drug trade. The government of British Columbia deserves some credit for setting up this unit, which recently issued a report outlining some very interesting statistics. I should like to quote from its report as follows:

It has been conservatively estimated that there are 10,000 heroin addicts (in B.C.), or two-thirds of the national estimated figure of 15,000.

I might say that the report went on to say that the unit believed its figures were conservative. The report continued:

The city of Vancouver alone is believed to have in excess of 6,500 addicts who require approximately \$455,000 each day to support their habits.

To emphasize that point, I would repeat that it requires half a million dollars a day to support this insidious trade in drugs. The report then states:

This estimate is based on the average daily use of two capsules of heroin per addict at \$35 per capsule.

Later in the report it is stated:

Coupled with this increase in heroin addiction is a rise in the incidence of violent crimes, which more than doubled in the period from 1962 to 1971 and again increased in 1972.

In Vancouver, it is estimated that up to 70 per cent of all serious crimes are drug-related.

In the years 1969 to 1973, 30 of the murders in the lower mainland are known to have been drug-related, and in the years 1971 to 1973 seven attempted murders were similarly categorized.

The annual cost of the drug trade in British Columbia is estimated by this unit to be \$255.5 million. It comes after tourism as the second largest industry in British Columbia. The matter is out of control, and the government should again look at it in terms of its approach and the amount of attention it gives to this problem. There are incidents in our province of 12-year old school children being addicted to heroin, and the problem is reaching the elementary school level. Another fact of interest is that the Vancouver coroner reported recently that there were 1,000 drug-related deaths in British Columbia in the past three years. Under the present system, as many as 50 per cent of our prisoners in maximum security institutions are there because of drug-related crimes. I do not think those who say that the answer to this problem is to increase the penalty in respect of drug trafficking and drug addiction have read the Narcotic Control Act or considered the penalties presently provided. First of all, the maximum penalty for trafficking in heroin is life imprisonment, and the penalty for simple possession of heroin is a maximum of seven years. Unless we are going to bring back capital punishment in respect of trafficking, the penalties are there.

The fact is that the penalty has nothing to do with reducing this particularly iniquitous trade in narcotics. It is not the penalty that is important; it is the certainty of apprehension upon which we must concentrate. You can fool around with the penalties all you want, but you are not going to change the statistics. It is interesting to note that in British Columbia, when marijuana first came to the province, the court of appeal said that obviously it was