

Young Offenders Act

National Health and Welfare with respect to the setting up and support of organizations which will deal effectively with the roots of the problem that makes Bill C-192 necessary is indeed welcome in my own constituency. Included in the problem is the abuse of non-medical drugs and narcotics.

It is also felt that the still high percentage of early dropouts from school is one of the contributing factors of juvenile delinquency. This, of course, raises a problem. It is one which the provinces have been grappling with and, I believe, making some progress on for many years, namely, of ensuring that in addition to opportunities for academic training, youngsters should also have an opportunity to develop other abilities and skills if they are more suited for them. The federal government, under the technical and vocational training assistance legislation, has now under way 160 to 170 vocational and technical schools in Canada. It may well be that this program, in addition to its value from the economic point of view, can also be used as an instrument in the fight against juvenile delinquency. Before that becomes possible a teacher and educational training program must be implemented.

I would mention at this point that there is a necessity for professionally trained people in our communities, to deal with young people. I know that the shortage of probation officers is one factor that has been mentioned in hearings before the committee. In my jurisdiction, the lack of probation services and professionally trained persons to deal with young people is unbelievably and woefully inadequate. The state of New York, with a population of 18 million, has some 1,600 probation officers, while Canada has less than 300 people engaged full time in this work. The proper case load is considered to be 35 boys or 25 girls per case worker. It has been estimated that here the load is 180 or more per case worker.

Juvenile delinquency has been blamed on the lack of parental control, lack of schooling, poverty, our environment, our society, our lack of faith and our materialism. The truth, of course, is that the fault can be laid on any or none of these things. If we could find the answer, the complete answer, then we could perhaps effect the complete cure. There is no simple answer. It is a complex problem brought about by numerous causes both psychological and sociological. Just as there is no one simple and uncomplicated child, there is no one simple, uncomplicated solution. This is why in this particular field the more knowledge, understanding, humanity and money that can be brought to bear on the entire field of the activities of youth, the better will be our society. This is one field where the community must work as a whole.

Because the Minister of National Health and Welfare is in the House I wish to mention that there is one such organization wherein the community is working as a whole. The adult establishment is working hand in hand with the younger element in that community, some of whom have been on the narcotic scene and some of whom have not yet been on the narcotic scene. We all welcome the announced program of several million dollars to be used for the purpose of fighting the evil perpetuation of the younger elements of our society fall-

[Mr. Nielsen.]

ing into a pattern of regular use of narcotics. It is a field which cannot be swept clean by the cleansing fury of any one individual. There are many Canadians who are not only aware of the problem and the steps which must be taken to combat it but who are taking these steps. Here I refer to the splendid work being done by organizations such as the scouts, guides, the YMCA, YWCA, the many boys clubs and the religious youth groups which are all playing their part.

I would like to emphasize that the fight against juvenile delinquency lies with every part of society. I believe it is vitally important in this field that every action be governed by unity. The federal government can play a leading role in providing the leadership that is necessary if there is to be united action by the provinces and territories of this country. There are other fields in which one specialist profession can do great work. Organizations dedicated to the elimination of a disease or an affliction have clearly recognizable objects and aims. No matter how arduous their task, they are at least fully conscious of their enemy and can bend the whole energy of their organization toward its destruction.

In juvenile delinquency we have a problem as recurring and shifting as any which has ever faced society. There seems to be no permanent cure and no ultimate solution. Where there is youth, there will always be found the problems of youth. In tackling these problems, the only effective approach is the unified one in which every member of society realizes the problem and, more important, takes part in combating it. It is not a battle which can be won by a series of sanctimonious lectures nor by harsh, primitive methods in the courts. Nor will it be won by pampering and weakness. It can only be won if first of all the extent and nature of the complaint is fully exposed and then tackled by comprehensive and co-ordinated measures.

Before concluding my remarks, Mr. Speaker, I wish to say a few words about the woeful lack of services available to the poorer sections of our populations, particularly to Indian people. The greatest majority of youthful offenders who appear before the courts in my jurisdiction are full-blooded Indian or Métis young people.

Mr. Dinsdale: It is the same in other parts of the country.

Mr. Nielsen: As the hon. member for Brandon-Souris (Mr. Dinsdale) has pointed out, it is the same in other parts of the country; yet legal aid facilities are not available to these young people or their parents. They often appear in court alone because their parents are out of the country or for other reasons cannot be found; and there, in a strange atmosphere, a foreign milieu, they are confronted with accusations of crime, not knowing what to do, what to say or in which direction to turn.

● (4:50 p.m.)

The same deficiency appears in the bill before us as appeared in the previous legislation. Too often, police officers apprehending young offenders embark upon a series of questions and inquiries in the absence of either the parents or other responsible adults. I am not dis-