

Decriminalization of marijuana not enough

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I agree with the independent member of Parliament from Bow River, Stan Schumacher, that this is not the time to decriminalize marijuana. That should have been done nine years ago as a result of the recommendations of the Le Dain report. Decriminalization would no longer deal with new problems arising from the international trade of marijuana.

Unfortunately, Schumacher's reasons are not the same. He feels that decriminalization would encourage the use of marijuana (Herald, Feb. 9). According to studies done in the United States in places where decriminalization has taken place, use of marijuana has not significantly increased.

The Canadian Medical Association has said that the risks of receiving a criminal record from being in possession of marijuana are greater than the medical risks of its use. Decriminalization would have avoided that greater risk. Now another problem has been added to these risks that decriminalization will not affect.

Since many North American sources of marijuana have been either seized or contaminated with herbicide, the flow of dollars out of Canada to purchase marijuana from other countries has increased to proportions that threaten our economy. The amount of money leaving Canada and the United States is estimated to be in the billions of

dollars which makes the purchase of marijuana the largest untaxed drain of money from our economy.

Only legalization of marijuana will solve this problem. Under legalization, the government would stop the street trade in marijuana by authorizing outlets to sell it at prices below those of the pusher. The quality and strength of marijuana could then be controlled. With pushers eliminated, the sale of marijuana to minors could be reduced.

The profits of marijuana sale would stay in Canada to ease the strain on our devalued dollar and help lessen the price that Canadians must pay for food and goods from other countries. That money would go to farmers for a new cash crop and to new businesses for packaging and distribution. New jobs would be created. Taxation on the sale of marijuana would ease the burden of the taxpayer.

I hope that it will not take another nine years for politicians to publicly support legalization of marijuana, as many now support decriminalization, in reaction to the problems of today. I hope that the politicians that do not want to see any reform of marijuana laws will long be remembered for the damage to young peoples' lives as a result of arrest and the damage to our economy that their inaction has brought.

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Pot addiction predicted

TRENTON, Ont. (CP) — The director of a residence for treatment of alcoholics says that in 25 to 50 years he might have to open a similar house to handle marijuana addicts.

John Fryters, of Serenity House in Belleville, 20 kilometres northeast of here, told a meeting of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union that marijuana should not be legalized because the drug may be addictive.

"I think it could take several years to tell one way or the other. For years they thought cigarette smoking was harmless..."

Fryters said many of the younger people treated at Serenity House are addicted to alcohol and either marijuana or hashish.

"It is a vicious circle. The people take alcohol to get high, and then they start to get depressed, and they take the marijuana to get high again, and the whole thing repeats itself."

Marijuana reform likely to wait until after election

OTTAWA (CP) — Justice Minister Marc Lalonde said Wednesday there is little chance the government will move before the next election to ease penalties for marijuana possession.

"I'm not optimistic," Lalonde said when asked whether he will introduce before this spring's anticipated election legislation that would eliminate possession of marijuana for personal use as a criminal offence.

There appeared to be too little time and too much opposition to pass such a bill "between now and June."

The government did not want to introduce a bill and raise expectations without being sure it could deliver.

"I don't think that is the right way of going about it."

Earlier this month, Opposition Leader Joe Clark and NDP Leader Ed Broadbent accepted a challenge from Lalonde and said they would be prepared to give quick passage to penalty-easing legislation for cannabis — marijuana and other so-called soft drugs.

Possession would re-

main an offence, but not one that could lead to a criminal conviction and record.

Lalonde said he could not get such agreement from the nine-member Social Credit party rump in Parliament. Those MPs remained opposed, and the justice minister said they could tie up Commons time "for several weeks" debating a marijuana bill.

In the Commons, Social Credit spokesman Leonel Beaudoin (Richmond) denied he told Lalonde that his party would oppose lighter penalties for possession.

Social Credit MPs merely wanted to see any new marijuana bill before making a commitment.

Not so, said Lalonde. Beaudoin had said he wanted no change in the Criminal Code. The justice minister said he would be pleased to discuss the issue further if the Social Credit MP had changed his mind.

Could filibuster

In theory, the nine Social Credit MPs could filibuster such a bill for about 20 hours of Commons sitting time. But the government could stop them with

a rule — used increasingly — that puts limits on debates.

Lalonde conceded that there are MPs in all parties opposed to easing marijuana penalties.

Liberal MP Simma Holt (Vancouver Kingsway), for instance, is an outspoken opponent of lighter drug penalties. In an interview, she said the government will never introduce legislation to reduce marijuana-possession penalties before an election. If it did, the bill would never pass.

Meanwhile, at a news conference Tuesday, Onta-

rio Attorney-General Roy McMurtry attacked what he described as the hypocritical nature of the possession penalty issue.

Federal MPs tell those opposed to lighter penalties for marijuana possession that there are strict laws against possession. Maximum penalty for possession of marijuana is a seven-year prison term.

Yet most first offenders receive only a fine if convicted.

"I think the time has come to decriminalize it because we really haven't treated it as a criminal offence for some time."

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