

REPORTS OF CONFERENCES

SEMINAR ON THE PROBLEMS OF DRUG ABUSE IN NEW SOUTH WALES

HELD IN SYDNEY JUNE-JULY, 1966

At a meeting of the Advisory Committee of the Institute of Criminology held on December 1st, 1965, it was proposed that an inquiry should be undertaken into the incidence of drug addiction in New South Wales. This inquiry, which was subsequently extended to cover the whole area of socially-dangerous drugs, was planned as a seminar comprising three full-day sessions to take place at fortnightly intervals, and these were held on June 6th, June 20th and July 4th. In all, 144 people took part in the seminar, including representatives from Commonwealth and New South Wales State Government Departments concerned with the problem, the Victorian Drug Bureau and Department of Mental Health, the medical profession, universities, pharmaceutical associations and drug companies, and educational and religious bodies. The seminar was under the chairmanship of the Honourable Sir Leslie Herron, Chief Justice of New South Wales, with the assistance on the second day of Dr. C. J. Cummins, Director-General of Health, and His Honour Judge A. Levine. The final session was attended by Dr. Leong Hon Koon from Singapore as a Special Adviser of the World Health Organisation.

The inquiry covered the causes of drug abuse, the nature and extent of the problem in this State, the legal position relating to the control of socially-dangerous drugs, and the effectiveness of the controls and facilities for treatment. Thirty-two working papers were submitted, each covering a particular aspect of the subject, and the first two days were taken up by the presentation and discussion of these.

For the morning of July 4th the meeting divided into four sub-committees to examine more specifically the problems presented by different groups of drugs. These committees with their respective chairmen were as follows: (1) narcotics (Mr. N. A. Custance), (2) amphetamines and barbiturates (Dr. W. A. Barclay), (3) hallucinogens, including marijuana (Professor D. C. Maddison), and (4) drugs available without prescription (His Honour Judge A. Levine).

In the afternoon the chairmen presented the reports and recommendations of these sub-committees to the plenary session for approval or further discussion. The sub-committee reports will be incorporated in a full report of the proceedings of the seminar which is at present being prepared and will be published after approval by participants.

One fact which emerged from the discussions was the great benefit to be derived from a pooling of information from representatives of different disciplines, and from different sections of the same profession. In the absence of meaningful statistics no precise assessment of the extent of drug abuse in this State could be made, but the discussions resulted in a general evaluation of the dangers and trends and some suggestions for corrective action and further research.

At the suggestion of the Honourable the Chief Justice it is proposed, when the report has been published, to hold a subsequent evening session to which Judges, Magistrates, Ministers of the Crown, and some members of the legal profession will be invited and the various papers submitted to the seminar presented in summarised form.