

The Marijuana Tax Act of 1937

You may have thought that we have had a national marijuana prohibition for a very long time but Marijuana became illegal in the United States in 1937 after congress passed the Marijuana Tax Act.

Usually, whenever Congress is going to pass a law, they hold lengthy hearings that can go on and on day after day. Not so with the Marijuana Tax act of 1937: the congressional hearings on the national prohibition of marijuana lasted one hour. Since the hearings were so brief we can tell you almost exactly what was said to support the national marijuana prohibition.

The first testimony came from Harry Anslinger, Commissioner of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics from 1930 until 1962, who stated "Marihuana is an addictive drug which produces in its users insanity, criminality, and death."

There were then two pieces of medical evidence introduced with regard to the marijuana prohibition. The first came from a pharmacologist at Temple University who claimed that he had injected the active ingredient in marihuana into the brains of 300 dogs, and two of those dogs had died. But the active ingredient in marijuana not synthesized until after World War II, in a laboratory in Holland. Whatever this pharmacologist actually injected into these dogs will never known, but it almost certainly was not the "active ingredient" in marijuana.

The other piece of medical testimony came from Dr. William C. Woodward, who was both a lawyer and a doctor and served as Chief Counsel to the American Medical Association. Dr. Woodward, who came to testify at the behest of the American Medical Association said "The American Medical Association knows of no evidence that marihuana is a dangerous drug."

In response to Dr. Woodward's comments one congressman then stated "Doctor, if you can't say something good about what we are trying to do, why don't you go home?" Another congressman added, "Doctor, if you haven't got something better to say than that, we are sick of hearing you."

So, over the objections of the American Medical Association, without any evidence whatsoever in support of the outrageous unfounded remarks by Harry Anslinger, the bill passed out of committee and on to the floor of Congress, where the debate on the bill lasted approximately one minute and thirty-two seconds.

During the congressional "debate" a republican congressman from upstate New York stood up and asked two questions, which constituted the entire debate on the national marijuana prohibition. First he asked "Mr. Speaker, what is this bill about?"

House Speaker Rayburn replied, "I don't know. It has something to do with a thing called marihuana. I think it's a narcotic of some kind."

Next the New York congressman asked "Mr. Speaker, does the American Medical Association support this bill?"

A congressman who was on the congressional committee and who later went on to become a Supreme Court Justice, stood up and replied "Their Doctor Wentworth came down here. They support this bill 100 percent." It wasn't true, but it was good for the bill passed to be passed on "tellers", without a recorded vote.

In the Senate the bill was passed without any debate or even a recorded vote. The bill then went to President Roosevelt's desk and was signed into law.

Thus began the dark age of Marijuana prohibition in the United States.