Anti-Narcotics Bills Studied By Legislators

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Your Legislature has before it a series of far-reaching narcotics measures on search and seizure and police informers designed to "take the handcuffs off law enforcement officers." The bills are described as imperative in the war on narcotic traffickers.

The proposed measures, introduced in both the Senate and Assembly, provide that all relevant and material evidence shall be admissable in the trial of narcotics offenders and that no pertinent evidence shall be barred because of the manner in which is was obtained.

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THE MEASURES also seek to eliminate existing court decision requirements that narcotics case informers be identified.

In the first action on narcotics bills, an Assembly committee last week gave unanimous approval to stiff, mandatory narcotics penalties for offenders. The action followed a federal official's warning that California's addiction rate is climbing steadily.

This bears out the statistics we pointed out in an earlier colmun, that during the past 10 years the narcotics evil has grown from 7313 felony narcotics violations in 1955, to 12,155 in 1959. During the first six months of 1960, they reached 6957, as compared to 5666 in the same months of the preceding year.

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OTHER measures proposed on the subject prescribe harsher penalties for narcotics possession and sale, and hit hard at those providing narcotics to minors; eliminate county jail terms as an alternative to prison sentences in felony cases; and restrict parole and call for local police registration of narcotics offenders for five years after parole.

One of the more recent measures to be introduced would provide penalties more than twice as long for major offenses, including life imprisonment instead of 10 years to life for a person with a prior conviction selling to minors. The legislation, if enacted, would provide for a distinction between marijuana and other narcotics offenses.

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MOST OF the measures introduced, or to be introduced later in the session, are a direct result of studies made by interim committees over the past few years.

Our law enforcement officers have complained strongly that several State Supreme Court decisions interfere with adequate execution of anti-narcotics laws because they severely restrict the use of unidentified informers, and make more difficult the use of search warrants. Others support these decisions as necessary to protect citizens against unlawful searches and seizures, or being "framed" into conviction by enemies.

ONE OF THE studies under consideration by the Legislature in determining need for new laws, pins responsibility for cutting off the sources of narcotics squarely on the federal government. It cites the fact that 100 per cent of the heroin used in the states comes fro moutside its borders. More than 90 per cent of the marijuana also comes from outside. The study discounts the suposed importance of "crime syndicates" in the narcotics traffic, pointing out that any car owner can obtain a plentiful supply south of the border, and detection is difficult at many border crossing places.

Subject to heavy criticism is the commonly accepted theory that the "addict-peddler" is a poor "victim," who should be treated more leniently than the non-addict seller. The report states bluntly, "When the addict-peddler is removed from the streets of California, the narcotics traffic will be substantially eliminated."

The State of Ohio, which adopted strong laws prescribing harsher penalties for narcotics possession and sale several years ago, eliminated, almost entirely, the narcotic traffic in that State.

VIRGIL By Lew Kleis

RIVETS By George Sixta

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SUPERMAN