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January 25, 1927.

Hon. James Couzens,
United States Senate,
Washington, D. C.

My dear Senator Couzens:

I beg leave to acknowledge your note dated January 20, in which you request that I furnish you with whatever information I may have regarding the extent of the propaganda which is being circulated regarding narcotic addiction in which the facts are misrepresented.

This office has been called upon a number of times within recent years to comment upon legislation with regard to the control of narcotics and the prevention of addiction and has been guided in its answers by the results of studies made by its own officers, and by its direct experience with the Narcotic Education Association.

This Association in addition to the method of publicity which it has initiated and carried out from its own office, has several times attempted to secure the assistance of the Government by direct appeal to this Service and perhaps other organizations, and by the introduction of proposed legislation in Congress.

The attitude consistently taken by this Service with relation to this Association has been that narcotic addiction is a real problem, but one which is successfully being dealt with; that according to all best information which it could secure, both by direct investigation and from the most reliable sources available, it is a decreasing rather than an increasing problem, and that many of the statements which the Narcotic Education Association distributes to the public, and seeks through Government assistance to distribute very much more widely, are gross exaggerations or distortions of fact and that the methods employed by that Association are unwise and apt to do more harm than good. The detailed evidence in this matter would make a very long story but it is on file at this office and if you desire to go into particulars, I shall be happy to make this material available to you.

It is my impression that while this Association may include in its membership a great many well intentioned, and in certain lines activity, influential persons, it has not pursued enlightened methods nor has it succeeded in securing the support of outstanding students of the subject. Moreover, the attempts made by this Service to persuade the Association to eliminate untrue matter from its publications, and to modify its methods in accordance with what appears to be the best thought of the times have met with no considerable success and it is observed that the same misleading statements and sensational methods continue to be employed.

The Bill S. 5204, which you inclosed with your letter appears to be in line with, if not a part of, the same propaganda with which we have become so familiar. In the light of my experience with the matter this legislation would appear to be unnecessary, and it is not apparent that it would achieve the end sought. The subject of narcotic addiction is being seriously and ably studied by a good many observers, including members of the Public Health Service. Their evidence in general indicates that the extent of addiction, in the United States at least, while considerable, is not menacingly great, and that it is decreasing. Furthermore, intimate studies of the personality of addicts and their life histories show that for the most part these persons belong to the group of psychopathic inferiors, among whom addiction to drugs is only one form of dereliction, although they are not as a class, as been mistakenly represented, prone to commit violent crimes. The danger of contracting addiction in normal minded children and adults would, therefore, appear not to be great, and investigations by competent observers have indeed failed entirely to reveal any such prevalence as has been claimed.

Very truly yours,

(Signed) H. S. Cumming

Surgeon General

AMS/LBD