

Part 1: The Parliamentary Etymology of the Term “Illegal Drugs”

The term “illegal drug” first appears in Parliament in 1955, however, the government does not use the term “illegal drugs” until February 1971. It is used sparingly, and almost never by the incumbent regime, until after 1980 when it becomes the default terminology.

Timeline:

1. Drugs, 8 Dec 1955, Sir Raymond Gower asks the Secretary of State for the Home Department:

"What evidence he has obtained of an increase in the traffic and use of illegal drugs in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement." *HC Deb 08 December 1955 vol 547 at 542*

http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1955/dec/08/drugs#S5CV0547P0_19551208_HO_C_126

2. Homosexual Offences and Prostitution, 4 Dec 1957, Lord Archbishop of Canterbury:

"The customers, even if they are kerb crawlers, are innocent and untouchable... I do not think that this kind of arrangement holds in the traffic in illegal drugs. It is the possession which is illegal, without distinction between buyer and seller." *HL Deb 04 December 1957 vol 206 at 760*

http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1957/dec/04/homosexual-offences-and-prostitution-1#S5LV0206P0_19571204_HOL_69

3. Drug Trafficking, Scotland (Penalties), Commons, 5 April 1967, Mr Clark Hutchinson:

"...asked what plans [the SSHD] has for legislation to increase the penalties in Scotland for being in possession of illegal drugs or trafficking in drugs." *HC Deb 05 April 1967 vol 744 at 59W*

http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written_answers/1967/apr/05/drug-trafficking-scotland-penalties#S5CV0744P0_19670405_CWA_93

4. Criminal Justice Bill, Lords, June 8 1967, Lord Derwent:

"...there are, in the main, two classes of offenders. There is the trafficker in drugs, the man who trades in illegal drugs, and it is for that reason that I propose this Amendment to the paragraph which deals with offences against the person. The other class of offender is the person who has drugs in his possession because he is taking them." *HL Deb 08 June 1967 vol 283 at 578*

http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1967/jun/08/criminal-justice-bill#S5LV0283P0_19670608_HOL_221

5. Drugs, Commons, 26 October 1967, Mr Jon Rankin:

"Does my right hon. Friend realise that the Office of Health Economics tells us today that the narcotic smugglers and pushers are now professionally prepared to operate in Britain, which is wide open to them, as they are doing in America, where illegal drug Acts already exist?" *HC Deb 26 October 1967 vol 751 at 1868*

http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1967/oct/26/drugs#S5CV0751P0_19671026_HOC_90

6. Clause 16, Commons, 20 June 1968, Mr James Scott-Hopkins

"The main purpose of tabling the Amendment is to draw to the hon. Gentleman's attention once again the fact that we are extremely concerned about these substandard and illegal drugs coming in, and we want their importation stopped at the earliest possible moment." *HC Deb 20 June 1968 vol 766 at 1432*

http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1968/jun/20/clause-16#S5CV0766P0_19680620_HOC_550

7. Drugs, Commons, 3 December 1970, Mr Michael Jopling:

"asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to reduce the dangers of illegal drug taking" *HC Deb 03 December 1970 vol 807 at 439w*

http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written_answers/1970/dec/03/drugs#S5CV0807P0_19701203_CWA_76

8. Narcotics, Commons, 2 February 1971, Mr Anthony Royle, Parliamentary Undersecretary of State:

Note: this is the FIRST use of the term "illegal drugs" by government:

"The members of the International Narcotics Control Board serve in their personal capacities and are required to be impartial and independent. They are specifically precluded from acting under the instructions of their own Governments.... The Board is responsible for supervising the implementation by Governments of the narcotics treaties currently in force and, in this context, assists in preventing illegal drugs being imported into the United Kingdom." *HC Deb 02 February 1971 vol 810 at 360w*

http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written_answers/1971/feb/02/narcotics#S5CV0810P0_19710202_CWA_417

9. Misuse of Drugs Bill, Lords, 4 February 1971, Baroness Birk:

"As I understand this Amendment, it is that cannabis should still be treated as an illegal drug; it should still be subject to penalties, but it should be put in a special class." *HL Deb 04 February 1971 vol 314 at 1404*

http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1971/feb/04/misuse-of-drugs-bill-1#S5LV0314P0_19710204_HOL_197

10. Misuse of Drugs Bill, Lords, 11 February 1971, Baroness Serota:

NOTE: Baroness Serota expressed prophetic concerns about civil liberties, particularly the possibility of alienating young people due to stop and search. She quoted the 'Deedes Committee Report on Police Powers of Search and Arrest', which according to Serota's reference, carried the words: "illegal drugs":

"I am particularly interested in the action which has followed Recommendation (viii); namely, The powers of stop and search should not distinguish between different illegal drugs." *HL Deb 11 February 1971 at 256*

http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1971/feb/11/misuse-of-drugs-bill#S5LV0315P0_19710211_HOL_87

11. Amphetamines, Commons, 8 April 1971, Mr Norman Fowler:

"We sometimes think of this problem as being confined to young people. There is no question that it is a problem of young people and that many of them are introduced to the illegal drug scene by way of amphetamines." *HC Deb 08 April 1971 vol 815 at 746*

http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1971/apr/08/amphetamines#S5CV0815P0_19710408_HOC_270

12. Drugs, Commons, 7 December 1972, Mr John Loveridge:

"...asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the pattern of illegal drug usage in the United Kingdom." *HC Deb 07 December 1972 vol 847 at 1655*

http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1972/dec/07/drugs#S5CV0847P0_19721207_HOC_79

13. Police (Drugs and Illegal Immigration), Commons, 31 January 1973, Mr Norman Fowler

"I welcome the opportunity of this small debate. It is a narrow debate but it allows us to consider two important units which have been set up in the Home Office to combat two important areas in crime—illegal drugs and illegal immigration." *HC Deb 31 January 1973 vol 849 at 1524*

http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1973/jan/31/police-drugs-and-illegal-immigration#S5CV0849P0_19730131_HOC_392

14. Books (Drug Advocacy), Commons, 26 March 1975, Mr John Loveridge:

"asked the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will initiate discussions with the representatives of local authorities to ensure that books which advocate the taking of dangerous and illegal drugs, other than on medical prescription, are only available on loan to persons who can satisfy the librarian in charge that they have a good reason for borrowing such books..." *HC Deb 26 March 1975 vol 889 at 152W*

http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written_answers/1975/mar/26/books-drug-advocacy#S5CV0889P0_19750326_CWA_78

15. Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill, Lords, 29 January 1980, the Earl of Mansfield:

"I do not believe that in carrying out these powers—and indeed I should not miss out the power to search for illegal drugs—the Scottish police have either abused their powers or suffered a loss of public sympathy as a result of having them." *HL Deb 29 January 1980 vol 404 at 810*

http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/lords/1980/jan/29/criminal-justice-scotland-bill-hl#S5LV0404P0_19800129_HOL_410

16. Illegal Drugs (Seizure), Commons, 5 December 1980, Mr Cranley Onslow

"...asked the Secretary of State for the Home Department what statistics he has relating to the total value of illegal drugs seized by the police in England and Wales in each of the past 10 years..." *HC Deb 05 December 1980 at 199W*

http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written_answers/1980/dec/05/illegal-drugs-seizure#S5CV0995P1_19801205_CWA_113

17. Adjournment (Christmas), Commons, 17 December 1980, Mr Cranley Onslow

"I do not believe that the figure of £47 million represents 100 per cent. of the illegal drugs coming into this country. I doubt whether it represents 15 per cent." *HC Deb 17 December 1980 vol 996 at 321*

http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1980/dec/17/adjournment-christmas#S5CV0996P0_19801217_HOC_255

18. Britain and Republic of Ireland (Joint Studies), Commons, 17 February 1981, Mr James Kilfedder:

"asked the Prime Minister (1) whether the joint studies to be undertaken between the British and Republic of Ireland Governments will include... ..cross-border traffic in illegal drugs..." *HC Deb 17 February 1981 vol 999 at 105W*

http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written_answers/1981/feb/17/britain-and-republic-of-ireland-joint#S5CV0999P0_19810217_CWA_248

19. Police and Criminal Evidence Bill, Commons, 30 November 1982, Mr Kilroy-Silk

"The hon. and learned Gentleman points to what he believes is the effectiveness of stop and search powers in Scotland, where only one-third of the people stopped and searched were found to be carrying offensive weapons. He could equally have pointed to the fact that of the people stopped on suspicion of carrying illegal drugs under the Misuse of Drugs Act, 75 per cent. were found not to be carrying illegal drugs, and 88 per cent. of the people stopped in the metropolitan area in one month in one division were not subsequently arrested." *HC Deb 30 November 1982 at 176*

http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1982/nov/30/police-and-criminal-evidence-bill#S6CV0033P0_19821130_HOC_300

20. Mr Alan Waters (Compensation), Commons, 28 February 1983, Mr Jock Bruce-Gardyne:

"The Commissioners of Customs and Excise deeply regret the incident, which occurred in September last year. They fully investigated the circumstances and are satisfied that an honest mistake was made by their officers in the pursuit of a legitimate inquiry into an alleged importation of illegal drugs." *HC Deb 28 February 1983 vol 38at 21W*

http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written_answers/1983/feb/28/mr-alan-waters-compensation#S6CV0038P0_19830228_CWA_144