

TITLE 18 - CRIMES AND CRIMINAL PROCEDURE
PART I - CRIMES
CHAPTER 19 - CONSPIRACY

§ 371. Conspiracy to commit offense or to defraud United States

If two or more persons conspire either to commit any offense against the United States, or to defraud the United States, or any agency thereof in any manner or for any purpose, and one or more of such persons do any act to effect the object of the conspiracy, each shall be fined under this title or imprisoned not more than five years, or both.

If, however, the offense, the commission of which is the object of the conspiracy, is a misdemeanor only, the punishment for such conspiracy shall not exceed the maximum punishment provided for such misdemeanor.

(June 25, 1948, ch. 645, 62 Stat. 701; Pub. L. 103–322, title XXXIII, § 330016(1)(L), Sept. 13, 1994, 108 Stat. 2147.)

Historical and Revision Notes

Based on title 18, U.S.C., 1940 ed., §§ 88, 294 (Mar. 4, 1909, ch. 321, § 37, 35 Stat. 1096; Mar. 4, 1909, ch. 321, § 178a, as added Sept. 27, 1944, ch. 425, 58 Stat. 752).

This section consolidates said sections 88 and 294 of title 18, U.S.C., 1940 ed.

To reflect the construction placed upon said section 88 by the courts the words “or any agency thereof” were inserted. (See *Haas v. Henkel*, 1909, 30 S. Ct. 249, 216 U. S. 462, 54 L. Ed. 569, 17 Ann. Cas. 1112, where court said: “The statute is broad enough in its terms to include any conspiracy for the purpose of impairing, obstructing, or defeating the lawful functions of any department of government.” Also, see *United States v. Walter*, 1923, 44 S. Ct. 10, 263 U. S. 15, 68 L. Ed. 137, and definitions of department and agency in section 6 of this title.)

The punishment provision is completely rewritten to increase the penalty from 2 years to 5 years except where the object of the conspiracy is a misdemeanor. If the object is a misdemeanor, the maximum imprisonment for a conspiracy to commit that offense, under the revised section, cannot exceed 1 year.

The injustice of permitting a felony punishment on conviction for conspiracy to commit a misdemeanor is described by the late Hon. Grover M. Moscowitz, United States district judge for the eastern district of New York, in an address delivered March 14, 1944, before the section on Federal Practice of the New York Bar Association, reported in 3 Federal Rules Decisions, pages 380–392.

Hon. John Paul, United States district judge for the western district of Virginia, in a letter addressed to Congressman Eugene J. Keogh dated January 27, 1944, stresses the inadequacy of the 2-year sentence prescribed by existing law in cases where the object of the conspiracy is the commission of a very serious offense.

The punishment provision of said section 294 of title 18 was considered for inclusion in this revised section. It provided the same penalties for conspiracy to violate the provisions of certain counterfeiting laws, as are applicable in the case of conviction for the specific violations. Such a punishment would seem as desirable for all conspiracies as for such offenses as counterfeiting and transporting stolen property in interstate commerce.

A multiplicity of unnecessary enactments inevitably leads to confusion and disregard of law. (See reviser’s note under section 493 of this title.)

Since consolidation was highly desirable and because of the strong objections of prosecutors to the general application of the punishment provision of said section 294, the revised section represents the best compromise that could be devised between sharply conflicting views.

A number of special conspiracy provisions, relating to specific offenses, which were contained in various sections incorporated in this title, were omitted because adequately covered by this section. A few exceptions were made, (1) where the conspiracy would constitute the only offense, or (2) where the punishment provided in this section would not be commensurate with the gravity of the offense. Special conspiracy provisions were retained in sections 241, 286, 372, 757, 794, 956, 1201, 2271, 2384 and 2388 of this title. Special conspiracy provisions were added to sections 2153 and 2154 of this title.

NB: This unofficial compilation of the U.S. Code is current as of Jan. 5, 2009 (see <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/uscpri.html>).

Amendments

1994—Pub. L. 103–322 substituted “fined under this title” for “fined not more than \$10,000”.