

NO TO DRUGS LEGALISATION

A REPLY TO MR BARON'S ARTICLE (*Pipeline, February*)

Motor vehicles are indeed dangerous, and so are alcohol and tobacco if abused; but their legality does not indicate that the UK should change its mind and legalise the present range of illegal drugs. This would simply add to the list of hazardous substances available to a generally indiscriminating public. Many of these substances are highly addictive. No, Mr. Baron (*Opinion Pipeline, February 1997*), legalisation would not remove the criminal element; demand would soar; the Health Authorities would not prescribe for free; prices would rise and black markets would start up. Look at the recent unsuccessful experiment by the Swiss in Zurich. We may be fighting an increasingly difficult battle, but prohibition still helps to minimise the number of people who take illegal drugs. This is necessary damage limitation.

Cannabis does not seem to produce physical dependence, but regular users can come to feel a psychological need for the drug's effect and to rely on it as a social lubricant. It has been implicated in many medical and psychological disorders (Ghodsea, 1986 and Ashton, 1987). People who use cannabis are more likely to try other drugs. It can cause special risks for those with lung and heart disorders, and heavy use by those with disturbed personalities can precipitate them into psychiatric disorder (*British Journal of Addiction*. 1991).

Amphetamine abuse can lead to a long-lasting psychotic state (Angrist, 1990). Do we really want to overload our already stretched health services with increasing numbers of persons

suffering from the myriad results of drug abuse? 20% of all admissions to emergency treatment in the USA (National Institute of Drug Abuse, 1987) were of persons suffering acute psychological or physical illness resulting from cocaine or crack usage. The neonatal problems presented by "crack babies" are well documented in the UK, and the dangers of cocaine addiction are high. Swadi nine years ago in 1988 collected data in six

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secondary schools in London and found that 20% of 11-16 year olds had tried solvents or drugs; this research did not include truants.

Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster (KC&W) is the area with the largest purchasing of NHS HIV and related services in the UK. This is because there is a steady increase of seropositive individuals coming into the area due to the good NHS provision of both HIV/AIDS and genito-urinary medicine. Seven point three percent of HIV service users, in a survey done in KC&W, were injecting drug users (Substance Misuse Needs Assessment: KC&W, compiled by Dr. Seck Mee Chua).

Other existing strains on medical resources in the same area of KC&W include the spending of £359,000 a year by the Mental Health Trusts for prescriptions of methadone. This includes the cost of the drug and the dispensing fee (Source: PACT Data). It is doubtful whether this need for methadone would disappear if heroin was legalised.

Local police intelligence suggests that cannabis dealers are switching to crack, because of the higher profit margin per deal (Sole, 1992). Drug addict

notifications in the UK are rising (Drug Addict Index, 1995) despite these substances being illegal. "Yes please" to harm-minimisation, but 'no thank you', Mr Baron, to any legalisation of another swathe of harmful products. Motor vehicles, alcohol and tobacco are enough for the time being.

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DUTCH DRUG DEALERS BUY BRITISH DOPE

Cannabis cultivators in London have found an eager market for their crops in Holland. Dutch drug dealers are importing British home-grown marijuana.

"It has become a cannabis version of coals to Newcastle," said Detective Sergeant Bob Thorn, boss of the Metropolitan Police Chemical & Pharmaceutical Intelligence Unit.

The cannabis in question is 'skunk', which gets its name from its strong smell, an indication of its potency - between 3 and 30 times greater than ordinary 'weed'.

**"Our growers are good and our skunk is better."
Detective Sergeant Thorn.**

"Our growers are good and our skunk is better," claims Detective Sergeant Thorn. "It won't be much longer before the UK becomes a serious exporter."

Ironically the hydroponic method of cultivation used in Britain, yielding up to six crops a year, was perfected in Holland.

Roller Cop

Meanwhile the Dutch police have been told to get their skates on. In a crack-down on pickpockets six Amsterdam Officers will form a roller skate 'flying squad'. They will spend the Summer zipping through the Dutch capital in pursuit of light-fingered felons.