

AN UNAFFORDABLE PREJUDICE

A Report to the Home Affairs Committee
concerning the Cannabis laws.

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April 1983

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CONTENTS

Introduction	2
Background to the Cannabis Laws	3
Cannabis Research	6
The Escalation Theory	14
Current Government Policy	15
Cannabis as an Issue of Individual Freedom	16
Cannabis and "Law & Order"	18
The Benefits of De-criminalisation	21
The Reality of Cannabis	23
Conclusion	27

INTRODUCTION

Members of the Home Affairs Committee,

When I heard that you were to enquire into the cannabis laws, I was anxious that the case for decriminalisation (and even legalisation) was communicated effectively. I, like many people, believe that this is an issue that has not been fully considered by government. The ramifications of the present laws are much wider than generally appreciated. In fact, the continuing illegality of cannabis amounts to nothing less than the oppression of a significant minority of responsible and valuable citizens.

Lest anyone believe that this opinion is that of a rampant drug crazed mind, allow me to borrow some credence from the unequivocal, if therefore uncharacteristic, words of President Jimmy Carter speaking to Congress in 1977.

"Penalties against the possession of a drug should not be more damaging to the individual than the use of the drug itself; and where they are, they should be changed. Nowhere is this more clear than in the possession of marijuana in private for personal use."

Those words illustrate the most puzzling anomaly in the present situation. Here is a law that was originally enacted in order to protect people from harm. Yet now, any rational examination of the subject can only conclude that the law actually does more harm than the drug may ever do.

I hope that this document will convince you, not only that the cannabis laws need changing, but that they need changing now!

BACKGROUND TO THE CANNABIS LAWS

Cannabis first became illegal in this country as a result of the 1925 Dangerous Drugs Act. This act was itself a result of the International Opium Convention which Britain signed that same year. Cannabis was included in the Convention as a result of pressure from the Egyptian government who claimed that regular use led to "chronic hashishism". No serious evidence was presented at the time and, to this day, despite nearly 100 years of international research, no evidence has been produced to support the idea that even heavy and prolonged cannabis use causes any significant harm.

Thirty-three years after cannabis became illegal a government committee, under the chairmanship of Sir Russell Brain, concluded that:

"...cannabis is not a drug of addiction;
it is an intoxicant."

Nevertheless, another three years later, in 1961, Britain signed the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs which branded cannabis as "...having strong addictive properties..." and constituting a "...risk to public health."

This is the sort of irrational treatment which the cannabis issue has been subjected to for too long. For over a century the greatest scientific and statistical minds available have been turned towards finding out what harm cannabis can do. Without exception, the objective the experts have been set has been to identify the harm that cannabis does. They have not been asked to find out whether or not cannabis is harmful - that rather fundamental question is simply prejudged.

One might consider that to be a rather remarkable brief to give a scientist, and particularly a statistician. Members of the Committee will be familiar with many "expert reports" and only

too aware that statistics can be made to prove anything.

Yet, in the case of cannabis, the truly remarkable conclusion is that the scientists have been unable to produce any conclusive proof that cannabis causes any significant harm.

In 1958 the Brain Report categorically separated cannabis from heroin and other narcotics. Their assertion that cannabis is non-addictive and of a completely different nature than "hard" drugs has remained undisputed. Nevertheless, ever since (even in your committee) cannabis and heroin are lumped together. Frankly, it makes more sense to compare a stolen kiss to a perverse rape than it does to compare cannabis to heroin. In both instances, the only meaningful connection between the two is their illegality. Yet, a stolen kiss involves a victim; whereas, even the most imaginative, will find it difficult to suggest how use of cannabis can effect anyone but the user himself.

In 1966 the Government appointed a Standing Committee on the Misuse of Drugs. (I would ask you to note that both this body and its statutory successor, The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, are, by definition, unable to consider the use of drugs; only the misuse.)

In 1968 the Standing Committee published the Wootton Report. Against a background of popular press hysteria, this inquiry was remarkable for its balanced and logical conclusions. It stated quite clearly that the evidence was heavily weighted in cannabis' favour. There is no conclusive evidence that cannabis causes any harm. There is quite a considerable body of evidence, not least that of human experience, which says that it does not.

When the Wootton Report was discussed in Parliament, James Callaghan (then Home Secretary) came about as close as is possible without actually doing so, to calling Lady Barbara Wootton a liar. With two or three short sentences he

discredited all those aspects of the committee's report with which he did not agree.

However, the 1971 Misuse of Drugs Act did, at last, make a legal distinction between cannabis and harder drugs. Such powerful substances as the opiates, LSD and cocaine found themselves in group A, whilst cannabis is in group B along with amphetamines.

The 1971 act brought the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs into being. In 1979, the Technical Sub-Committee of the Council recommended that penalties for use and possession of cannabis be reduced.

That recommendation has not been implemented.

CANNABIS RESEARCH

Informed opinion these days recognises that the original prohibition of cannabis had little to do with the Egyptian Government's fear of "hashishism" and more to do with our own desire to suppress a subversive Egyptian sub-culture that centered itself on hashish. Perhaps, if it were not for the transitory needs of the Empire over fifty years ago, we should not now be wasting millions of public pounds on the enforcement of a law which has no basis in common sense.

The first authoritative research into cannabis was published by the Indian Hemp Commission in 1894. Despite occupying around a dozen volumes, the report indicated a complete absence of proof of harmful or undesirable effects. Our colonial forebears seemed more concerned that cannabis use might cause "lethargy" amongst Indian workers than that it may cause harm. Yet they were unable to find sufficient evidence to support even this mild charge. Although one would have to criticise the report as being unscientific in today's terms, it is worth remembering that the subjects of the research were nearly all long term users. Not only that, but they were descended from long term users in an area where the regular use of cannabis had been (and still is) an integral part of life.

In 1933 the results of the "Canal Zone" inquiry into cannabis use in the U.S. Army were published in "The Military Surgeon". It concluded that the plant presented no threat to military discipline and that

"...no recommendations to prevent the sale
or use of marijuhana are deemed advisable."

In 1942 "The American Journal of Psychiatry" published a report which stated:

"Prolonged use of the drug does not lead
to mental, physical or moral degeneration,
nor have we observed any permanent deleterious
effects from its continued use."

In 1944 the La Guardia Report, commissioned by the Mayor of New York, was published. It described the effects of cannabis as "congenial" and "pleasant". No connection was found between the herb and the many vices that had been attributed to it - and it would have been difficult to conduct a more thorough investigation; the report was titled "...Sociological, Medical, Psychological and Pharmacological Studies..."!

In 1958 the Brain Report was published. Its conclusions were described earlier.

In 1968 the Wootton Report was published. Ten years further on and, with each new day, the evidence was making cannabis look more and more innocuous.

Throughout the 1970s, Canada has probably been more involved with cannabis research than any other country. Millions of dollars have been spent, without success, in an effort to prove the allegedly evil and harmful effects of the herb. In the USA in 1972, in Canada in 1972 and in South Australia in 1978, reports have been published which continue to reach the same conclusions:

* It is impossible to prove that cannabis causes any harm but it is also impossible to prove that it does not.

* On that basis it is unfair and unwise to continue incurring the enormous social and financial costs of illegality.

Other recent research by the American National Institute of Mental Health has finally shown that cannabis can kill. Tests involving enormous quantities of synthesised THC (the main psychoactive ingredient of the plant) have revealed that the fatal dose of cannabis in its natural state is probably about one and a half pounds - about 1500.00 worth at today's values and probably enough to make all your colleagues in the commons violently sick! The same research also showed that amoebae found a solution of THC a happy environment whilst an equal concentration of starch (bread, potatoes, rice etc.) killed them off in their thousands.

In 1979 the Technical Sub-Committee of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs found

"...no compelling evidence that occasional moderate use of cannabis was likely to have detrimental effects...reports on long continued heavy use of cannabis contain no evidence of consequential harmful effects on physical health..."

It was at this stage that the Council recommended reductions in penalties for cannabis offences.

Britain's latest contribution to cannabis research, the report of the "Expert Group", is in fact nothing more than a review of the most recent published research. It has taken 18 months for the eight professors, four doctors and a retail pharmacist to reach the same old conclusions - most predictable of which is that they want to continue their research! Consequently, there are real grounds for suspicion that this has been little more than a delaying tactic. Certainly, the Home Office seem to have been grateful for yet another excuse to avoid facing up to the real issues involved.

With the greatest of respect to the scientists involved, some of whom have been investigating cannabis for 10 years, is it not inevitable that they should want additional research? The existence of the group depends on a continuing requirement for research and on the continuing support of the Home Office. In view of this, it is hardly surprising that the scientists' conclusions tend to match the interests of those who control the purse strings - surely we all accept that it is in the nature of bureaucracy to preserve the status quo?

The Expert Group's conclusions are that:

- 1) There is insufficient evidence to reach any incontestable conclusions.
- 2) Much of the research undertaken so far has failed to demonstrate significant harmful effects.
- 3) There is evidence to suggest that deleterious effects may result in certain circumstances.
- 4) There is continuing need for further research, particularly on the epidemiological characteristics of cannabis use and on the effects of its long term use by humans.
- 5) The therapeutic use of cannabis may prove to be beneficial.

It is interesting to note that the Home Office's latest standard reply to enquiries emphasises 3) and 4) above, whilst paying scant attention to the other conclusions and ignoring 2) completely! They do however admit that the Chairman of the Advisory Council has said that the Expert Group's conclusions confirm the Council's earlier view that penalties for cannabis use should be reduced.

Let us examine these latest conclusions one by one:

1) There is insufficient evidence to reach any incontestable conclusions.

If the Expert Group ever expects to reach an incontestable conclusion then they are assured of jobs for life. Incontestable conclusions do not exist in science - even, it seems, when one sets out to confirm a pre-concieved view.

2) Much of the research undertaken so far has failed to demonstrate significant harmful effects.

There is no credible research that suggests significant harmful effects on real humans in real life.

3) There is evidence to suggest that deleterious effects may result in certain circumstances.

This is a meaningless and unscientific statement. Breathing oxygen causes deleterious effects in all circumstances - it catalyses the ageing process. Given the job the scientists have been trying to do, it would be truly remarkable if they could not have come up with at least some evidence to support their starting position.

So what evidence do they have?

Prof. P. Turner's paper on Kinetic & Metabolic information gives no hint of any "deleterious effects".

Prof. Sir William Paton's paper on the Cardiovascular system gives no hint of any "deleterious effects". He does say that the physical effect of the cannabis high (tachycardia - irregular heartbeat) is similar to that of vigorous exercise.

The paper on the Lungs and Respiratory System says it is possible, though not proved, that cannabis could cause slightly more "functional impairment" than tobacco, if they were smoked in the same amounts (which is, of course, a ludicrous suggestion).

Prof. McNichol's paper starts with a statement that most of his

evidence has, at best, "...conjectural relevance to effects on man". He then says that "...in many studies, fundamental methodological control procedures have not been included." Having successfully discredited his sources he somehow manages to conclude that "...there is a considerable body of evidence of the potentially adverse effects of cannabis and the total impact of the evidence is somewhat greater than the sum of its constituent parts". In other words, a few people (Prof. McNichol is obviously one of them) seem to think that cannabis might be harmful although they cannot actually prove it or present any facts to support their view.

The paper on Cerebral damage has been prepared by three scientists. As they use the word "addict" in relation to cannabis users in their first sentence, it is difficult to give any credence to the remainder of their statements. However, they conclude that

"...no evidence has ever been found of structural changes in the central nervous systems of marijuhana smokers."

Prof. J. Griffith Edwards discusses the question of Dependence and spends much of his time on telling us why he can't actually come to any real conclusions. This doesn't however stop him from indulging in all sorts of speculation. For instance, he flies in the face of every serious study of the subject when he quotes one particular investigation (using synthesised THC), which found withdrawal symptoms after 10 - 18 days. He is vague about some others which "give indications of the possibility (of addiction)". He mentions in passing that there have been two studies (there have been three) of real people in real life who have been smoking natural cannabis for up to 10 years and which have found absolutely no evidence of addiction. Then he concludes that the one study which found withdrawal symptoms "...should be accepted as persuasive."!

Prof. Edwards second paper on the Question of Psychiatric Morbidity is little more than a succession of personal opinions. The introduction is titled "A difficult area for proof" and adequately reflects the Professor's difficulty in proving what

he has been asked to. Why doesn't he just look for the truth and forget about proving his pet theories?

4) There is continuing need for further research, particularly on the epidemiological characteristics of cannabis use and on the effects of its long term use by humans.

This is a statement which has confused and concerned me ever since I first saw it in print. After a considerable amount of research, after examining every dictionary, thesaurus and reference book I could find and, finally, after consultation with a Cambridge English scholar, my suspicions were confirmed. this sentence is meaningless and, as such, manifests the true value of much of the Expert Group's work.

The root of the word "epidemiological" is the same as the word epidemic. The Collins English Dictionary defines "epidemiology" as "The branch of medical science concerned with the occurrence, transmission and control of epidemic diseases." There cannot therefore be any conceivable "...epidemiological characteristics of cannabis." The Advisory Council should not tolerate the use of such sloppy, meaningless language from individuals who are supposed to be experts in the precise and unforgiving world of science.

Is there "...continuing need for research into the ...effects of its (cannabis') long term use."? That doesn't seem unreasonable and I don't want to deprive these eminent scientists of their livelihoods. However, are they ever going to take notice of the research that has been done? What about the greatest laboratory of all - real life? If one suggests to the Home Office that some sort of investigation into the actuality of cannabis use and its effects is required, they reply that "Ministers are satisfied with present penalties...the expense and effort...(would not be) justified."

So why bother with any research at all?

5) The therapeutic use of cannabis may prove to be beneficial.

That statement would not be news to the millions of people, in hundreds of civilisations, across thousands of years, who have used this natural herb for medical and recreational purposes. You wouldn't surprise our recent ancestors with the idea of using cannabis for treating ailments either. The only people who you might surprise are those who suffer from Glaucoma, Epilepsy, Asthma or Spasticity. They might want to know why the promise which cannabis holds out in treating their ailments is not available to them. They would certainly want to know why the Home Office is so obstructive about allowing legal research into the therapeutic use of the plant.

If you have ever seen the toll that chemotherapy takes on cancer patients, you would want to know why cannabis, which can alleviate some of the horrific side effects, is not available to these people.

The Expert Group's conclusions contribute nothing of value to the debate on Cannabis. There can be little doubt that the 18 months they have taken, to revamp and confuse what has already been said a dozen times, is a politically expedient delay. The Scientists are least to blame. They are simply pawns in the hands of their political masters who desperately look for proof that does not exist.

Perhaps the latest meaningful research comes from the University of California. "Cognition and the Long Term Use of Ganja" was in fact published some months before the Expert Group concluded their work, yet no mention is made of it in their report. This study chose subjects who had been using between two and four ounces of a 50/50 marijuhana/tobacco mixture per day (an incredibly high rate of consumption). On average the subjects had maintained this rate of consumption for 7.4 years. The study found no impairment in any of the cognitive functions tested. No "deleterious" effects at all.

THE ESCALATION THEORY

Ever since it became clear that the actual effects of cannabis are not as evil, morally degenerative or dangerous as had been thought, the idea that cannabis "leads onto harder drugs" has been gaining ground. There is a certain type of individual who believes that their opinion necessarily outweighs the empirical knowledge of others - even if, as in this case, the pro-cannabis lobby has nearly all the evidence on its side.

It is this attitude that has led to the popular idea of the "Escalation Theory". In fact, there has never been any evidence that users of cannabis progress to the use of other drugs. All the evidence has directly contradicted this idea.

"The fact should be emphasised that the overwhelming majority of users do not progress to other drugs."

(Shafer Commission, USA, 1972)

The only connection that can be demonstrated between cannabis and harder drugs is their illegality. The real point for concern is that, by forcing people to move in illegal circles in order to obtain cannabis, the law itself actually creates opportunities for the narcotics dealer to go to work.

The greatest danger from cannabis is its illegality. Not only are cannabis users in danger of finding themselves publicly branded as criminals, with all that that entails, but the law, which allegedly exists to protect, in fact pushes them into a position where harder drugs may be offered to them.

This is a factor which you may wish to consider during your investigation into the heroin problem.

There is good reason to believe that taking cannabis out of the criminal law would reduce the growth of heroin addiction.

CURRENT GOVERNMENT POLICY

Despite the overwhelming evidence, and in direct contravention of the recommendations of every officially sponsored inquiry, successive governments have taken no meaningful action to halt the many injustices caused by the present cannabis laws. Instead, the entombed viewpoint seems to be that

"...to significantly reduce penalties for cannabis use might lead some people to believe that the drug was less harmful than had been previously thought and therefore encourage them to use it..."

Somehow or another the Home Office manage to use the Expert Group's findings to support this "official line". Any analysis of this viewpoint produces an unsatisfactory conclusion.

- 1) There has never been any evidence to suggest that cannabis is unsafe. On the contrary, all the evidence is characterised by an inability to prove what the scientists have set out to look for.
- 2) This viewpoint pre-supposes that the penalties for cannabis use are actually less harmful than cannabis may be and therefore fails to consider the effects of the law itself.
- 3) This viewpoint pre-supposes that cannabis has nothing to recommend its use and therefore fails to consider all the available evidence.
- 4) All the available evidence (from post-decriminalisation surveys in Oregon, Maine and California) indicates that even legalising cannabis would produce no significant increase in use.
- 5) This viewpoint looks for incontrovertible proof of the harmlessness of cannabis. Any moderately well informed person will realise that it is impossible to prove that anything is completely harmless.

CANNABIS AS AN ISSUE OF INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM

Inevitably, the current government viewpoint is likely to predominate for as long as cannabis remains illegal. Quite naturally, few people wish to draw attention to an illegal activity, even if their own experience and knowledge tells them that the law is wrong. Cannabis, unlike alcohol, is a drug that tends to turn people inwards rather than outwards. Instead of "Dutch courage", cannabis tends to produce a "Pakistani caution" or "Lebanese lethargy". A rather peaceful and gentle effect which is hardly conducive to vociferous campaigning, particularly from those who wish for nothing more than the right to enjoy a quiet smoke in the privacy of their own homes.

The vast majority of those who suffer directly from the cannabis laws do so quietly and without protest. They prefer to accept a small fine and see the intrusion of the law into their private lives over as quickly as possible. Unfortunately, this disguises the true effect of the law and is one of the reasons that, so far, inertia has had its unchanging way. However, not only are there reasons why the present law is unjustifiable, but there are many reasons why it should be changed. To maintain the status quo is to condone the continuance of many injustices and to ignore the positive benefits of de-criminalisation.

Some people hold the view that cannabis offences are treated relatively mildly and that therefore, there is no reason why the law should be changed. That is a cynical, not a pragmatic attitude and ignores the fundamental right of any human being to conduct himself freely; insofar as his conduct does not interfere with the freedom of others.

Why should millions of people have to hide part of their cultural upbringing and social recreation from view? Why should people who choose to grow a harmless natural herb in their greenhouse be ostracised and treated by the law in the same way as refiners of morphine and heroin? Surely, in any free loving society, the onus must not be on proving the necessity

for change of a law that restricts peoples' freedom, but on proving the necessity for continuance. It is simply not honest to say that more research is needed when the record proves that, in this instance, no notice has been taken of the research that has already been done.

In the USA, most of the dozen or so states that have now decriminalised cannabis have adopted a method first introduced in Oregon in 1973. Essentially this involves a "parking ticket" being handed out. There is no question of an arrest, of being imprisoned for even a few hours, or of ending up with a criminal record. However, in 1975 the Alaskan State Supreme Court overturned even this measure as being an infringement on an individual's Constitutional right to privacy. I understand that there are many more cases pending in both state and Federal courts.

It is undoubtedly true, that the majority of the public would not actively seek de-criminalisation. However, by definition, a majority of the public did not actively seek de-criminalisation of homosexuality. That does nothing to lessen the grave injustices that were done to gay people, nor to excuse responsibility for those who are presently suffering because of the cannabis laws.

There can be no doubt that the present cannabis laws are a deep and entirely unjustifiable infringement upon the individual freedom of a substantial minority of UK citizens.

CANNABIS AND "LAW & ORDER"

Many people still see the only relevance of cannabis to the law & order issue as being "How do we stop it?". Not only is that view based on a misapprehension of the facts, but it ignores the very significant role that cannabis use now plays in the lives of many people and therefore in the maintenance of "law & order".

How significant? How many? The answers to these questions are very important. One would have thought that they would be almost the first asked in any examination of the cannabis laws. Yet, none of the British research has ever attempted to answer them. The one thing we do know is that H.M. Customs will seize 20-30,000 Kg of cannabis this year and they reckon to catch about 10% of what actually arrives on our shores.

The Home Office recognises that

"...statistics on convictions for misuse (sic) of cannabis do not give an accurate picture...but it is considered that the expense and effort which any attempt to gain reliable estimates would entail are not justified..."

Is it not ludicrous that millions should be spent each year on enforcing the cannabis laws and on trying to identify the plant's supposed harmful effects, yet nothing is done to assess the importance or democratic relevance of the whole issue?

According to US Government statistics, 17% (35 million) of Americans have tried marijuhana and 7% (15 million) are regular users. Do we really believe that use is much less widespread in the UK?

If we said that, in the UK, only half as many people smoke cannabis regularly as in the USA (i.e. 3.5% of our population),

we are still talking about over 2 million people! Some quick calculations on HM Customs' figures indicate that that is probably a drastic underestimation.

In reality there is a massive sub-culture which extends throughout the length and breadth of this country. It is the law that defines this part of people's culture as "sub". The manifest wish of the people involved is for the law to get out of their private lives.

The existing cannabis laws bring the entire law into disrepute. Young people, immigrants, and others more open to influence, are bound to be confused when they see a law which is so openly flouted, a law which they know from first or secondhand experience is unnecessary and which, in some instances, tries to forbid a central part of their own culture.

Have you considered the role that the cannabis laws played in the recent outbreaks of racial violence? It is a fact, mentioned but hardly considered in the rash of official analysis, that many of the riots were sparked off by police activity in relation to "ganja", the Rastafarian religious sacrament - cannabis. No one defends violence or lawbreaking, nor suggests that legal ganja would have prevented the riots. Yet here is the straw that broke the camel's back, that needn't have been there in the first place!

How much of the international organised crime wave is founded on narcotics smuggling and how would the future of the narcotics market look if cannabis was taken out of the underworld and the pushers' ready supply of potential customers dried up? This question is indicative of the many that have not yet been given the consideration they deserve.

Have you considered the vast amount of police, customs and court time that is devoted to enforcing this unjustifiable law? The financial cost of enforcement is huge. 87% of all drug convictions relate to cannabis offences. Decriminalisation saved California \$25M in its first year - and that's only those

savings that can be identified and measured. How much more effective were the California law enforcement agencies against real, anti-social crime as a result of their increased time and resources?

How much would the controversy over "stop & search" be quelled by decriminalisation? There would be so many fewer instances where the police, rightly or wrongly, felt the need to exercise such powers. How much better would it be if our youth could understand that the police can and will take action against true criminals, but not against anyone who looks like he may use a quarter ounce a week?

People who are being "stopped and searched" will never understand that a policeman is only doing his job. They are bound to personify the law in the policeman who has stopped and searched them. Stupid laws undermine the authority of the police.

The most respectable and law abiding citizen must lose some of his respect for the law as a whole, when a particular law is so widely disobeyed. Widespread disobedience is not, in itself, a valid reason for repeal of any law. Nevertheless, not only is this law widely disobeyed but the only consequences of disobedience (for anyone - not just the user) come from the law and not the "crime".

In the USA, government tried to stamp out the "marijuana menace" by successive increases in penalties. From the 1920's through to the 1960's penalties were increased each time reports of increased use were published. The criminal law has irrefutably demonstrated its ineffectiveness as a deterrent to drug use.

Unenforceable law is bad law. There are few people, politician, judge or policeman, in history, now, or in the future, who would disagree with that. There can be no doubt that the cannabis laws are unenforceable or that they will continue to be so.

THE BENEFITS OF DE-CRIMINALISATION

There are a multitude of reasons why cannabis should be entirely removed from the criminal law. The present position is indefensible on moral, physiological, psychological and sociological grounds. However, there are also a number of ways in which any move towards legalisation would produce positive benefits. On their own these are not valid arguments for de-criminalisation but that does not mean they are irrelevant. Up to now these considerations have been ignored.

One has to consider the potential revenue that could be earned from taxing the sale of cannabis. At present, between the country of origin and the end user in Britain, the price of the plant raises some 50 times over - from £20.00 to £1000.00 per pound. There can be few laws which, on repeal, would turn a cost centre into a profit centre. The net effect of saving expense and creating revenue could be enormous - literally hundreds of millions of pounds - and, if there's anybody who still insists on trying to make other peoples' decisions for them, here is a source of finance that will keep your "research" going for as long as you wish!

When any government is seen to act bravely, to put easy popularity in second place, and to defend a previously oppressed minority, the potential increase in respect for the law is enormous. This could be a real and very valuable benefit from moving towards legalisation, particularly from those sections of the community where cannabis is only one of the factors that ostracises them.

Really though, if we are interested first and foremost in a fair and just society, then the most exciting benefit must be the extra time and resources which our police force can look forward to.

Nobody who examines the evidence against cannabis, and then weighs the cost of enforcement against our limited resources, can be happy that our priorities are right. It is obscene that so much money and effort is thrown uselessly away on this futile law.

Do you remember when the plain clothes officer was shot dead in East London next to the articulated lorry load of cannabis? We cannot excuse or forgive the evil men who placed human life so cheap. But I say to you that we cannot forgive the maintenance of a law that created the opportunity for his death.

Added to the overwhelming argument against the existing law, these positive aspects of de-criminalisation make reform an urgent necessity.

THE REALITY OF CANNABIS

To fully understand the likely effects of any reform in the law, it would be as well to understand why people use cannabis and also the effect it has on them. This is an aspect of the issue which has not been considered; despite the fact that it is at the very heart of the matter.

Consistently, and unsuccessfully, scientists have tried to identify objective harmful effects. In reality the effects of cannabis are largely subjective and beneficial. Dr Andrew Weil, one of the most respected pharmacologists in the USA, and an ex-commissioner of the US Public Institute of Mental Health, regards cannabis as an "active placebo". His research, which spans the last twenty years, suggests an explanation for the biggest dilemma of all. Why, if no virtually no objective effects can be ascertained, does anyone want to use cannabis?

Dr Weil suggests that, rather than interfering with the normal mental processes, as does alcohol, heroin etc, cannabis actually adds a new ability. Instead of altering the way that we perceive things, cannabis allows us to interpret our perceptions in different ways. As such its recreational value is enormous. On the basis of "a change is as good as a rest", cannabis will allow us to look at things from a new angle. At the intersection of our "stoned" and "unstoned" points of view we can find a more whole and balanced perception of the world about us.

Perhaps for some, that is too much of a shift in attitude. Nevertheless, one of the most certain characteristics of cannabis use is a peaceful mood. The whole nature of cannabis is diametrically opposed to any anti-social behaviour. Cannabis use tends to produce harmless introvert, behaviour rather than the sort of extrovert, and often offensive, behaviour which alcohol can produce.

In driving for instance, as in all other matters, the effect of cannabis tends to reduce rather than increase one's self-confidence. Therefore, although no sensible person wants to see anyone driving under the influence of any drug, the effect of cannabis is inherently safer than alcohol.

Using cannabis is very much less of an escape than other drugs. Alcohol, the opiates and most other drugs tend to dull the perception. If I heard that my children were smoking cannabis I would be much happier than if I heard they were drinking. At least they would be doing something positive; exploring their mind, not blanking it out.

Of course, as with any intoxicant, there are people who misuse it. There always will be. Yet, the potential harm from irresponsible use of cannabis is so miniscule compared to the injustice of a continuing ban as to be meaningless.

If the inherent nature of the plant is subjective, introvert and peaceful. Why then has it attracted so much adverse comment?

Look back at the original reason that we made the drug illegal - the Egyptian government's convenience. Fear, prejudice, misunderstanding. In the main the anti-marijuhana scare has been concurrent with the rise (and now the fall?) of racialism. Take these snippets from "Indian Hemp, a Social Menace" a supposedly serious study by an British barrister in 1952.

"...the racketeers are 90% coloured men...
I counted 28 coloured men and some 30
white girls...girls and coloured partners
danced with an abandon...bebop club, its
coloured peddlars, its half crazed,
uncaring young girls..."

and, in conclusion

"...The day will come when this country
will be all mixtures if we don't watch
out. There will be only half castes."

There is somehow a sense of something morally wrong in smoking cannabis. Why? Getting "slightly tipsy" is perfectly respectable, even encouraged at times, in all but the most puritanical of company. Yet for some reason, smoking marijuhana, is frowned upon and even in some relatively liberarated circles regarded as slightly risqué.

Nowadays, in the irrational meandering way that prejudices have, cannabis is less often accused of causing violence, crime or sexual perversion and more often of what has become known as the "amotivational syndrome".

No one who has observed heavy marijuhana smokers could doubt that the activity is often accompanied by an apparent inability to get things done; by a sense of indifference, and, some would say, downright laziness. Nevertheless, the 1972 Shafer Report to the US Congress reported cannabis users as having a better work record than the non-using control groups. Indeed, to say that cannabis causes amotivation is an obtuse interpretation and a confusion of cause and effect.

If that theory ran true then one would assume that taking the drug away would re-create motivation. Dr Weil's studies at Harvard prove that not to be the case. Instead it seems that amotivation could be the cause of heavy marijuhana smoking. Our universities, as well as American colleges, have seen similar amotivational behaviour for years before the "evil black man" introduced cannabis to the campus.

Nevertheless, the misinformation and prejudice persists. Dr Frank Wells of the BMA had some revealing remarks to make at a meeting with the Pharmaceutical society in 1980:

"Parents may recognise that children are using cannabis by the fact that they seem happy and contented."

Is the man opposed or in favour?

Still the myth persists amongst people who should know better:

In March of 1980, handing down judgement in Lewes Crown Court, Mr Justice Lawson said:

"You treated your wife savagely and it resulted in her death...we know you are a cannabis user and this probably had something to do with it."

In the summer of the same year, a principal Police surgeon for the county of Northampton referred to cannabis as:

"...a very dangerous hallucinatory drug..."

The truth of the matter is that cannabis is a harmless natural herb. Nowadays it is grown and smoked by virtually the entire spectrum of society. From the affluent executive with his after dinner joint of Royal Nepalese, to the crafty mixture of Old Holborn and Morrocan that turns a blind eye from the prison warder.

The reason that millions of British citizens smoke cannabis regularly is that they enjoy it. It is a gentle, pleasant, warm, sociable occasion-maker. At the sophisticated end you could hear discussions that sound like a debate on the merits of Californian or French grown Sauvignon grapes. At the other you will find a relaxed evening in the pub followed by a few joints in the park on the way home and a take-away to round off the evening.

The reality of cannabis is the very antithesis of the sort of alcohol induced rowdiness which creates so much trouble.

CONCLUSION

In the introduction to this document I said that any rational examination of the cannabis laws can only conclude that the law actually does more harm than the drug may ever do.

I have shown that the cannabis laws were originally enacted through blind racial prejudice and that the continuing propaganda against the plant is founded on arguments of similar value.

I have shown that the overwhelming body of evidence pronounces cannabis to be a relatively harmless herb with less chance of inflicting physiological or psychological damage than many common foodstuffs.

I have shown how the popular idea of the "Escaltion theory" has been discredited by every inquiry into the subject.

I have shown how the imposition of the Cannabis laws is a grave infringement on the rights of millions of UK citizens.

I have shown how the cannabis laws bring the entire law into disrepute; particularly for certain sections of the population where use of the plant is an important part of their culture.

I have shown that there are tremendous financial and social benefits to be gained from reform of the law as against the present financial and social penalties which the existing legislation inflicts upon our society.

I have shown that treating all cannabis use as misuse is a short sighted and unreasonable point of view. Whether or not you agree with their views, there is a sizeable and coherent body of opinion which says that cannabis use can produce real benefits.

If nothing else, this subject is bound to provoke strong emotional reactions. That is inevitable. The whole question of

drug use is intimately tied up with our most profound hopes and fears. The question relates to the very nature of consciousness and that, as all the world's philosophies and religions will testify, is what we are all searching after.

That is one of the reasons that this issue is important. One of the reasons that I ask you to examine it, putting aside your preconceptions and, as far as you can, your own emotional reactions. I don't suggest that you entirely dispense with your "gut feel". That, as our elected representatives, is an important part of your prerogative. Yet consider also the plight of over 3200 people who have been sent to prison for simple possession of cannabis since 1977.

That is a staggering toll of human injustice in a nation which used to pride itself on a liberal and tolerant attitude.

Although it is more difficult to sympathise with people who take unnecessary risks, remember also that on 17th December 1982 Lord Lane recommended that the importation of small quantities of cannabis should attract sentences of between 18 months to 3 years! Is that reasonable?

Members of the Committee, throughout this document I have deliberately stayed away from suggestions of exactly how the law could be changed. I have not attempted to argue for legalisation as opposed to de-criminalisation; just for any move in that direction. In view of the 1961 Single Convention it would be difficult to remove cannabis from the criminal law altogether. However, to legalise possession and cultivation for personal use would not breach the terms of the treaty.

We cannot afford this law any more. Please, for the sake of the entire country, stop this waste of time, money and lives. Reform the cannabis laws now.

With acknowledgements to:

Dr Michael Schofield. Author of "The Strange Case of Pot"

Dr Andrew Weil. Author of "The Natural Mind".

Peter Laurie. Author of "Drugs".

The Legalise Cannabis Campaign.

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Steve