

Drug legalizers move in for the kill

by Kathleen Klenetsky

Taking advantage of the failure of the Reagan administration's war on drugs, advocates of legalization have kicked off a new drive to sell Americans on the perverted notion that legalizing dangerous, addictive narcotics is the best way to deal with the drug plague.

Two developments in late April signaled that a major attempt to destroy the last vestiges of America's anti-drug stand was under way: The Inter-American Dialogue, a group of high-powered influentials from the United States and Ibero-America, issued their second report urging the "selective legalization" of certain drugs; and Kurt Schmoke, Baltimore's new Oxford-educated mayor, went before the U.S. Conference of Mayors to call for a national debate on drug decriminalization.

This was all it took to turn the issue of drug legalization—which had all but gone underground with the demise of the Carter administration—into a leading item on the national agenda. It is now impossible to pick up a newspaper, or turn on the TV news, without hearing yet another commentator or expert sound off about how decriminalization should be at least considered.

The *Baltimore Sun* and the "conservative" *Washington Times* have published editorials endorsing Schmoke's call; two influential magazines, *Foreign Policy* and the *Economist*, have run articles or editorials favoring legalization. Free enterprise nuts William Buckley and Milton Friedman, both long-time decrim advocates, have issued new statements on behalf of the policy. The *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* ran front-page features in their May 15 editions, laying out the case for drug decrim. And numerous TV and radio interview shows—ranging from ABC's "Nightline" to public television's "MacNeil/Lehrer Report," have done features on the issue, with Schmoke the ubiquitous guest.

Political officials jumping on the decrim bandwagon include Washington Mayor Marion Barry, whose administration has had more than its fair share of narcotics scandals, Mayor Donald Fraser of Minneapolis, and Reps. Pete Stark (D-Calif.) and Steny Hoyer (D-Md.). (By and large, these are the same individuals who pushed to get federal decriminalization under Jimmy Carter.) In New York, State Sen. Joseph Galiber felt free to introduce a bill that would set up a state-run Controlled Substances Authority to control the sale, by pharmacists, doctors, and others, of narcotics, cocaine, and marijuana.

The Reagan administration contributed, perhaps unwillingly, to the drug legalization mania, through Surgeon General C. Everett Koop's report claiming that nicotine is as dangerous and addictive as cocaine and heroin. As a spokesman for NORML (the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws) exulted, "Anyone who reads Koop's report will find it impossible to justify a criminal approach to marijuana."

The proposal has not been without its critics. Rep. Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.) chairman of the Select Committee on Narcotics, has denounced the Schmoke proposal as "idiotic," "chit chat for cocktail parties."

Just give in

In place of the administration's impotent "Just say no," the drug legalizers propose a new slogan: "Just give in." In other words, if you can't beat the devil, you might as well join him.

Their chief propaganda line is that it has proven impossible to curb the supply of drugs. Rather than waste billions of dollars in fighting an unwinnable war, the government itself should get into the drug business. This, or so the spurious argument goes, would not only shut down the drug mafia, by taking the profit out of narcotics trafficking; it would also raise billions of dollars in revenues, because drug sales could be taxed, like alcohol or cigarettes. As Princeton University Prof. Ethan Nadelmann, author of the *Foreign Policy* article backing legalization, claims, "Legalization of the drug market, just like legalization of the alcohol market in the early 1930s, would drive drug dealing business off the streets and out of the apartment buildings and into legal government-regulated, tax-paying stores."

These arguments are lies, from top to bottom. Decriminalizing drugs would be tantamount to a declaration of surrender to evil in general, and to the Soviets in particular, who decided in 1967 that hooking the American population on narcotics would be a top objective.

Medical studies have proven that drugs have a much more potent effect on the body's psychological and physiological responses, than cigarettes or alcohol. Dr. Frank Gawin of Yale University points out that with cocaine in particular, desire increases with use, and that animals in laboratory tests given unlimited access to the drug, will consume ever greater amounts until they die. "I would be terrified to live in a cocaine-legalized society," he says.

Experiments with drug legalization have been singularly unsuccessful. In Britain, where physicians were permitted to give heroin to addicts, a huge black market developed, and heroin addiction jumped.

If that isn't enough, consider some of the recent fatal accidents linked to drug usage, such as the Amtrak disaster in Maryland last year which claimed 16 lives. Do you really want your bus driver, airplane pilot, utility plant operator, or brain surgeon high on drugs—even if it is legal?