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THE DRUG SYMPOSIUM AT RUESCHLIKON

A conference of renowned specialists from all over the world assembled under the chairmanship of writer Arthur Koestler at the Gottlieb Duttweiler Institute at Rueschlikon, Zurich, to discuss drugs: not those that doctors prescribe to alleviate the pains of our bodies, but those that can bring an easily-won paradise to our minds.

Quite clearly, if drugs do us no more harm than to procure us with moments of artificial happiness, then there is a case for legalising them and for allowing us to ease the burden of our weary lives. To arrive at a sound opinion on the advisability of the use of drugs it is necessary to examine their effects and this is what the conference has tried to do.

There are many different kinds of drugs with widely varying effects. One speaker at the symposium has defined seven kinds of drug-dependencies. The seven families of drugs in question are morphine and heroin, cocaine, cannabis (consisting of hashish and marijuana), amphetamins, khat, barbiturates and halucinogenics. All these drugs are very different from one another. The first three are derivatives of opium. They can be smoked or injected. Cannabis is smoked. Amphetamins (pep-up pills like "purple hearts") are absorbed. Khat denotes the varieties of alkaloid leaves which people in Asia and Latin America like to chew. Barbiturates refer to most sleeping pills including (so I've been told) the drug Valium. Halucinogenics comprise the all-important LSD (invented by the Basle firm of Sandoz in 1943) and its far weaker brethren, mescaline. The common character of all drugs is to create a psychological dependence (a property also shared by tobacco and alcohol) and, in the ominous case of heroin, an irrevocable physiological dependence.

There is no arguing that heroin, because it wrecks the life of anyone foolish enough to tamper with it, should be proscribed. The conference did not in fact dwell on this vicious narcotic, if only to review the paltry means that have been devised to put an addict back on his feet (with very few proven successes) and glance at the positive results of "group therapy". Cannabis and LSD

are far more controversial because they are not "deadly" and do not necessarily induce physiological addiction. It would indeed be hard to find a youth in England who has not at one time had the opportunity to smoke hashish (the Beatles use it, as we all know, and still produce good songs), as for LSD, it is widespread in America and has been extensively tested under clinical conditions.

LSD is far more potent than cannabis and has effects which vary in an extraordinary way according to the taker. Apparently, a lot depends on his moral situation. If he is unprepared, his "trip" might lead him to states of great depression. On the other hand, LSD can mean a journey to mystical and spiritual realities for the one who indulges in it consciously and not out of a state of frustration. LSD can be psychologically harmful because it allows a break-away from the realities of life. Those who take it are usually unbalanced characters, frustrated, spleenish people who find that life has lost all its savour. They have become prone to the drug because it has the virtue of making reality seem both more real (to some) and more beautiful (to most). They will depend on its daily use and dread the moment when its effects die out and life becomes grey again. Some also take LSD for psychological reasons since it can make complexed persons feel content with themselves.

The participants at the conference never fell in agreement on the use of LSD, neither could they have done so. The conference was separated in two camps, the pro- and anti-LSD partisans. Many in the first group (understandably a minority) had tried the drug and could speak authoritatively on its wondrous effects. One speaker, an orientalist, said that LSD, the "tulip of the dervisch", was a wonderful vehicle for "making spacial journeys into the immensity of our inner selves". Drugs, he maintained, had been in use in the Orient since history began and they were considered as a necessary step to self-knowledge and spiritual fulfilment. He mentioned in this respect the "sacred drug" of the Persians. Drugs

were part of the culture and civilisation of the East and it was meaningless to prevent Westerners from benefiting from the enriching experience which they could bring when used correctly, that is, in the spirit of oriental culture. The LSD and narcotics experiment in America only turned sour when the Mafia and the underworld became involved in its distribution and subsequent abuse. Arthur Koestler had a valid counter-argument to pit against the orientalist's suggestion that we in the West should all be allowed to benefit from "spiritual" drugs. He said that a "culture" cannot be exported. The only things which get exported are the gew-gews and the gadgets. In the same way the East can export all the narcotics that we could wish to consume, but not the culture which would make their use fulfilling to Western souls.

Against the LSD-defenders a number of professors pointed out that the drug upset the dream-cycle and had bad neurological effects.

It was not possible, of course, to separate the debate on drugs from the society which was assuring their success. How was it that heroin and hashish, which had for so many centuries been confined to the East, had invaded the West so suddenly and become a real sociological problem? This enigma naturally lead to some searching questions on the nature of our society. One Marxist speaker had the extreme view that drugs were the only way of keeping capitalism alive. He maintained that the aridity of western life, all bent on making profits and climbing the social ladder, naturally lead to the large-scale absorption of the palliatives which the drugs constituted. He argued that it was only thanks to the artificial miracle of drugs that the youths of today could find an escape to the dearth of capitalistic existence. If they were not numbed by the use of drugs they would rise and shatter the whole system. Drugs were therefore the saviours of late-capitalism. He illustrated his point by mentioning the American drug "Soma" which induces contentment and happiness without touching the roots of the dissatisfaction which would lead anyone to use the drug in the first place.

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Two days of discussion were naturally not sufficient to examine all the sociological causes of the use of drugs, in particular, heroin, LSD, and "pot" (or cannabis) in the U.S.A. and pot in England and Scandinavia. There is a certain relationship between the quality of life and the consumption of pot, but the usual Marxist explanation does not hold for Switzerland, a highly capitalistic country in which the rise in drug addiction hardly exceeds the increase in population.

Two explanations to the drug fad appear plausible: the first is that when something common, such as the smoking of hashish among youths emerges, then everybody will have a bash out of imitation and lust of experience. Hardly anybody would ever be a cigarette smoker if there hadn't been a temptation some time during early teens to imitate other elder smokers. This is how smoking spread into a universal habit. There are obvious signs that this is becoming the case of pot. 80% of Vietnam veterans smoke pot and it seems rather vain to insist in forbidding it legally in the United States. This could be equally true of Great Britain. To allow it would at least cut the grass from under the feet of the underworld and diminish our rising crime rate. This, at least, was what some of the speakers at the symposium maintained. The second explanation is that drugs correspond to a genuine spiritual need and that their widespread consumption reflects the moral and existing vacuum of our disintegrating society. If this is the case, then there is obviously little one can do to stop the movement until society is completely overhauled. This is maybe what the young pot smokers of today will achieve tomorrow—for better or worse, that's another question.

The conference closed after having well explicated the facts but still leaving some important questions unanswered.

For example: the attitude we ought to adopt towards pot and the intelligent use of LSD and, if a common condemnation of these things were reached, what measures should be taken to put an end to them.

The cultural value of the use of drugs was examined, and there at least the conference agreed that they were not the way to an improvement of art. Many writers and artists had experimented with LSD. Koestler and Huxley among them, and found that their inspiration was definitely heightened but that their means of expressing it coherently were correspondingly diminished. One of the most remarkable effects of LSD is to break, or perhaps to transcend, the outside causality of the world as we usually perceive it. Under favourable circumstances, the taker of LSD can visualise a world in which everything is One, just like the mystic. Unfortunately, his powers of analysing and structuring what he sees are blocked and there is no possibility for him to do any creative work under the influence of the drug. The artist loses the ability of delineating objects and the writer finds it impossible to construct meaningful sentences and eventually loses his whole spelling.

In his closing speech, Arthur Koestler pointed out the astonishing discrepancy between the intellectual and moral being of a man (a theme which he had developed in a recent "Observer"). The drug which, he said, he would like to see developed, should be able to unite our marvellous intelligences with our perverted personalities. So would we: because the day we are as good as we are clever, then this world of ours would do away with pot and LSD for ever.

(PMB)

COMMENT

DO SWISS WOMEN REALLY WANT THE RIGHT TO VOTE?

Switzerland treats its women so unjustly that it ranks among the most primitive countries in the world. The only other countries which deny their women the right to vote are Lichtenstein, Yemen, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Nigeria, moslem countries for the most part, where women are confined to harems and not even allowed to show their faces.

As a proof that this uncivilised anomaly still recently had a live backing among Swiss males, the 1959 referendum on the issue of equal federal-political rights for women produced 654,939 "no" against 323,727 "yes" ballots.

Still, the seed has been sown and the number of women-backers has increased gradually, so much so that

during the '60s over 50 votes on the political rights of women were held on the cantonal and communal levels. Vaud and Neuchatel were the first cantons to grant their women a say in cantonal affairs (1959), Geneva followed in 1960, Basle-town in 1966, Basle-country in 1968, Ticino and Fribourg in 1969. All these cantons except Basle-land have also given women the right of vote in communal issues. Graubunden, Berne and Zurich have allowed their communes to vote themselves the female right of vote.

Now this portentous problem has reached the federal level once again. The Federal Council has submitted to Parliament a proposed improvement of the 74th article of the Federal Constitution, outlined in our "Swiss News" items. The Council backs its proposal in a 40-page "message" designed to answer every critic.

The isolation of Switzerland was not a determining factor. It was rather the contradiction between the increasingly important role played by women in the economy, the increased freedom of their lives and the "woman at home" image. This called for a more realistic attitude towards the problem of womens' right of vote.

What is more surprising is that the message contains lengthy arguments to convince the women who *don't* want the right to vote! No, it says, the right of vote will not imperil the condition of women, neither in their homesteads nor in society. No, the right of vote will not tend to increase the disinterest in direct democracy. Yes, women *can* bring constructive views on the problems affecting them more particularly, even though they may be less interested in other more specifically masculine topics.

There is a "Union of Swiss women for the female right of vote" and there is the pending "Union of Swiss Women against the female right of vote". The first union probably gathers together all the intellectual, politically-active, aggressive, "proud-to-be-women, men-with-the-baby, equal-opportunity-for-women, no-more-downtreading" elements. They stage banner-carrying processions, meet in committees and send representatives to the European Human Right Convention. The second is less publicised and less typified. A few years ago in Zurich, when the right of vote for women came up and was rejected by the people, it placarded a very conspicuous bill reading "Totale Verpolitisierung unseres Lebens? NEIN!" all over the city.

These militant elements, fighting against the right of vote, may be getting rarer to find, but the fact remains that the overall majority of Swiss women are just not interested in the political equality which their men are gradually working out for them. The reporter for the "Europa" programme