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THE DRUGS PROBLEM

and what is done about it in Switzerland

Drugs are no longer the luxury of intellectual experimentors like de Quincey and Huxley but the daily experience of growing circles of youths living more or less on the fringe of society. While the problem of alcoholism is an old one and pervades nearly all strata of society, drugs is a new phenomenon because of its unprecedented social and psychological aspects. A distinction should be made between Europe and America. In Europe the hard drug problem remains essentially individual whereas the use of heroin in the United States has taken such proportions that it is considered a matter of national urgency. In fact, drugs in New York can be compared to the alcoholic problem of the last century in Europe, when drunkenness was a kind of endemic disease in the working classes.

The social and psychological implications of drug taking are inherent in the reasons why young people take hashish, LSD, purple hearts, and in the rarer cases heroin. This partly reflects a revolt against the establishment, unfulfilled needs and ideals and an urge to escape the realities of life. Young people also smoke pot as an expression of community life. The problem becomes most apparent when it comes to curing the wrecks of the most lethal forms of drug taking. They have to be

treated in hospitals which stand for the establishment against which they have rebelled. This means that they will tend to avoid the cures offered by institutions assimilated to prisons and reject any form of relationship with the doctors attempting to heal them. Because of the state of psychological imbalance suffered by most of these patients, the question of relationship should however play a vital role in their improvement.

It is recognised that the conflict with the present state of the law and the mentality of the drug taker has led to a kind of vicious circle preventing hospitals and doctors from carrying out their work as efficiently as they otherwise should. An inveterate alcoholic is a much more docile and co-operative patient than a drug addict. Drinking is not associated in the same way as drugs with a collective dissent of the established order of things.

This situation has given rise in Britain and America to the creation of "Release" offices where addicts or young people charged with drug offences can find help and advice from people of their own kith and kin. Similar private offices have opened in Switzerland. The two most recent ones are operating in Geneva and Lausanne and are subsidised by the State. But

the "Drop In" offices of Zurich and Basle and the "Speak Out" agency in Zurich have been established for several years and have more experience of the efficiency of this formula.

The name "Drop In" the purpose and spirit of this assistance centre. Young people come when they have a problem, which need not necessarily be a drug problem. The centre is run by three qualified doctors and a team of eight social-psychiatric workers. All of them are young, have long hair and dress like the people they look after. Drug addicts or occasional drug takers drop in when they have had a bad trip or when they are sick. Young people occasionally come for advice after a family quarrel or trouble with the police. "Drop In" observes complete discretion on all these cases and its patients are assured that their parents will not be told anything.

The "Drop In" office in Basle performs the same function but goes beyond advice and immediate therapy by following up the initial treatment prescribed to those who have "tripped" badly and wish to give up drugs by visiting them regularly and establishing a vital relationship. Without such a relationship, the drug addict will not have complete trust in those who are trying to help him.



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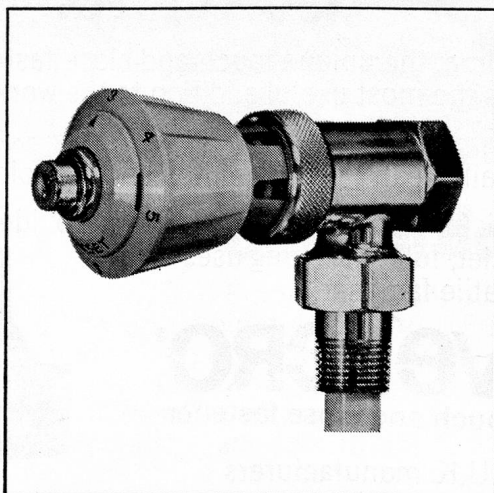
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TEMSET

The team of the Basle "Drop In" realise that their long term results are still small. While they may prevent a young girl from committing suicide as the result of a disastrous trip, they find it difficult in ensuring that the girl will not trip again. "Drop In" can give shelter and food to its patients, and encourage them to busy themselves with handicrafts, painting, pottery, etc., for a limited time before newcomers arrive. It is necessary to separate the newcomers from those who are partly cured because of the ever present risk of drug "contamination" and a relapse. But to move away from "Drop In" the convalescent addicts have to be accepted somewhere, but an insert in all the important German-Swiss papers produced only one reply. The landlord of a farm where "Drop In" had hoped to create a therapeutic community refused to lease his farm.

The rehabilitation of drug addicts, difficult as it is from the medical point of view, is made yet more complicated by the lack of co-operation of a wary public. If it is recognised that small communities run on a non-institutionalised basis are preferable to large anonymous hospitals equated by a majority of addicts with the establishment, then there should be a general openness making such communities possible.

The State could give "Drop In" sufficient funds to build adequate premises, but then its appeal as a free and non-institutional home of moral assistance is immediately lost. This has

actually been demonstrated with the "Drop In" at Zurich. The fact that the centre received subsidies from the town made it dislikeable to the fringe communities and led to the setting up of a completely independent office called "Speak Out". This is a kind of platform, a meeting place where tormented or rebellious young people can meet and exchange views. It was born from the closure of the Lindenhofbunker in 1971. While it offers youths sharing the same problems the opportunity to meet in a congenial atmosphere it is not equipped to help drug addicts out of trouble.

The ideal solution would be for a millionaire beatnik to build and run an institution for addicts. This would solve part of the psychological difficulties encountered in this kind of therapy. The hard medical means of liberating heroin addicts are still far from satisfactory. Estimations vary as to the proportion of relapses from a disintoxication cure. The most pessimistic assessments quote up to 98 per cent of relapses. The psychiatric clinic of the University of Basle claims a percentage of relapses as low as 60 over a period of five years.

The treatment varies according to the different cases of drug addiction, but usually consists in progressively weaning drug addicts by reducing the doses of heroin and replacing them by methadone. This drug has less disastrous effects than heroin and allows the patients to lead near-to-normal lives.

The trouble comes when a disintoxicated patient leaves hospital and either drifts or is approached by people from his former surroundings. The relapse is probably more a question of psychological and moral assistance than one of biological necessity. Drugs often replace what is lacking in emotional and relational life. Hence the importance of a follow-up organisation and more understanding from the community.

The problem is quite similar to the ex-prisoner's. It is difficult to adapt unaided to a life and a society with which one is not reconciled. Without the security of a family and a satisfactory job, the former drug addict will be tempted to seek escape in a relapse. In Switzerland there are so far very few employers willing to give work to youths still presenting the symptoms of drug addiction. The problem is fortunately not so widespread, but is bound to increase in importance.

While British law has finally recognised that there was a fundamental difference in degree between hard and soft drugs, and reduced penalties for soft drug offences, Swiss courts have been cracking down very hard on minor drug offenders. Hashish, marijuana and LSD can't be put in the same bag as heroin and amphetamins. The essential difference is that the former does not create a physical dependence, whereas the latter very quickly produce an almost irrevocable addiction leading to a disinterest in life and a total inability

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to communicate. Heroin addicts become wrecks and write-offs. Although cannabis is said to harm the brain, it can be argued that this is also true of drink. Tobacco is probably more harmful than moderate joints of cannabis and is socially acceptable.

The objections usually raised by the opponents of any loosening-up of drug laws are that people attracted to soft drugs will eventually want more and succumb to the hard and lethal "white powder". This sound argument is made true by the presence of nar-

cotics rings, drug peddlars and the very predicament of those who take to drugs in the first place. Soft drugs might be allowed in a healthy society because they would no longer be used as an expression of revolt, despair and therefore be harmless. The resort to hard drugs is not a result of dissatisfaction with soft drugs, but the consequence of the usually depressed state of the drug taker and his exposure to criminal elements. Thus the root of the troubles go beyond simple repressive measures against soft drugs which

(once shorn of persistent taboos) are no more dangerous than barbiturates, Saridon, whisky, a packet of cigarettes a day and other socially accepted "necessities". The emphasis should lie on understanding the reasons why teenagers take drugs and finding what they are actually looking for. The answer to this question and the will to act in consequence with the result seems to be a better alternative than to proclaim new laws and leave the disease untended.

(PMB)

TECHNICAL ITEMS

Spike tyres and dry roads

As everyone knows, the damage caused by spikes to the roads each winter is counted in hundreds of thousands of francs. As a result, the government of the canton of Vaud in Switzerland has decided to introduce a special tax of S.Fr. 100 (US \$26.30) per winter for every vehicle fitted with spike tyres. A Swiss inventor in Geneva has invented a new type of spike tyre with all the advantages of conventional spike tyres but without their drawbacks. The tyre has two rows of spikes, on either side of the tread and slightly back from it. On dry road, at normal tyre pressure, the vehicle runs only on the central tread and the spikes do not come into contact with the road. Whenever the road conditions require, it is sufficient to release a little air from the tyre (300 to 500 gr.) for the central tread to flatten and the spikes to come into contact with the road surface. The inventor has also devised a system of "Mini-Maxi" valves making it possible merely by pressing on a valve to obtain the desired pressure.

Pneumatic-hydraulic vices

A Swiss engineering works at Lenzburg (Aargau) recently produced two new models of interchangeable hydraulic clamping vices, one operated by hand, the other by compressed air. They are rapidly interchanged by removing a single fixing screw, without having to take the vice off its stand. The special system for the rapid opening and closing of these vices is designed so as to save as much time as possible when changing work parts. When open, the clamping device releases the operating jaw, held by an anchoring rack; it is moved by hand in order to adjust the width of the jaws. The clamping run, of about 14 mm, comprises two stages, in order to save compressed air and speed up operation. The first is a low-power approach run (max. 12 mm) followed by a high power

clamping run of about 2 mm, as soon as the part to be clamped has been contacted. This process is commanded by a special valve incorporated in the cylinder unit. Several models of these vices are available, with a full range of cylinder unit. Several models of these clamping forces of up to 17,000 kg. at 6 atm.

Puncture warning appliance

A Swiss firm in Zurich has produced a safety device for vehicles, which won a silver medal at the last Brussels Salon of inventions. It is a puncture warning device designed to warn the driver of a heavy truck when a tyre on his vehicle or the trailer is losing air. This warning system is particularly useful for transport on motorways, where heavy trucks drive increasingly fast. One has only to think of the many accidents caused by abnormal heating of one of the twin wheels, as a result of a puncture or a difference in pressure between the two tyres. The instrument comprises three main parts: a transmitter, a receiving aerial with a receiver, and an optical and acoustic warning signal. Very small and very sturdily built, the transmitter is mounted on the wheel hub. It is screwed onto the end of a pressure gauge tube set to the tyre pressure; the pressure gauge is connected to the tyre valve—or to the two valves in the case of twin wheels—by a flexible tube. In the case of twin wheels, the pressure gauge is designed so that it acts as a pressure equilibribrator for the two wheels when the pressure drops suddenly in one, the system isolates the other so that the pressure does not drop there too. A drop in pressure of about 0.7 bar is sufficient to lock the appliance and to set off the signal. As soon as the pressure drops, a light flashes inside the transmitter; once the driver is warned by the signals in his cabin, all he has to do is glance at the instruments to see which tyre is damaged. The receiving aerial consists of a galvanised and

insulated cable fixed on the edge of the mudguard or the body. It is connected to the receiver fixed to the rear of the body of the truck and powered by the truck's battery. The warning signal comprises a flashing light mounted in the cabin, in a very conspicuous spot, together with a clearly audible acoustic signal. Small in size, easy to mount and perfectly reliable, this device also has the advantage of helping to balance the pressure in the tyres on the twin wheels, thus considerably reducing tyre wear.

Alusuisse in Australia

The Nabalco (Pty) Ltd. aluminium works (aluminium oxide), built at Gove with the participation of Aluminium Suisse C. Ltd. (Zurich, Switzerland), was inaugurated at the beginning of July, 1972. Production started with an annual capacity of 500,000 tons, corresponding to the first stage of construction; a second stage also involving 500,000 tons will be reached in 1973. The figure of S.Fr. 1.8 billion (US \$473.8 million) is quoted for this scheme, of which 70%, i.e. S.Fr. 1.3 billion (US \$342.2 million) will be supplied by Alusuisse. The mining of bauxite began in the spring of 1971

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