

Change 'attitude problem'

NORML bids for genuine local supporters

Two and a half years ago, when a friend and I decided to start a UNL chapter of National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws, we had no idea how many local activists the issue would attract.

Within a few months, we had more than 200 signed members, with a regular attendance of about 30-50 people, and a "core group" of about 25 people who dutifully worked and spoke up.

Our immediate goals were to raise money to support the cause nationally and to disseminate information locally to counter rightist propaganda — and to some degree our efforts have been fruitful. We've sent more than \$1,500 to national pro-legalization interests, informed farmers and other hard-to-reach rural people at last year's state fair, distributed flyers, sold T-shirts, etc. In a larger sense, our efforts have gone unredeemed and, in some cases, have probably been detrimental to our own cause.

I think the pro-legalization movement has developed an attitude problem. Some of the people who have joined the group have been "rebels casting out lines for a cause."

These people come and go; their superficial interests manifest themselves in a simple unwillingness to work. The other extreme, equally common, is those people who identify with the issue so closely that it consumes their lives.

It's as if the whole world was an arena in which the great cosmic struggle between the hempsters and the "Republican fascists" takes place.

It's a convenient trap to see things as black and white, and so our rhetoric becomes as tired and reactionary as those persons we oppose.

The most glaring and self-detrimental example of this I know of is when Jack Herer, a noted activist, came to give his talk last year in Lincoln. As leader of Help Eliminate Marijuana Prohibition and author of well-known underground book, "The Emperor Wears No Clothes," his presence attracted many local radicals and other interested persons.

He also attracted media interest, including a camera from 10/11 news.

How disheartening it was to hear Herer

employing sexist language, referring to males in the audience as "men" and females as "girls," and insulting non-users as "idiots," denying, and I quote, "their birthright to smoke hemp."

Preaching the hemp gospel as he shook his copy of "The Emperor" like a Gutenberg, he reminded one most of a stoned televangelist.

Yet with all the hoopla and mythomania-feeding rhetoric, the cause is still a vital one. Perhaps the most effective proponents have not been radicals at all.

When he publicly announced that marijuana was less harmful to health than either tobacco or alcohol, Surgeon General C. Everett Coop probably convinced more people than anyone has. And the single best quote we have on the politics of drug use comes from Jimmy Carter, who asserted that "the penalties for the use of a drug should not be more harmful to the user than the use of the drug itself."

I would take the quote one step further to argue that a crime without a victim is no crime at all.

I have never understood the concept of "a crime against the state," for what is "the state" but the people who populate it?

Anti-marijuana laws are informed by racist preconceptions and imagery from the mid-1930s, portraying the marijuana user as a black, jazz-playing dope fiend or his white "victim" fit for rape or exploitation.

The classic example of early anti-marijuana propaganda is the movie "Reefer Madness," in which innocent white suburbanites smoke grass, go crazy and develop a fantastic conviction in their ability to fly.

While the post-prohibition Anslinger Regime is largely responsible for the initial marginalization of marijuana users, the continued view of hemp as an "evil drug," lumped together with more harmful physically addictive drugs such as heroin and crack, is a function mostly of business interests and ultra-right wing moral entrepreneurship.

The drug war justifies self-righteous conservative sentiments that "thou shalt not

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