

# POLITICAL SCIENCE

## WHAT TO DO WITH OUR ADDICTION PROBLEM: Waging peace on drugs

By Tom Dworetzky

**P**eople from the entire political spectrum are calling for the legalization of drugs. Others argue that it's both immoral and absurd to legalize substances that are destroying not only individuals, but communities—and that we should "crack down" harder.

No question that drug addiction is the immediate social problem today. The plight of junkies' ruined lives and 'hoods creates its own cancerous underground economy—and nourishes a thriving overground economy we can hardly afford: beefed-up police forces, overcrowded prisons, and understaffed health-care facilities.

The stalemated debate on legalization focuses on the wrong thing: whether by legalizing drugs, we thus condone them. This is a false issue. Drugs are bad; no argument. But in truth, the war on drugs is a losing proposition. Trying to keep junkies and drugs separate (or any of us from our bad habits) can't be done. So perhaps it's time to consider a modest middle way, based on two seemingly contradictory propositions:

1. *Drugs should remain illegal.* Who could possibly advise easy drug access for anyone? The accidents and evils perpetrated while *under the influence* indirectly hold us all captive and infringe on our rights to safety.

2. *Drugs should be legal.* Why punish those weak-willed or tormented enough to fall into the monkey's grip? Drug addiction is

a medical and psychological—not criminal—issue. Junkies have enough problems already.

At first glance, these two propositions seem totally at odds. How, then, to please all? What plan can satisfy the pragmatists trying to cut costs, the individual-freedom advocates, the moralists who argue that society must set standards for everyone, and, of course, the junkies?

But looking beneath the rhetoric, you'll observe a couple of

things: first, that when you're rich, society looks the other way if you have a drug problem. There are many low-profile alternatives; just ask visitors to the Betty Ford Clinic. When the rich get in a jam, they go to a sanitarium or, if it's the kids, to a boarding school or academy. We don't need a bunch of

law-enforcement agencies to shove the rich into rehab programs, either. All it takes is cash, check, or charge.

Then, acknowledge that whether a junkie has money or is broke, we can't keep him or her from the drugs. Several decades and billions of dollars after we declared war on drugs, we've won only minor battles. The conflict itself is lost. Drugs are easier to get than ever before.

We can end the war and at the same time keep junkies off the streets by making drugs freely available—in pharmacies located in minimum-security prisons. I've never known a junkie who'd waste time hassling people when he or she had drugs. With drugs avail-

able in prisons, we could at the same time and place offer cost-effective treatment services, high-school courses, and health care. So, instead of spending all of our money to catch junkies, we could encourage addicts to check into jail.

The deal would be, "If you do drugs, all right; but you can't leave high, and you won't find drugs on the outside. Do drugs, but pay with your freedom until you can leave clean." Make prisons the malls for the addicted, and cut out the middlemen who prey on their disease.

Think of the prisons as Betty Ford Clinics for the poor. Addicts do crimes to get drugs; they don't do drugs to commit crimes. Let the junkies live in peace and get on with their lives, confront their inner demons, work through their journeys. And let our neighborhoods experience a little peace and quiet, too.

Perhaps we should examine why we won't give drugs to people. There's a world of difference between condemnation and control. We can condemn addicts by making them check into secure drug-use and treatment facilities to pursue their chemical nightmares, to remain separated from civilized society until the time they're clean and ready to return. Or we can try to control them and fight over the long, strange trip they're on. ☐

**Instead of futilely trying to keep junkies away from drugs, should we seek a way to keep the addicts away from everyone else—in "jails" that provide them with drugs free of charge?**



What do you think? Would you trade freedom for free drugs? Call 1-900-903-8683 ext. 7030101. Your views will be recorded and may appear in a future issue. Calls are 95¢ per minute. You must be 18 or older. Touch-tone phones only. Sponsored by Pure Entertainment, P.O. Box 166, Hollywood, California 90078.