

# LOOK AT THE PHYSICAL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ASPECTS OF DRUGS

## Legalties & Realities

By PAT ROSSI

Although infrequent, the instance of someone being ushered into closed offices as a result of alleged drug offenses does happen to Northern Highlands students. What happens next?

The first objective of the administration is to determine the guilt or innocence of the alleged offender. Mr. Vinci, the vice-principal, makes this determination after a careful analysis of the evidence available. The statement of the faculty member or of another individual who reports the offender and any other material object which have been confiscated are considered.

If it is decided by the administration that the student is guilty beyond the shadow of a doubt of drug-related offenses, the actions which follow are not arbitrary. The Board of Education dictates that any student found guilty of possessing alcoholic beverages on school property or coming to school intoxicated will be suspended for five days. Likewise, a student will be suspended for the same amount of time if it is discovered

that he possesses or is under the influence of illegal substances on school property.

One who is found to be abusing drugs at Northern Highlands is also subject to the laws set by the state of New Jersey. In the case of alcohol abuse, if the offender is underaged, he may be referred to the local police department. If so, he may then be subject to a disorderly persons offense which carries a minimum fine of \$100. In the case of marijuana possession, defendants who are under the age of sixteen are covered by the state's juvenile delinquency statutes, whereas defendants sixteen or older face the penal laws of New Jersey. Generally, under these laws, defendants who are found to be guilty of possessing small amounts of marijuana will be charged with a misdemeanor. However, second offense charges are far more severe.

Mr. Hopkins summed up the drug offense policy at Northern Highlands by stating, "Our aim is not to punish the offenders but to educate them so that they don't continue to use drugs."

## Right?

sponded that they use drugs regularly. According to the poll, 29% of the juniors and 27% of the freshmen use drugs habitually. Whether the decrease from sophomore to junior year is due to changed attitudes regarding drugs or simply to the type of class is debatable.

Believe it or not, girls seem to be more involved with drugs than boys. For example, 65% of the sophomore girls responded that they have tried drugs at least once, while only 45% of the boys said that they have tried drugs. In all four classes, the percentage of habitual drug users is about 5% higher for girls than for boys.

Drug usage seems to have begun before Highlanders reached high school. Many habitual drug users began using drugs in the third and fourth grades. However, most moderate users began in the eighth and ninth grades.

When asked if they ever attended class stoned, students replied with a wide variety of answers. The replies ranged from, "everyday" to "once a year" to "never."

## LEGALIZE IT?

By AMY WINTERS

Legalization or decriminalization of marijuana is presently being considered by government officials in Washington. Legalization of pot would allow commercialization of the drug, like liquor or tobacco. However, decriminalization would only repeal laws making it a crime to possess small amounts of pot. According to Congressional Digest, the emphasis of the seventies was on discouragement of the distribution of marijuana, while penalties for its possession were to be decreased. Apparently, that is still the general attitude today.

The most recent major federal law, the Controlled Substance Act of 1970, lowered the penalty for possession of marijuana from a felony to a misdemeanor. Efforts of varying degree have been and continue to be made towards decriminalization of pot. Eleven states, including New York, but not New Jersey, have passed various forms of decriminalization laws. Sixteen states, not including New Jersey, have approved medical use of the drug to alleviate the side effects of painful cancer treatments and to ease eye pressures caused by glaucoma. Today, Alaska is the only state where any amount of marijuana is permitted for personal use.

In 1972, the National Committee on Marijuana and Drug Abuse recommended decriminalization. Since then, former President Carter has expressed

that he favors the concept. He stated in his Drug Abuse Message, August 2, 1977, "Penalties against possession of a drug should not be more damaging to an individual than the use of the drug itself." He also said that we can discourage the use of marijuana without defining the smoker as a criminal. However, the Department of Justice and its Drug Enforcement Administration are opposed to decriminalization of pot.

Congressional Digest suggested that one of the main controversies is the right of an individual to use a harmful substance versus the right of society to protect itself from harmful influence of marijuana use by youngsters whose performances affect classrooms supported by public funds.

The pros and cons of decriminalization or legalization of pot are presently being carefully considered. Congressional Digest reported that some people feel that usage is too widespread to control with rigid penalties.

Senator Javits, a New York Republican who introduced a bill for decriminalization, presented a statement before the Committee of Narcotics Abuse and Control. He stated, "The number of people experimenting with and using marijuana continues to increase...; criminalization of marijuana has failed... the case for reform has become clearer and more clearly defined." He explained that decriminalization would reduce

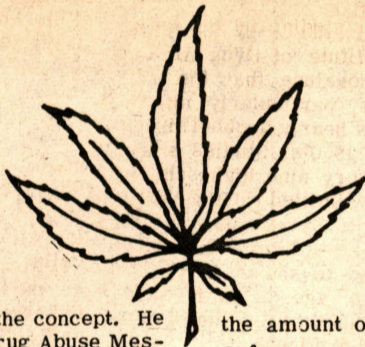
the amount of money spent on enforcement. He also said that we have ignored the subjectivity of the process by which offenders are chosen.

There are also those who are opposed to decriminalization. The International Narcotics Enforcement Officers Association is "in favor of tough penalties for pushers of marijuana." INEOA said marijuana is an intoxicant, and if it is decriminalized, it will be almost impossible to cope with people driving under the dangerous influence of the drug. "If we want the nation to go to pot, then by all means let's decriminalize," said one INEOA official.

The International Association of Chiefs of Police is against decriminalization because

history has shown that when drugs are readily available, their use increases. One member of the association said, "Marijuana has been proven to be the doorway to the other more dangerous drugs."

If marijuana were legalized, some very interesting and pertinent questions would be raised as suggested by William Novak in High Culture: Who would be given the right to sell marijuana and where? Would smoking be allowed in public places? What about advertising? Would it be sold as joints, in bulk, or both? These questions may, however, have a long wait before they can be answered.



## Help for HIGH Schoolers

By ELLEN AURITI

Although there are several places in the Bergen County area which offer help with drug-related problems, the Raymond E. Banta Valley Center is one of the closer and better-known facilities. Located next to the Valley Hospital in Ridgewood, Valley Center was originally opened to fight heroin abuse, although now the staff of physicians, nurses and counselors deal primarily with pot, alcohol, and pills.

Valley Center's services (including V.D. and pregnancy tests, in addition to drug counseling) are aimed mainly at young people, from junior high to early adulthood, and are provided free of charge to residents of Allendale, Upper Saddle River, and the six other member communities it serves.

One of the most important features of the Center is its guarantee of full confidentiality. Although family partici-

pation is encouraged, the decision of whether or not to involve parents is entirely up to the individual.

On the initial visit, someone on the staff will explain the counseling program and set up an appointment. Most people go about once a week, though this varies from person to person. During a session, the counselor will try to help the person see why he uses drugs instead of dealing with the problem in other ways. The counselor will point out alternative solutions to dealing with life which do not involve drugs. Work on trying to stop behavior that involves drugs is stressed.

The lack of red tape, along with the relaxed environment, makes it relatively simple to obtain help at Valley Center. The Center is open on weekdays from 9:00 AM until 5:00 PM and the number to call for an appointment (445-HELP) also serves as a twenty-four hour hotline.

### THE FOLLOWING PLACES HAVE FACILITIES TO PROVIDE HELP FOR PEOPLE WITH DRUG RELATED PROBLEMS.

Bergen County Drug Abuse Center 75 East Broadway, Hackensack 342-2565	Raymond E. Banta Health Center 301 North Van Dien Ave. Ridgewood 445-4357
Family Counseling Service 148 Prospect Ave. Ridgewood 445-7015	West Bergen Mental Health Center 74 Oak Street, Ridgewood 444-3550

## PARENTS 'JUANA TALK

By JASON KATZ and VALERIE DAMON

Most of the parents interviewed recently express a deep concern for what one mother termed "almost a way of life for some kids". She is referring to the use of drugs by high school kids.

Parents seem to agree that there is a problem with drugs but whereas the administration feels frustration at the problem, the parents show a surprising amount of hope.

"The drug problem is pretty bad, but if you teach those kids what the chemicals do to your body, they'd stop" states one father. The majority of parents with children in Northern Highlands think that a new program of education is the answer to the drug menace.

Mrs. Frey, a school nurse, parent, and member of the CACHE committee, feels that there is no one solution; it will take a combined effort of communication and discipline to overcome the problem.

The question was raised as to whether the parents are more concerned over teens' use of alcohol or drugs. Almost all of the parents have an attitude that drugs cause permanent damage, while alcohol causes only temporary ones; therefore, the use of drugs by teens worries parents more. One mother admitted, "I'm worried about both of them (alcohol and drugs). Yet my husband and I drink. How can we tell our kids that it's wrong for them to?"

What do parents do to deter their children from using drugs? According to virtually all of them, they discuss the matter openly with their kids.

When asked if kids should be allowed to try drugs once or twice, just to experience them, there was a hodge-podge of responses. Some were extremely negative, while others were very open-minded. An astounding number of parents who said 'no' also stated that they expected their kids to try drugs anyway,

with or without their permission. Two parents wanted their kids to sample drugs once, but only with the parents present.

Especially the parents whose youngsters are involved in drugs feel that peer pressure is the major cause for drug use and abuse. One mother with two children attending Highlands says, "It's definitely (my son's) friends. They do drugs, so he does, too, to be 'cool'. If it were up to him, he wouldn't. It's not the way he was raised."

Other causes for the drug problem that were cited are: accessibility of drugs, lack of proper education, lack of parental supervision, youthful frustrations, permissive society, and even the pressure of having too much spending money. Mrs. Frey mentioned most of the above reasons, plus what she called an "overabundance of leisure time".

Out of all the views expressed by the parents, the most divided opinions concerned the future of drug abuse in the high schools. One-half of the parents feel that drug abuse will increase in the future. A father of a former Highlands student said, "In a few years the situation will be uncontrollable."

The other half maintains that drug use is on the decline. One proponent of the idea explains, "Ten years ago, I had kids in high school, and the drug problem was tremendous. I now have a daughter who is in high school, and it definitely isn't as bad. I also teach seventh grade students, and they're perfectly straight, as far as I can tell."

One father thoughtfully added, "Drug use will only decrease if we parents get moving and do something."

As for the future of teenage drug usage, one parent concluded, "It's all in our children's hands. We put them through school, they show great progress, and then they turn around and become addicted to drugs. Only time can tell."