

Letters

Stony Brook

Greenberg's article ("Pot' and politics: How they 'busted' Stony Brook," 9 Feb., p. 607), does well to direct the attention of the scientific and academic communities to the actual harm done to a promising, growing institution of higher education by widely advertised and inflated police activity directed at the possession, exchange, or sale of illegal drugs on campus. It fails, however, to deal with the even graver issues which have been raised by the subsequent legislative committee investigations and which are involved in the nationwide nature of the drug problem.

Perspective on these issues may be gained by recalling the national state of opinion and enforcement of the laws prohibiting the use of alcoholic beverages during the last decade of Prohibition. Probably no one has ever denied that alcoholism is a serious social evil, that it harms many persons irreparably, or that it injures many innocent victims of drunken drivers. Nevertheless, in the late 1920's, drinking on campuses throughout the nation followed the pattern of social practice everywhere else. It was impossible for university and college authorities to adopt a more repressive attitude than the police were willing or able to enforce in general. The end of Prohibition has not ended the problems of alcohol, but at least on our campuses it is less of a problem than in the 1920's and is more readily kept within restraints that prevent its interference with academic life.

I do not wish to embark on an argument respecting the merit of our laws prohibiting illegal drugs, except to point out that there is a very great difference between narcotics that are addictive, hallucinogens such as LSD for which there is growing evidence of serious mental and genetic damage, and marijuana for which scientific and medical evidence of any serious consequences of use is almost nonexistent. The real issues facing our universities and colleges are whether it is possible to enforce the existing laws more restrictively on a campus than in the surrounding

community, and whether it is proper and desirable for university authorities to attempt a police function. The use of informers and undercover agents, which the police themselves find necessary to secure evidence of infraction of the laws, would, if practiced on the part of a university administration, quickly demoralize the university community by destroying the mutual trust so indispensable in relations between colleagues and between teachers and students. It is a fact, in spite of the anonymous assertion of a Stony Brook faculty member which Greenberg quoted, that during the past 2½ years since I joined the Stony Brook administration all *evidence* (in contradistinction to hearsay and rumor) of any illegal possession, exchange, gift, or sale of drugs reaching the dean of students and his staff has been communicated to our Suffolk County police. Such evidence rests on a far better knowledge of student life in the residence halls than that which is based on occasional visits of some faculty member. What is now being demanded is that we transmit rumor and hearsay, and that we ourselves become informers in the most despicable sense.

The charges of laxity in enforcement of university regulations and of state or national laws thus rests essentially upon the conscious refusal of our administration and faculty to apply police methods. It is our belief that while we should cooperate with the police and report to them all evidence of violation of the drug laws, our primary responsibility is to maintain an academic atmosphere in which thought and opinion may be freely expressed, in which truth may be sought without fear of consequences, and in which charges leading to the discipline or suspension of a student or the termination of employment of a faculty member receive full due process.

The hearings held during the past weeks before the State Legislative Committee on Crime, of which State Senator Hughes is chairman, raise further grave general issues of concern to all academic persons. One such issue is the reception and widespread publicity accorded to unfounded charges, rumor,

and hearsay directed against various staff and faculty members. At its worst, the situation was reminiscent of the notorious McCarthy hearings of the 1950's. Without impugning the right of a legislative committee to get at the facts, is it not equally our right in a free democracy to claim that public hearings be restricted to evidence, and that hearsay and rumor, if accepted by the committee at all, should be confined to private hearings?

The second issue is of the broadest gravity to all of us. It relates to the confidence with which university staff and faculty members can receive disclosures from the students they must counsel. It is a legal fact that teachers do not enjoy a right of privileged communication. Such rights are restricted to legal counsel and in some respects to physicians and psychological or religious counselors. Nevertheless, the proper maintenance of the role of teacher depends upon confidence and implicit trust, and confessions of illegal activity may well come to the knowledge of a university teacher or counselor. Seven members of the Stony Brook faculty, subpoenaed by the legislative committee, have thus been impelled to claim the protection of the Fifth Amendment in order to avoid testifying to confidential matters disclosed to them by students. One can scarcely blame them, although they thereby direct upon themselves the opprobrium of the community at large, which in spite of our ancient civil liberties persists in regarding a claim to the protection of the Fifth Amendment as an indication of guilt. One must therefore recognize that under present law faculty members are faced with a most serious difficulty: either they must refuse to receive confidences from students or colleagues that could lead to charges of violation of the law; or they must be prepared for a forced disclosure of these confidences before a court or legislative committee. In either case, their role as teachers and counselors is seriously constricted. If, on the other hand, they insist on adhering in full conscience to their roles as teachers and counselors, but insist also on a right of nondisclosure, the judgment with which they are faced is like that of the Athenians upon Socrates, whom they accused of debauching their youth. One must drink the hemlock.

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It was Greenberg's keen reportorial sense that, first among national journalists, identified the academic promise of the Stony Brook campus of State University of New York. Those of us who had decided earlier that something exciting might become of the place are permanently in his debt for calling the attention of the scientific community to Stony Brook in 1965, and particularly to the importance of the appointment that year of John S. Toll as president. Greenberg's article on our recent difficulties with drugs and with our environment is also perceptive in its speculations about the larger significance of events of this sort to public higher education—especially those institutions which aim to achieve quality in instruction and research.

Therefore, only the most consequential cause should move me to request use of this column to amend or extend his report. Such cause, I regret to say, exists and is made important by the direction which the subsequent assault on the university has taken: a vastly publicized campaign to paint the faculty and administration at Stony Brook as collusively indifferent to the problem of drug abuse. It is thus necessary to add these observations to Greenberg's summary of the pre-raid development of the university's countermeasures. We were not only aware that we had a problem, but were also hard at work on it. Following the arrests on the campus last spring (each of which was a result of the university's investigations), a number of new steps were taken. Every relevant office—the president, the dean of students and his staff, the housing staff, psychological services, the campus ministry, the masters and faculty associates of the residential colleges—was involved in a campaign of discussion and education aimed at sensitizing the student body to the legal, physiological, and psychological dangers of drug abuse. The freshman orientation period last fall emphasized these problems particularly, and evidently with some success since only two members of that large class were among the 29 students indicted. All elements of the university community participated last fall in a revision of the campus regulations, with special attention given to the clarification and strengthening of the rules against use of illegal drugs. Counseling services for students were extended. Training of residence assistants was intensified, with the assistance of experts in narcotics problems. Recruitment of a full-time

staff for drug abuse prevention, education, and control was completed in the week before the raid. I am unaware of another campus where a more concerted effort has been mounted.

A staple item in the police charges of university indifference to drug abuse has been the allegation that there were frequent occasions on which large groups of students "turned on" in public lounges. The fact is that the university had no information indicating any such happening prior to the raid, and careful investigation of the tidal wave of hearsay since generated has failed to reveal an instance. The basis of the police allegations has now been entered in the record through the testimony of their undercover agents before the Joint Legislative Committee on Crime. Although rich in titillating hearsay, this testimony is singularly innocent of precise, firsthand information in spite of the fact that it represents nearly 9 man-months of undercover work among the students. In attempting to support their charges, the agents were able to adduce only one incident that could live up to its advance billing, and that on very shaky grounds: a group estimated at 50, judged to be under the influence of mescaline. Since no cross-examination was allowed, it has been impossible for us to find when this occurred or to establish the witness' diagnostic competence. (The latter is an important point, because there are indications that membership in Students for a Democratic Society, use of pastel-colored lights, beards, and unusual hair styles are considered to be suggestive evidence of drug abuse.) To be sure, the agents deemed other incidents relevant, although these were not coupled to a report of public drug use. Thus, one officer described in shocked detail a party at which students appeared in most bizarre clothing. Indeed, he saw by his account one young man with his chest bare, his face painted and an outlandish hat standing next to the president, during which time the president failed to remonstrate with him. The agent elided one possibly relevant detail: this party, which we were able to identify, was a costume affair for foreign students, at which the president awarded first prize to a lad who came as an Indian. Other faculty present characterize the party as proper to the point of ennui.

The whole affair is now rapidly headed for the courts of law. While this is on issues which can only evoke

the greatest concern and distress in anyone whose memory of academic problems goes back 15 years, we at Stony Brook will at least welcome the first appearance to date of due process and the rules of evidence in public discussions of the university's problems.

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Food Radiation: Burden of Proof

In referring to two areas of research that have public health implications, Auerbach ("The chemical production of mutations," 1 Dec., p. 1141), uses the word "hazardous" in a way that should not pass unchallenged. Speaking of the evidence that irradiation of food makes it mutagenic for mice she says: "... extrapolation from mice to man is hazardous when one is dealing with slight genetical effects..." Again, discussing the inconclusive evidence of mutagenesis by caffeine, she writes: "As in the case of food sterilized with radiation, the application to human affairs is doubtful and hazardous."

What does the author mean by "hazardous"? Perhaps she means "intellectually hazardous"—which hardly raises any question of public concern. Not specifically stated, but implied surely, is the conclusion that we should not interfere with the use of either caffeine or food irradiation until we have more clear-cut proof of danger. If this is a correct inference from the word "hazardous," I think there are grounds for criticizing the practical recommendation.

Even if the scientific evidence for the two dangers is equally inconclusive, the policy recommendations should be quite different. The drinking of caffeine is already deeply embedded in our culture. Our experience with the cigarette problem indicates the difficulty of changing widespread social habits. To attack coffee at the present time would undoubtedly be in some sense socially "hazardous."

The irradiation of food is another matter. This practice is not now woven into the web of social practices, nor is it likely to be. No one *desires* irradiated food. There are merely commercial interests that believe they stand to gain financially by the development of a food-irradiation industry. It is questionable whether there is any social need