

for disagreement with them is that everybody in the study was defined as an alcoholic." The authorities—such as the NIAAA, the National Council on Alcoholism, and the American Psychiatric Association—all concur that alcoholism, as opposed to alcohol abuse, is a physical addiction marked by chronicity, increased tolerance, and withdrawal symptoms. The Rand report does not define what an alcoholic is, and, says Archer, some of the subjects could have been young men who modified their alcohol consumption as they outgrew the heaviest drinking age group, which is said to be between 18 and 25.

To those who subscribe to the conventional notion of alcoholism—which is that the only cure is abstinence—a hundred Rand studies wouldn't change their minds. Any "alcoholic" who returns to controlled drinking is, by definition, not an alcoholic. Archer says the Rand study can be compared with a study of diabetics which included people with pre-diabetic or borderline conditions. "If you said they were all the same you might well come up with the conclusion that some diabetics don't need insulin."

The principal Rand author, sociologist J. Michael Polich, says the difference with the NIAAA is a quibble over terminology which doesn't detract from the report's findings. He says all but 8 percent of the original subject population exhibited dependency symptoms, and their elimination would not have changed the outcome. He says "we are not at odds over what the data show," which is that "there is a subgroup of people admitted for treatment of alcoholism for whom the prognosis is better with controlled drinking than with abstinence."

Polich says "the existence of this group calls into question the whole theoretical basis of alcoholism treatment as currently conducted." Since some people are less likely to relapse into alcoholic drinking if they do not have to abstain altogether, there are some instances in which "insistence on a goal of abstinence can be harmful."

Despite the differences in interpretation, Archer says the NIAAA likes the study. In his view, its main contribution is an affirmation that alcoholics are better able to stay on the wagon if they have some kind of community support system. (The researchers found the treatment histories of alcoholics too erratic and varied to evaluate but they concluded that treatment is better than no treatment.) Archer says the report also helps "substantiate the value of AA [Al-

coholics Anonymous]" and could bolster efforts to establish closer ties between treatment centers and AA. This, he acknowledged, may sound like an obvious thing to do, but not everybody thinks AA is great. Behavioral psychologists, for example, who contend that all behavior, including alcoholic behavior, is learned, have an aversion to the AA philosophy which implicitly relieves an alcoholic of some responsibility for his condition by flatly insisting that alcoholism is a "disease" and accepting anyone's self-definition as an "alcoholic."

The Rand study is probably the most complete picture yet produced of the "natural history" of problem drinkers who have contacted treatment facilities. As such, it provides impressive confirmation of the chronicity and relative intractability of alcoholism. Over the entire 4-year period, 84 percent of the subjects experienced significant alcohol-related problems. So the likelihood is that many of the 46 percent judged problem-free at the time of the study could relapse into alcoholic behavior. So difficult is it to alter the alcoholic condition that the authors conclude "it is the subject's initial characteristics rather than the treatment he receives that exercise the greatest influence on the course of alcoholism."

One noteworthy finding by the Rand group was that even among the subjects who managed long-term abstinence or control of their drinking, other indicators of well-being did not significantly improve. That is, there was still a high rate of unemployment, failure to establish enduring marriage or love relationships, anxiety, and depression. Says the report, "alcohol consumption is only one factor in a large number of behavioral problems that typically manifest themselves in alcoholism," which may mean that for most alcoholics, kicking the bottle is only the beginning.

Although the controversy over controlled drinking versus abstinence is still very much alive, Polich believes more people are beginning to question the conventional belief that "alcoholism is a monolith and there is only one right treatment." After the 1976 report "some people said we should not even discuss the idea because it will encourage people to go back to drinking." Now the reaction to the idea of controlled drinking is more muted. Besides, relates Polich, some Boston University researchers did a survey of local alcoholics after the 1976 report, and not one of them blamed the Rand report for his return to the bottle.—CONSTANCE HOLDEN

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## Citizens Update

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The new political party for which ecologist Barry Commoner is the most visible spokesman, and presumptive front-running presidential candidate, is alive and kicking. The Citizens Party was launched last August as a rallying point for those who feel the Republicans and Democrats have conspicuously failed to address issues related to corporate power, inflation, and energy (that is, conservation and development of renewable sources). Among prominent figures in the movement are Georgia politician Julian Bond, renegade Steelworkers Union leader Ed Sadlowski, and writer Studs Terkel.

Party machinery is now grinding into gear. Headquarters have been established in downtown Washington, run by Bert DeLeeuw, who is a former field coordinator for Fred Harris's 1976 presidential campaign and founder of something called the Movement for Economic Justice. DeLeeuw says the party now has several thousand members, who have contributed \$18 apiece, and it is hoped they will number 10,000 by the time the party holds its convention in Cleveland next April. The party has branches in 32 states and is now working on the petitions that are necessary to get it listed on the presidential ballot in all 50 states. The entrance of Senator Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) into the race has probably damped recruitment efforts to some extent, but after the Democratic nominating convention, says DeLeeuw optimistically, "we'll be there."

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## Decision on Aspartame Due This Year

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Next summer may see government approval of a new artificial sweetener, Aspartame, which has been patiently waiting in the wings for 6 years to take up the banner from the fallen cyclamate and disgraced saccharin.

Aspartame's manufacturer, G. D. Searle & Co., has been trying to get the product on the market since 1974, when it was briefly approved by the