

By Daniel Lazare

NEW YORK

ON A RECENT SATURDAY, 2,500 PEOPLE gathered in Washington Square Park in Greenwich Village to listen to music and speeches and, in a few instances, to light up joints. However, instead of heading for the nearest doughnut stand—the usual denouement for smoke-ins in the '60s—the crowd then marched five miles uptown to the very different political landscape of East Harlem.

There, while a reggae band played and curious residents leaned out their windows, speaker after speaker accused Rep. Charles Rangel (D-NY), the hard-line chairman of the House subcommittee on narcotics, of making the drug problem worse. By waging a high-tech war against an array of illegal substances, Rangel and others in the federal government have succeeded in putting a serious dent in the marijuana trade. But instead of reducing drugs generally, their efforts have backfired by opening up a vast new market for ultraprofitable substances that are more potent and portable. As a result, whereas marijuana was once cheap while cocaine was reserved for swank Hollywood parties, today, after close to two decades of stepped-up border interdiction, the relationship has reversed. Marijuana prices have soared, while the ultracheap, ultrapotent cocaine derivative known as crack has emerged as the drug of choice of the urban underclass.

"Pot is the only thing that works against crack," said Dana Beal, a stalwart of the '60s Yippies who is now the prime force behind the Coalition for 100-Percent Drug Reform, the organizer of the Aug. 26 rally. "It competes head-to-head with it on the street. A fair number of people have completely quit coke because they've gone back to pot, while others have quit pot because they've gone back to coke."

Unfortunately, Beal adds, due to the inverted price ratio, a mild intoxicant like marijuana is steadily losing on the retail level.

As Beal and other drug activists point out, marijuana provides an interesting perspective for viewing the efforts of federal anti-drug warriors over the last 20 years. Despite official disapproval, marijuana's fortunes back in the comparatively mellow '70s seemed unstoppable. As former radicals made their way into the mainstream, it seemed that their favorite recreational drug would as well. Grass was cheap and safe, and therefore a growing segment of the population seemed to believe that it should be as freely available as beer. Eleven states decriminalized simple possession, while one—Alaska—legalized cultivation for personal use. The idea seemed to be gaining ground at the federal level as well. Jimmy Carter indicated support, while a decriminalization bill introduced by the late Sen. Jacob Javits and a once-liberal congressman from New York named Ed Koch got as far as legislative hearings. NORML—the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws—reached a peak of 20,000 members.

Noxious weed: Then came the Big Chill. While Carter White House drug adviser Dr. Peter Bourne was advocating decriminalization and Hamilton Jordan was rumored to be snorting coke, plans were underway for a major U.S.-sponsored eradication effort in Mexico using the notorious herbicide called

The drug trade obeys the laws of commerce



paraquat. It was an example of political incoherence all too typical of the Carter administration. The fear of being poisoned by paraquat residue on their weed sent a shiver through the ranks of pot smokers and put a crimp on Mexican exports. But instead of eliminating the trade, it shifted it south to Colombia. Since Colombia was also a traditional processing and distribution center for coca paste from the Andes, newly glamorous cocaine began finding its way north alongside bales of Colombian Gold.

Thus the pattern was set. Instead of beating back drugs, the feds wound up distorting the market. In 1981, the Reagan administration, which regarded drugs as one element in a vast narco-terrorist-commie conspiracy to undermine the West, organized something called the South Florida Task Force to halt the flow of marijuana into places like the Everglades. Vice President Bush was placed

in charge, while Associate Attorney General Rudolph Giuliani—who would later advise an interviewer, "Talk to drug addicts and they will tell you they started with marijuana"—was given control of operations. Although skeptics joked that the task

In today's market, the most potent and dangerous drugs, like crack, have become the cheapest, while the least harmful, like marijuana, have vastly increased in price.

force specialized mainly in churning out press releases, it was actually highly effective. Interdiction, backed up by high-speed Coast Guard interception boats, high-tech radar, etc., worked. The drone of marijuana planes in remote areas ceased. Four years later, the Reagan administration launched a domestic eradication effort in areas like California's Humboldt County with similar results. Marijuana cultivation, at least outdoors, dropped significantly.

The results were soon apparent on the drug market. "Bud Bogart," as the author of *High Times* magazine's highly touted price quotes in the late '70s and early '80 was known, recently estimated that the wholesale price of medium-grade marijuana rose from \$90 to \$175 per pound in 1968-70 to \$1,100 to \$1,400 today, an increase of upwards of 200 percent even when inflation is taken into account. On the retail level, the increase was even more pronounced—from \$20 an ounce to upwards of \$200. Cocaine prices, on the other hand, followed a reverse trajectory, plummeting from approximately \$50,000 a kilo in the late '70s to \$10,000 today. By radically enhancing the mind-altering qualities of coke, crack brought prices down even more. Today, a vial of crack retails for about \$5, which is approximately the same as a loose joint. Yet there is no doubt as to which delivers more bang for the buck, which is why crack consistently beats out marijuana in street-corner sales.

Keeping up with the Joneses: "Prices used to reflect the dangers," observed Bud Bogart. "Heroin and cocaine used to be very expensive, while the cheapest thing was always pot. If you wanted to have an expensive jones, you had to have the money to pay for it. It was like a stairway where if you stayed on the lowest level, you knew you'd be all right. There was a kind of built-in protection."

In today's distorted market, however, drug prices are sending the opposite signals. The more dangerous and potent substances are also the most attractively priced. The reason is bound up in the economics of drug importation. As interdiction has grown more and more sophisticated in the '80s, smugglers' costs have risen, which is why they've been forced to recoup by switching to compact, odorless, ultraprofitable cocaine. Instead of messing with mother ships, cigarette boats, and bales of herb, they long ago realized that they could make far more money from a single suitcase filled with cocaine. By comparison, marijuana has become as profitable as beer during Prohibition.

Indeed, in this respect as in so many others, the '80s are the '20s redux. Anti-drug prohibition is fostering a binge-style consumption and a tendency toward ever-more-potent intoxicants, just as it did when the target was booze. The story is the same; the only things that have changed are the names of the controlled substances.

Prior to 1920, for instance, the U.S. was primarily a beer-drinking nation. Distilled spirits were drunk, of course, but usually straight, which for most people acted as a brake on consumption. With Prohibition, however, habits quickly changed. The highly potent cocktail, previously the exclusive province of the fashionable set, found its way into the middle class as well. One reason was that it was chic, but another was its usefulness in masking the taste of incredibly

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INSHORT

By Joel Bleifuss

Patriotic predators

Lee and Carleen Bach first attracted public attention for a three-by-five-foot nylon flag, whipping in the wind at the top of a 30-foot pole at their home in Las Cruces, N.M. Their next-door neighbors objected not to the Bachs' patriotic fervor but to the flap, flap, flap outside their windows. Joe Smith of the *Las Cruces Bulletin* reports that despite help from a local bank that set up a Bach defense fund, support from a vigil of flag-waving pro-Bach demonstrators and the advice of the right-wing Washington [D.C.] Legal Foundation, Lee Bach was convicted on June 21 of violating a city noise ordinance. So he switched to a cotton flag, which didn't snap as smartly as the nylon version, and the charges were dismissed. After the dismissal, the Navy veteran said he would probably go back to flying a nylon flag. To him, the flag noises are the "sounds of freedom." But fervent public support for the couple vanished after charges surfaced that the Bachs had conned \$160,000 out of an 89-year-old woman whom Carleen had met through her job at the local Social Security Administration. Three weeks before Lee's June conviction the court-appointed attorney for Julia Peterson brought suit against the Bachs. After the suit was filed, Peterson was admitted to the hospital for dehydration, where she soon died. There is no evidence of foul play in her death, but the last time the Bachs were seen with their elderly charge, they were in the hospital force-feeding the struggling woman with a syringe. That syringe contained chicken broth, according to the Bachs' attorney, Norman Todd, who lives in a house the Bachs inherited in 1981 from another elderly woman Carleen had befriended.

Show me a legal morass

Missouri law says life begins at the moment of conception, and that's okay with the U.S. Supreme Court. But as Peter Wilson and Mary Nick-Bisgaard predicted in the August 2 issue of *In These Times*, the Missouri statute is raising some interesting legal dilemmas. On August 6, Lovetta Farrar of the Chillicothe (Mo.) Correctional Center sued the state for illegally imprisoning her five-month-old fetus without a trial. "If life begins at conception, then fetuses are supposed to be like anyone else—they're a person and they have constitutional rights," says Farrar's lawyer, Michael Box. And in Columbia, Mo., 20-year-old Bryan Rosner is trying to convince the courts that according to Missouri law he is actually nine months older than the date on his drivers license and thus cannot be charged with underage drinking.

Lip service

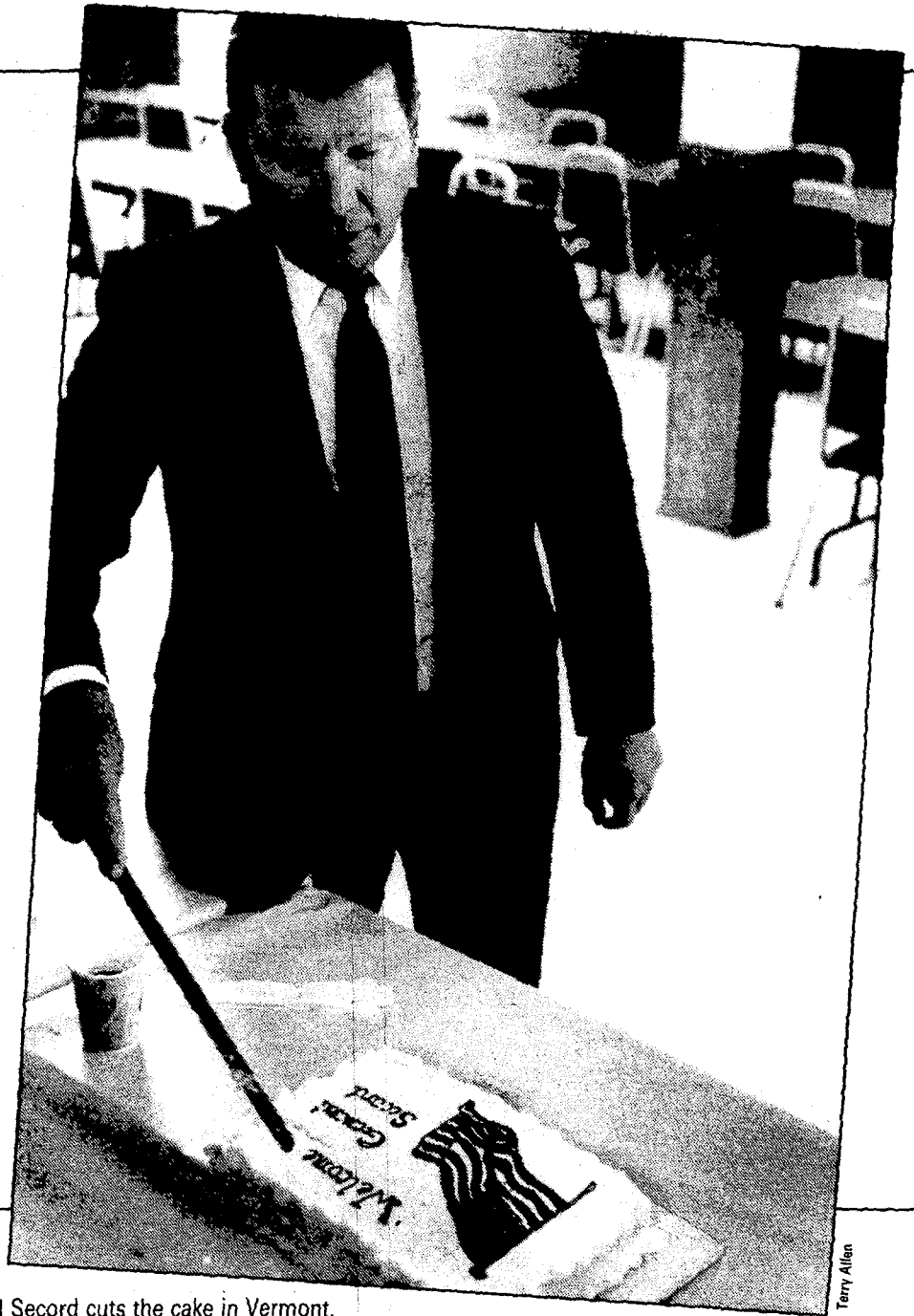
Imagine you had a dollar for every time a member of Congress has uttered the word "education" in the past year. You would be rich. But for many representatives, concern for education stops at their campaign coffer. The current *Common Cause Magazine* reports the following quote from John F. Jennings, staff director for the House elementary, secondary and vocational educational subcommittee: "We've had vacancies on our committees for years, and we've had to accept temporary members. Part of the reason is that members go to committees where they can get more PAC money."

Better a hen than a cock

According to Dallas Police Department policy, if you want to be a cop in Dallas you "must not admit [to] nor have engaged in deviate sexual intercourse [or] sexual contact with a member of the same sex since age 15 ... [or] with any animal or fowl since age 17." The Dallas Gay Alliance obtained a copy of the hiring policies after the department rejected a lesbian's application for a job on the force. Rex Wockner reports that members of the Dallas Gay Alliance are livid. The whole thing is "just sick," says activist John Thomas. "Texas is predominantly a rural state, and Texans are predominantly ignorant about sexual relationships. So they really are more comfortable with the idea of sex with animals and fowl than with their own sexual desires for someone of the same sex." According to alliance president William Waybourn, "It's obviously an accommodation to all the farm boys in Texas."

Art attack

On August 26 artists rallied in New York, Los Angeles and Chicago to raise public awareness about current congressional attacks on the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), including funding cuts for the NEA's visual arts program and an amendment



General Secord cuts the cake in Vermont.

On the road with Richard Secord

CANAAN, VT.—Iran-contra defendant Gen. Richard Secord kicked off a national tour to raise money for his defense on August 21 at the American Legion Hall in this tiny town in the remote northeast corner of the state. He was invited to try out his road show by two buddies from West Point who live nearby.

Only about 50 people, mostly elderly legionnaires and their spouses, were in the hall, which could have held three times that number. "I came an hour early so I'd be sure to get a seat," said one disappointed supporter of the general. Another fan, Ann Hutchens, came from neighboring New Hampshire. "I like Oliver North and I like Secord, and I blame [Massachusetts Rep. Edward] Boland for everything," she said, referring to the congressman who sponsored the legislation that Secord allegedly helped violate while aiding the Nicaraguan rebels. Asked if she thought the U.S. should overthrow Nicaragua, she answered, "No, I wouldn't go that far. After all, they gave the contras a haven."

One man who worked in the hall was not surprised by the low turnout, despite extensive publicity: "People hereabouts," he said, "don't give a rat's ass for Richard Secord."

The event began with a salute to the flag and an impassioned rendering of "God Bless America." Flanked by plastic flowers and the flag, Sec-

ord described the world as a Cold War battlefield in which good and evil are palpable entities. "At the end of World War II we were the only superpower," he said. "We could have had an empire if we wanted one. [Instead] we were magnanimous to the victims who are now our opponents in the economic sense and to our war-torn allies who were basket cases."

Throughout the postwar period, the real protector of U.S. security against the Soviet menace, said Secord, has been "the CIA [which] was decimated for no good reason ... [and] had its hands tied by endless bureaucratic rules and [congressional] oversight."

The internal enemy of U.S. preeminence, he said, is the "increasing power" of the Senate. "The founding fathers had no idea Congress would be asserting rights to manage foreign policy and national security. If we don't get our act together," he warned, "the U.S. is in danger of becoming a third-rate power real soon.... The world is laughing at us all because we have a Congress blindly intent on getting more and more power."

Secord presented a picture of himself as an isolated patriot, who, not unlike the U.S. itself, has only tried to do good, and has been knifed in the back by the ungrateful recipients of his services. Like North, Secord feels unjustly "pursued" by the special prosecutor's office, which has charged him with providing illegal

gratuities to Oliver North and lying to Congress. The special prosecutor's office is "unconstitutional," a "first-class monster," he said, calling the prosecutors "hired guns and vigilantes who ride in and do the job of the president."

"I thought Reagan would go to bat for me," he said bitterly. "That was naive, wasn't it?" He was unremorseful and defiant about his role in the Iran-contra scandal, blaming Congress, which, he said, "forced" North and his associates to save the U.S. from "the mortal threat of Nicaragua ... [a country that] is Soviet-dominated and -supported from A to Z."

"Fighting with surrogates was a tool taken away from us, so we started covert actions," he said. Now that the tool of covert action has also been blunted, Secord is "pessimistic" about Nicaragua. Although he did not advocate a U.S. invasion for fear that Washington would be accused of gunboat diplomacy, he noted several times that the only way left to win Nicaragua and excise "the cancer" is with "an invasion like Grenada" of U.S. troops.

In an interview after his speech, Secord denied that the U.S. is duty-bound to respect the outcome of the upcoming elections if the Sandinistas win. "Why are we duty-bound? I don't know any laws that say that [we can't intervene]. If that nation presents a clear threat to our interests, I don't see anything like that in international law."

Secord gave the examples of "suc-