

Stall should end on marijuana-law reform

For those who still harbor the illusion that Oregon stands on the forefront of enlightened treatment of marijuana use, some recent developments provide a much-needed perspective.

The Lane County Public Defender's Office has challenged a new state law that, among other things, provides a more severe penalty for growing marijuana than the manufacture of amphetamines or barbituates.

A circuit court case here involving an alleged pot-growing, processing and packing operation near Veneta provided the occasion for the public defender's legal motion.

The constitutional challenge revolves around inclusion of marijuana, for purposes of determining penalties, in the same category as opiates such as heroin and hallucinogens such as LSD. Based on a new federal law with a "schedule" of drugs based on their (presumed) relative danger, the Oregon law thus labels pot as a drug with a "very high hazard potential."

Now that's a step backwards. It's time we got started in the right direction again.

In 1973, Oregon set one of those national precedents for which it once was somewhat infamous: It instituted non-criminal fines for the possession of less than an ounce of the notorious weed. Criminal penalties remained in-

tact for growing, selling, transporting, giving away or doing almost anything with marijuana besides smoking it alone in private.

At the time, dopesters and non-smoking citizens, who objected to the law agencies' senseless preoccupation of suppressing a minor indiscretion, hailed the reform as the first step on the path toward outright legalization of marijuana.

The patent contradiction of maintaining criminal penalties for growing and selling this drug, the consumption of which had become non-criminally permissible, was seen as a temporary incongruity. They believed the law's inconsistency would disappear as soon as Oregonians realized "decriminalization" would not bring on a horrid outbreak of social ills.

As it turned out, they were wrong.

The social ills did not appear, but state Legislatures since 1973 have rejected proposals to permit cultivation or nonprofit transfer of marijuana.

Since July of this year, when the state adopted the federal schedule, Oregon has actually reverted to the "killer weed" mentality fostered since the 1920s by marijuana's more alarmist critics.

Meanwhile, other jurisdictions have passed us in liberalizing legal attitudes toward marijuana. Many modeled their

laws after Oregon, creating thereby more of the ambiguous "decriminalized Wonderlands" in which marijuana became minimally illegal but never entirely legal.

Only Alaska, has granted complete legitimacy for personal cultivation and use of marijuana. That state's supreme court accomplished this reform through a broad interpretation of a "right to privacy" guaranteed by the Alaskan constitution.

For Oregon, the 1973 law, rather than being the beginning of something big, can be seen as the end of something rather small, even petty.

Instead of becoming the initial phase of reasonable statutory treatment of marijuana, the 1973 "breakthrough" represents—in retrospect—a shallow political gambit designed to defuse a popular social movement.

Reports issued in 1972 and 1973 by the National Commission on Marijuana and Drug Abuse said no evidence existed that marijuana causes physical or mental problems.

A similar Canadian commission reported that the drug—even if used routinely for years—doesn't cause criminal or violent behavior, is non-addictive and presents no risk of death from overdose.

These reports, the long standstill in humanizing Oregon's marijuana laws

and the Lane County court case indicate the need for a renewed campaign for legalization. A mere tinkering with the penalties for marijuana cultivation and sales begs the question of marijuana's relative harmlessness and its hypocritical treatment by the government.

Most states reap large revenues from their regulation—and implicit endorsement—of liquor sales. Yet alcohol remains causally linked to thousands of deaths in traffic accidents and physical illnesses every year.

The federal government not only includes tobacco products in its international Food For Peace Program but subsidizes tobacco cultivation in this country. Yet, cigarette smoking annually causes thousands of deaths from heart disease and various cancers.

Marijuana presents a negligible health or social hazard, but its producers and consumers are heavily censured while their politically powerful counterparts in the liquor and tobacco industries are actually encouraged.

These absurd inequities have gone on long enough.

The Oregon Legislature begins its 1979 session in a matter of weeks. Lane County's representatives should be told that the freeze on marijuana-law reform must end.

Who says so?

Those of us who still remember the 1978 gubernatorial campaign in Oregon probably recall an uncertainty about what election of Sen. Victor Atiyeh would bring.

In a classic scramble for the political mainstream, Atiyeh and quite a few other candidates watered down history of conservative predilections.

One's choice of friends, however, often provides an important clue to intentions, we believe. And some of Atiyeh's friends seem to be coming out of the woodwork, now that he's in line to take over the governor's job.

One of these friends turns out to be Vincent de Poix, the president of Teledyne Wah Chang, the profitable heavy-metals' plant that helped turn Albany into the cesspool of Oregon.

De Poix clearly understands that whoever has access to the governor also has a pipeline to whomever Atiyeh appoints as head of the state Department of Environmental Quality.

Teledyne Wah Chang and other of Albany's notorious polluters have been in a running battle with the DEQ for years. Now that a new man is in the top spot, they obviously think an armistice may be at hand.

De Poix joins a cadre of wood-products industrialists who backed Atiyeh because they didn't like Gov. Bob Straub's positions on wilderness areas and herbicide use in forests.

Our venerable conclusion: With friends like them, who needs enemies?

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YOURS

Un-Greek unclear

Although the article in the Emerald entitled "The Un-Greek" (Nov. ODE) was generally well-written, and the reporter stuck closely to his facts, I must point out that I was quoted slightly out of context.

The quote beginning "It's sort of a secret club mentality..." was made in response to a question on our feelings on secret initiation ceremonies with hazing. Such initiation ceremonies are condemned by all houses on this campus, and are not allowed to be a part of the Greek system at Oregon by Interfraternity Council rules.

Alpha Delta Upsilon Oregon agrees with, supports, and follows these rules.

I would like at this point to apologize to those persons who have taken offense at the quote, placed as it was in connection with a discussion of secrecy as a whole. A.D.U. Oregon feels that secrecy per se does not connote immaturity in people who accept it

as their way, just when that secrecy is combined with humiliation or mental and physical distress for prospective members of a secret organization.

We feel, of course, that non-secrecy is better for us and for numerous other people on this campus, but this does not imply a condemnation of secrecy as a

concept.

Once again, I wish to thank the Emerald for its fair and honest reporting on our organization, and on the other subjects your fine newspaper covers.

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sophomore, history-theater
Monday, November 20, 1978