

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

ATW-6

Symmetry

Buenaventura
Colombia

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Mr. Richard H. Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
535 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10017
U.S.A.

Dear Mr. Nolte:

In the Great American Drug Controversy the opposing sides behave in remarkably similar ways. The foibles of Feds symmetrically mimic the foibles of Heads. I would like to submit as an illustration of this general thesis the accompanying advertisement clipped from the April, 1972 issue of Playboy. (I bought the magazine in this steamy Pacific port while waiting for my Landrover to arrive on a ship from Panamá.)

One of the commonest allegations by foes of illegal psychoactive drugs is that their purveyors -- those dastardly pushers we hear so much about -- lure hapless innocents to lives more and more immersed in worse and worse drug habits. I am perfectly prepared to believe that such is the case in some instances, although I have little direct evidence of it. Any estimate of its frequency would be an unfounded guess. More interesting than the relative truth or falsity of the stereotype of the Dope Pusher is its demonstrable applicability to the other side. That is, pushers of legal psychoactive drugs conform to the same stereotype. Again, I have no basis to estimate how often.

In this advertisement from Playboy the United States Tobacco Company urges people to enjoy (that is, use) tobacco in "an old way": by putting it in contact with the oral mucosa instead of inhaling the combustion products. The ad cites the use of snuff "as far back as the 16th century." In fact, oral use of tobacco goes back to the prehistory of the American tropics, where indigenous tribes have long used tobacco both as a snuff and a masticatory. Some of these tribes (in Mexico, for instance) have used the leaves of the species Nicotiana rustica, a plant stronger in its psychopharmacological effects because it contains more of the same alkaloids that occur in the tamer species Nicotiana tabacum. N. tabacum is the raw material used today by all manufacturers of com-

Introducing an old way to enjoy tobacco.

If you're one of the millions who like to smoke, chances are you think that smoking is the only way to really enjoy tobacco.

Well, we have news for you:

There's more than one way to enjoy the pleasures of the tobacco leaf.

As a matter of fact, people have been partaking of these pleasures in ways that have nothing to do with smoking for hundreds of years.

Satisfying the aristocrats:

Take the aristocracy in England.

As far back as the 16th century, they considered it a mark of distinction—as well as a source of great satisfaction—to use finely-cut, finely-ground tobacco with the quaint-sounding name of “snuff”. At first, this “snuff” was, as the name suggests, inhaled through the nose.

Just a pinch:

Later on, the vogue of sniffing gave way to an even more pleasurable form of using tobacco—placing just a pinch in the mouth between cheek and gum and letting it rest there.

Now, hundreds of years later, this form of tobacco is having the biggest growth in popularity since the days of Napoleon.

And what we call “smokeless tobacco” is becoming a favorite way of enjoying tobacco with Americans from all walks of life.

Anything but obvious:

Why is “smokeless tobacco” becoming so popular in America?

There are a number of reasons.

One of the obvious ones is that it is a way of enjoying tobacco that is anything but obvious.

In other words, you can enjoy it any of the times or places where smoking is not permitted.

Thus, lawyers and judges who cannot smoke in the courtroom, scientists who cannot smoke in the



laboratory, and many people who like to smoke on the job, but aren't allowed to, often become enthusiastic users.

In the same way, people who work or play with their hands get the comfort of tobacco—but don't have to strike a match or worry about how to hold (or where to put) their cigarette, cigar, or pipe.

The big four:

The four best-known, best-liked brands of “smokeless tobacco” are “Copenhagen”, “Skoal” and the two flavors of “Happy Days”.

All four are made by the United States Tobacco Company, but each has a distinctive flavor and personality. (To make sure that distinctive

flavor is as fresh as it should be when you buy it, all cans are dated on the bottom.)

Copenhagen, the biggest-selling brand in the world, has the rich flavor of pure tobacco. Skoal is wintergreen-flavored. And Happy Days comes in either raspberry or mint flavor—so it's especially popular with beginners.

But if “smokeless tobacco” has many advantages for lovers of tobacco, we must also admit it has one disadvantage.

How to use it:

It takes a little more time and practice to learn exactly how much to use (a “tiny pinch” is the best way to describe it) and exactly how to use it.

To get over that minor problem, we'll be happy to send you a free booklet that explains how to get the full enjoyment of “smokeless tobacco”—as well as a few pinches that you can try for yourself.

(Write to “Smokeless Tobacco”, United States Tobacco Company, Dept. P11, Greenwich, Connecticut 06830.)

Once you get the knack, you'll find you have something else, too: Another great way to enjoy tobacco.



Smokeless Tobacco. A pinch is all it takes.

mercial tobacco products.

These Indians have long known tobacco -- both species -- as a strong intoxicant. It violently affects the autonomic nervous system and thereby the action of many end organs, notably the heart and blood vessels. Directly or indirectly, it also alters brain and mental function, not often in a predictable way. Pharmacologists rightly classify tobacco as a powerful toxin. It is a member of the Nightshade family (the Solanaceae) -- a plant group abundant in poisonous alkaloids⁹ with conspicuous effects on the human nervous system. Despite great toxicity, plants in this family have been used to induce altered states of consciousness by peoples in diverse parts of the world.

A simple cold-water infusion of tobacco is an effective natural insecticide, as anyone can verify in his own garden. (The N. rustica that is cultivated in North America today is grown as an insecticide.) Sudden human deaths have occurred from the use of small amounts of such infusions as enemas in home remedies. And nicotine in pure form is a deadly poison that kills by overstimulation in doses quite easy to achieve. (There is enough of it in a single cigar, for example, to do in more than one person.)

Why, then, do smokers not experience these toxic effects? There are two reasons. First, like all regular drug takers, they become tolerant, and tolerance to nicotine is of rapid occurrence. A first-time user of cigarettes may turn successively pale, cold, sweaty, ashen, and drastically sick. Similarly, the psychic stimulation, or high, that tobacco can provide is much more prominent when use of the drug is spaced out -- say to every other day or once a week. Secondly, and more importantly, smokers smoke it, and smoking destroys the greatest fraction of nicotine in the natural leaf. (Probably, other constituents that play roles in the psychoactivity of whole tobacco are also destroyed or converted to inactive derivatives by the heat of combustion.) The point is that one can get more of a jolt out of a dose of tobacco applied to the oral or nasal mucosa than he can get from tobacco derivatives inhaled as smoke.

Physicians are all aware of the efficacy of administer-

⁹Alkaloids are a chemically-defined class of nitrogen-containing compounds of plant origin that are feebly alkaline in solution. Many of them are pharmacologically active in animals, some so much so that they are toxic in ordinary doses. Their names end in "-ine," (nicotine, morphine, mescaline, strychnine, etc.). Quite often, they seem to have no purpose in the plants that make them and may simply be by-products of plant metabolism.

ing drugs by putting them in the nose, under the tongue, or between the gum and cheek. If a drug lends itself to absorption in these areas, it is absorbed very rapidly into rich networks of blood vessels. The psychoactive constituents of tobacco lend themselves well to this sort of absorption. Thus a tolerant smoker can once again feel the effects of tobacco if he lets an infusion of the whole leaf seep into his bloodstream instead of taking the combustion products into his lungs.⁹

Habitual use of whole tobacco as an application to the oral mucosa is not a good practice. The recommendation of it as an addition to an ongoing smoking habit is a direct solicitation to deeper involvement with a dangerous drug in a worse way. Recommendation of it for novice users is pushing as shameless as any practiced by vendors of marihuana or narcotics, especially when the products are flavored to minimize the natural distaste most people have for tobacco on first trying it orally. The reader will have no difficulty identifying these suggestions and others in the copy used by the United States Tobacco Company to "promote" its Smokeless Tobacco.

If we are to make any headway in solving our drug problems, I think we have to watch out for what we do not call drugs as well as for what we do. The Drug Problem is much larger than growing use of marihuana, hallucinogens, narcotics, and other illegal drugs. It involves no less than our broadest conceptions and our power to shape reality by defining it one way or another. "Pro-" and "anti-drug" forces accuse each other of many low practices. And in a curiously symmetrical fashion, both are partly right and both are partly wrong.

Sincerely yours,



Andrew T. Weil

Received in New York on May 5, 1972

⁹In so doing, he would also eliminate the risk of lung disease associated with smoking but would increase the likelihood of developing an oral cancer.