

RADIO FREE EUROPE *Research*

COMMUNIST AREA

USSR: Agriculture
Culture
Law

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A SOVIET NARCOTICS PROBLEM: (POTHEADS?)

At a time when militant groups in several western countries are advocating lifting the legal restrictions on the use of marijuana, the potters of Russia are in for a cool time of curtailment.

In a recent decision the Plenum of the USSR Supreme Court reaffirmed that the production and distribution of narcotic, spasm-producing and toxic substances was illegal and called upon lower courts to pay special attention to intensifying the struggle against crimes threatening the life and health of citizens. The main stress of the decree was directed at users and dealers of illegal narcotics and the "particular danger these persons present to society."¹ In substance, the growing and cultivation of plants used for illegal narcotics were clearly prohibited.

It so happens that marijuana, the most popular of the current narcotics, comes from the hemp plant Cannabis sativa, which unlike Khrushchev's corn, grows luxuriantly in Russia, particularly in the densely populated urban areas in the northwest where the demand is localized. The drug comes in resinous form from the dried flowers and tops of the hemp plant. The plants grow in most any soil but prefer moist, cool climates; they often reach a height of six feet.

While the source of Russia's hard narcotics -- heroin and morphine -- is China the very profusion of the hemp plant makes for an easy source of supply. But hemp, like vodka, comes in different qualities: superior, sredny and awful. The best comes from the cultivated variety, not the wild steppe type. Here the industry is exclusively in the hands of the collective farms and private plots --

1) Sovetskaya Yustitsiya, No. 9, 1966, pp 29-30.

the state farms disdain raising hemp as too labor-demanding and unmechanizable.

Thus, the source of pot in Russia, the plant of dissent, the symbol of revolt, lies in the fields of the kolkhozy and the private plots of the collective farmers and employees. Whether the vogue is as widespread as in some cities of the West, is not clearly established from Soviet sources.

However, the timing of the USSR Supreme Court decision on narcotics, and the context of the document, reflects the Kremlin's concern over the increase in the use of narcotics and the need for further legal restraints in the production and distribution of the more readily available forms of narcotics.

Nature blessed Mother Russia with the largest area of cultivated hemp in the world besides untold stretches of the weedy variety in its forests and steppes. If the current pot craze becomes the fashion in the USSR, as the Supreme Court decision seems to infer, it would not be the only phenomenon of culture shock imported from the West. For the potential potters, the permissiveness of nature may well thwart the legal restraints of the state.

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While the source of Russia's hard narcotics -- heroin and morphine -- is China the very production of the hemp plant makes for an easy source of supply. But hemp, like wheat, comes in different qualities: superior, average and awful. The best comes from the cultivated variety -- not the wild steppe type. Here the industry is exclusive -- in the hands of the collective farms and private plots.