USA

The Drug Scene

ROBERT CLANCY

NEW YORK'S Governor Rockefeller made a stir when he proposed life-imprisonment with no parole for pushers of illicit drugs. While there was strong criticism of this proposal, opinion polls indicate that the majority of the people - not only in New York but throughout the US - agree with this measure.

Such a reaction is in line with the concern of most Americans about crime, which is regarded as today's Number One problem. Drugs are closely associated with crime, so no wonder there is much agreement with the Governor. Whether he was playing to the gallery or thought he really had something, he touched a responsive chord.

Yet it must be noted that this Draconian proposal was an about-face from Rockefeller's previous sponsorship of an elaborate rehabilitation programme for drug addicts. This programme, costing many millions of dollars, was a dismal failure, and it looks as though the present stance is a reaction of angry frustration.

Rockefeller and his supporters brush aside objections as to the cost of his punitive measure with rhetoric about the cost to society of *not* putting drug pushers in prison. Yet the costs cannot be so readily dismissed. Those acquainted with the legal and penal systems point out that already courts and prisons are overburdened and cannot handle even the present load without more funds.

Indeed every new proposal, as well as every drug programme now in effect, involves costs that are staggering and unrealistic. For example, a methadone maintenance and rehabilitation programme for heroin addicts - with uncertain results - costs thousands of dollars per year per addict.

The common cry for more police is another thoughtless reaction. In addition to the cost to the taxpayer, extra police would probably create extra problems. Big money is involved in the drug traffic and pay-offs to policemen are already notorious. Nearly $100 million of heroin, captured by New York police in the famous "French connection" case, and stored in various police stations, has been stolen and every indication points to an inside job.

Elaborate and expensive law enforcement on federal, state and local levels occasionally cracks open a drug ring. But for every connection or pusher put out of business there are more to step into the ranks - for the illicit drug traffic has a world-wide and well-organized set-up. The street pusher upon whom the wrath of Rockefeller and company is vented is the last and lowliest link in a vast and powerful chain. The pusher is usually a victimized addict himself.

Even drug education has been a failure. The effort to tell young people about drugs has produced ludicrous "scare" films and programmes. Besides arousing laughter, they also arouse curiosity about drugs, thus leading to more not less drug abuse.

What then can be done? The answer - disarmingly simple - was offered by a letter-writer to *Time* magazine who said that the drug problem is not that drugs are supplied but that people want to take them.

That's it of course - as long as there is a demand there is bound to be a supply - but it is no doubt too simple and basic for politicians who are seldom philosophers. If people stopped wanting to take drugs, the whole problem, the whole crime syndicate, would vanish overnight without costing society a penny. It would be pertinent, therefore, to inquire into why so many people are taking drugs.

A comprehensive study[1] was undertaken by the Ford Foundation on the subject of drugs, and among its findings are the following:

Most illicit drugs do not do as much physical harm as is supposed. (Excessive consumption of anything can cause harm; and the psychological state of the drug user must also be considered.) Indeed, the social costs in terms of crime and punishment are far greater.

The very fact of illegality makes illicit drugs attractive (as was alcohol during Prohibition days). Part of the reason too is the youth revolt. Peer pressures among young people are very strong, and interestingly there is currently a swing away from heroin amongst them - not because of law enforcement or "education" but because young people have found that it produces too many "bad trips" and peer pressure is inducing other youngsters to switch to less harmful drugs.

The Ford Foundation report also conjectures that the desire for "consciousness-expanding" experiences, far from being abnormal, is a universal trait in mankind which our culture does not provide for or encourage and even discourages, thus paving the way to the underground method of drugs.

Disillusion with the American Dream also has much to do with the escape into the fantasy land of drugs. The well-to-do take drugs as a relief from the tensions and pressures of modern living. But the highest inci-

[1] *Dealing with Drug Abuse*, a report to the Ford Foundation by the Drug Abuse Survey Project, Praeger Publishers, 1972.

dence of drug abuse is in slums and poverty-ridden urban areas, especially among depressed minorities such as Negroes and Puerto Ricans as well as disaffected youths and "drop-outs" from society. It would appear to be a substitute for the good life which is denied them - a substitute which turns out to be expensive because illegal and so leads to crime.

The matter of legalizing drugs in America, as in Britain[2], is from time to time broached (though drug abuse in Britain has never reached the proportions it has in America). Somehow or other this proposal gets side-tracked, thus provoking the dark suspicion that there is too much investment in the illegality of drugs to make the switch.

But the more basic problem of why so many people take drugs leads us to basic social and economic considerations. It leads us to poverty, the "rat race" and other failures of our superficially "straight" culture. No wonder politicians want to rant against pushers rather than face up to questions that would require some fundamental re-thinking and re-ordering of our society.

ALFRED RUSSEL WALLACE

Ormonde

OFTEN, of a pair of pioneers, one is forgotten and the other becomes famous. Today Bruno is known to very few, Galileo to many. Charcot is forgotten, Freud is a legend. And so it is with Alfred Russel Wallace and Charles Darwin.

1973 marks the 150th anniversary of Wallace's birth and the 60th of his death, but bonfires will hardly be lit in his honour. Darwin, on the other hand, has become a noun and an adjective as well as a name.

Before Darwin's famous voyage, Wallace took journeys to the Amazon and the Malay Archipelago and studied the geographical distribution of plants and animals. He gave to Darwin the idea of natural selection.

Wallace went beyond Darwin in concluding that the principles governing plants and animals do not apply strictly to man in whose development he saw an additional spiritual element. (Darwin simply could not understand this "defection" of his colleague and deplored it.) Wallace's thoughts in this respect bear a resemblance to those of Henry George particularly in his examination of the Malthusian theory.

Wallace became concerned with economic and social questions and sought to interest Darwin in them. But the latter declared that political economy just confused him and he steered clear of it.

Wallace was influenced by Herbert Spencer's *Social Statics* of 1850 especially concerning land reform. "We permit," wrote Wallace, "absolute possession of the soil of our country, with no legal rights of existence on the soil to the vast majority who do not possess it."

John Stuart Mill's Land Reform Association proposed to get the state to appropriate future increments in land values. Wallace joined this group but wanted something more, and he brought out his ideas in his book *Land Nationalisation*. His proposal was that the state acquire land - eventually all the land - by inheritance. The lands of those who died intestate would revert immediately to the state, and all other land would become national property over a period of three generations. Unfortunately, the Land Nationalisation Society that resulted from Wallace's work drifted in another direction and proposed state purchase of land. The Society "would secure to all existing landowners and their heirs revenues equal to the annual value of the land." One wonders by what steps this remarkable perversion took place!

The Society was not Wallace's only disappointment; he was disgusted with Herbert Spencer's defection on the land question and criticised him even more strongly than did Henry George in *A Perplexed Philosopher*. Wallace maintained friendly relations with George during his visit to America and George's visits to England. Both men respected one another, though George did not agree with land nationalisation (his own proposal being that owners retain title to land and that society collect rent through land-value taxation).

In his book *The Wonderful Century* Wallace praised the nineteenth century for its great scientific progress but blamed it for being behind in social progress. Huxley thought that education was the panacea; Wallace argued that that was not enough but that equality of opportunity was the important thing. Spencer thought that evolution would do everything; Wallace said that people must act intelligently and decisively. He opposed the do-nothingness of Mill and the materialism of Darwin.

In so many ways, this versatile man had penetrating insights that reach into our century, whereas the leaders mentioned above seem to stay within the nineteenth century. With his wide-ranging studies and interests Wallace fell just short of a cohesive scientific and philosophic approach to the problems of society. One could wish that it were he rather than Spencer who composed a Synthetic Philosophy.

Nevertheless, Alfred Russel Wallace has left enough of a legacy to deserve a second look and a little more recognition.

[2] Editor's Note: Drugs are, of course, legalized in Britain only to the extent that addicts are registered and may receive drugs on doctors' prescriptions.