

had been temporarily halted. The Soviets also profess to regard the timing of the American action as being a deliberate attempt to take MIRVs out of the orbit of the SALT talks.

It is true that the pause in deployment of the SS-9, together with the low level of underground nuclear testing by the Soviet Union (in the first half of this year the USSR conducted one test and the USA 23) could be taken as signs of genuine expectation that the SALT talks might come to something. On the other hand this low activity may have been dictated more by economics than pacific intentions, and it is in any case hard to understand how the Russians, if they take SALT seriously, could have been prepared to jeopardize the mutual trust on which any SALT agreement must be based by their actions during the last few weeks in the Middle East. Even if the Egyptian missiles were only swapped around, the Soviet observance of the truce should, like Caesar's wife, have been above suspicion.

On the American side, too, it is hard to see how the cause of SALT was enhanced by the acceleration of the MIRV programme, and indeed those who see SALT as a superpower diversion to prevent discussions of general and complete disarmament can even argue that but for SALT neither MIRVs nor ABM would have proceeded as far as they have. Although the main strategic implications of MIRVs are as a first strike weapon, they were apparently developed by the United States as a penetration aid against the sophisticated Soviet air defence system which, it is claimed, is capable of being upgraded into an ABM system. In short, there is little outward sign that either superpower holds much hope of SALT. The discussions at Pugwash may serve to persuade the respective governments that the lack of omens is not necessarily a bad omen.

## DRUGS

### Marihuana and the Law

by our Washington Correspondent

ANOTHER voice has been added to those who are calling for a reconsideration of the laws relating to marihuana. A staff report of the now defunct National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence\* recommends that marihuana be made legal for people more than 18 years old. The existence of the anti-marihuana laws, the report says, means that "large segments of our population are engaging in criminal behaviour. Many are caught and labelled 'criminal', despite the fact that they are otherwise law abiding citizens. No other body of legislation has created as much general disrespect for our laws, particularly among the young. No other body of legislation has 'criminalized' as many otherwise law abiding citizens".

The report proceeds to urge drastic changes in the existing "archaic and ineffective" laws, including legalization of the drug for those over 18. The idea of a government licensing system should also be considered so as to pre-empt the market from organized crime.

This verdict is based on a balance sheet with few items. On the one hand the abuse of marihuana can be as dangerous as the abuse of other drugs, such as

alcohol. But the staff report cites a long list of studies including the Wootton report in England (1968), the Mayor La Guardia report (1944) and even the venerable Indian Hemp Drugs Commission (1894) to show that marihuana is not a cause of crime and violence. There is evidence that in the United States, at least, marihuana use does not lead on to heroin or other harder drugs, except in as far as it is the personality of the user, rather than the properties of the drug, that causes progression.

On the other side of the balance sheet is the cost of enforcing the laws against marihuana. The staff report quotes a recent estimate that between 500,000 and 1 million citizens of the United States are regular smokers of marihuana and that between 3 and 5 million use the drug occasionally. Many of the users are young people, and probably include up to a quarter of the students at schools and colleges in metropolitan areas. But marihuana is by no means confined to students; a recent survey of a large American city showed that 11 per cent of the entire population had used the drug.

Even the literal cost of bringing these "criminals" to book is appalling. California alone spent \$75 million on enforcing its marihuana laws in 1968. Arrests for marihuana offences in the state during the first half of 1968 were running at a rate of 31,000 adults and 15,000 juveniles. The consequences of labelling a person as a deviant or delinquent, the staff report points out, are that he often is led to act in conformity with the label. Perhaps the greatest social cost is that "much of our youth has suffered a loss of respect for the law. They note that marihuana use carries serious criminal penalties while the use of alcohol, which evidence shows to be much more harmful when abused, is acceptable and lawful". The report concludes that social costs of the marihuana laws far outweigh the real dangers of the drug.

The sections on marihuana comprise only a small part of the report, which runs to some 1,600 pages and covers all aspects of criminal violence. Much of the material was used by the National Commission, chaired by Dr Milton S. Eisenhower, in its Report to the President. The Commission did not, however, adopt the recommendation on legalizing marihuana but merely called for more study of the question. Printing of the staff report has been delayed until now because of lack of funds.

There is at present no chance at all that the report's recommendation concerning marihuana will be acted on. The Attorney General, Mr John Mitchell, for one, remains persuaded that it is a dangerous drug. There are also serious political risks that face the party or state legislature seeking to take a softer line on marihuana. Nevertheless, the times are changing. A few days before the staff report was published an issue of *Newsweek* asked on its front cover whether it was time to change the law. Even Senator Barry Goldwater has publicly enquired whether the existing laws are perfect. It seems there is also a tendency away from allowing special interest groups to inflict their own moralities on the community. The Roman Catholics and the medical associations, for example, have been required to yield on abortion, just as in the 1930s the Methodists and others were forced to give way when Prohibition proved unworkable. For that matter the laws against marihuana have become so widely abused as to appear to many as a new Prohibition.

\* *Crimes of Violence*. Pp 1,597. US Government Printing Office. \$6.50.