

VILLAGE VIEW

ANDREA LEONARD

WHAT is the matter with us? After reading in the June 15 issue of Parade magazine an article about Head Shops, I have to ask myself -- and you, too -- "What IS the matter with us?"

If you didn't happen to see -- or bother to read -- the article, you probably won't bother to read this column either. That's one thing that's the matter. Either nobody cares or they feel too helpless to fight.

Briefly, Michael Satchell reported on the testimony of a 16-year-old girl, now a drug-rehabilitation program resident, who started smoking pot at 11, using alcohol, tranquilizers and barbiturates at 13 and other psychedelics at 14, and became a heavy user of amphetamines by the age of 15; she was telling it like it is to the audience of Congressmen on Capital Hill in Washington, D.C.

The emphasis in Satchell's article was placed on the paraphernalia drug users employ; items that are legally purchased (and legally sold) in so-called "head shops" as well as in boutiques, novelty shops, record and convenience stores.

The term "head shop" derives from the slang "hop-head"; according to the *Dictionary of American Slang*, com-

plied by Harold Wentworth and Stuart Berg Flexner, and published by Thomas Y. Crowell Company, a hop-head is a narcotics addict. Ergo, "head shops" sell equipment for the specific use of narcotics addicts. And their operations are perfectly legal.

In one of last month's national magazines there was advertised a kit for growing pot hydroponically, in a closet, under grow-lights, "All you can use," it said. Oh, it didn't mention marijuana; it called it "stuff." But the illustration accompanying the ad copy was of a healthy-looking marijuana plant.

How do I know what a marijuana plant looks like? Because I stopped one day at Barnstable Police Headquarters to see its display. Although the police aren't growing pot in the basement they do have a fine exhibit. The plant is as easily recognized as a tulip, a rose, a sunflower, or a daffodil. Once you've seen it, you'll recognize it.

A week or two ago I attended the birthday party of an 11-year old enrolled in one of Barnstable's Elementary Schools. The youngster's mother told me the child's classmates are smoking pot in school. Where do they get it? I don't know. I doubt they're buying it, so it must be given to them.

"Get 'em hooked when they're young; you've got a customer for life. Make sure they know how to use all the paraphernalia; kids love using the equipment connected with doing drugs as much as the effects."

The attitude of headshop owners, according to Satchell, is, "Having failed in attempts to eliminate marijuana, some self-righteous individuals now seek another scapegoat on which to vent their frustrations- the paraphernalia associated with marijuana."

Self-righteous? Scapegoating? Venting frustrations? Come off it! Parents of 11- and 12-year old children who smoke pot can hardly be called self-righteous because they need and want help in protecting their kids against purveyors of narcotics and equipments its use entails. They're worried sick, not self-righteous.

Looking for scapegoats? No, they're looking for help, legal help now, to protect their youngsters from narcotics. They must send their children to school; school is where the drugs are.

Venting frustrations? Frustrated, parents are, but they're frustrated by laws, or the lack of them, that permit the sale of tools, made for the exclusive use of dope addicts, to kids. Parents aren't cooperating in the effort to turn their children into hop-heads; and, sure, they're frustrated when their attempts to prevent that are unsuccessful.

Drug importers, traders, dealers, pushers, sellers-- the vast international network that's threatening the health, mental and physical, of our children are succeeding in the lucrative business of contraband. Not only in big cities. Not only in other towns. Not only in Florida, California, Michigan and Illinois. In the hills of New Hampshire and Vermont. On the prairies of the Midwest. And here, in Barnstable. In Hyannis. In Centerville. In Cotuit. In Osterville. In West Barnstable. In our schools. On our streets.

The National Institute on Drug Abuse reports 60,000 persons, mostly teenagers, sought treatment last year in clinics and psychiatric centers for problems associated with marijuana use. They sought help. The others?

Why aren't head shops closed by the police? Hear this: magazines, books, advertisements and other printed material encouraging drug-use are protected by the First Amendment upholding free speech. I'm all for free speech, but I'm 100% opposed to comic books, magazines and ads that encourage kids to use illegal drugs. Further, laws aimed at banning drug-use paraphernalia have been struck down by courts as too vague and too broad. Can you prohibit the sale of cigarette papers? Or pipes? Or plants? Or seeds?

Is anyone having any success in the battle? Satchell reports a group in Atlanta, DeKalb Families in Action, led by Sue Rusche, has made headway; from 35 head shops and outlets in 1977, the number has been reduced to three. Georgia state laws, carefully written, pressure put on merchants, and an intense public relations campaign have effected the change.

The Parade article indicates America supports a \$20-billion annual marijuana habit. That's \$87 each for every man, woman and child in this country. Or, taking an average, \$2,610,000 in the Town of Barnstable. And please PLEASE don't think "it's not happening here." Two-and-a-half million dollars ain't grass!

Neither is the inestimable cost of increasing drug-use. It's not only the money spent on pot; it's also that spent to support services for drug-users. The clinics, the counsellors, the psychiatric services, the rehab centers are funded, for the most part, by government-sponsored programs. That means we all help pay for them. And it's also the costs in vandalism, shop-lifting, bag-snatching, burglaries, crime of all kinds, associated with drug-use. Supporting the habit is expensive; addicts have little or no incentive to work. It's easier to steal. These costs are reflected in outright financial loss to individuals, higher taxes to the employed, higher prices to consumers, and more and more-crowded, more and more-expensive police protection.

Saddest of all is the cost in destroyed lives. Hop heads don't make good citizens; they leave behind them a trail of broken-hearted fathers and mothers, spouses and offspring, and a growing sub-culture of non-productive dependent indigents.

I know. I know. We can't successfully legislate marijuana use any more than we could successfully legislate the sale of alcohol. We tried, and it didn't work. Nor can we, apparently, successfully control ourselves, as adults, or our youth to lay off the "stuff"; not when it's so widely available and in such prevalent use. What CAN we do?

Support laws that make penalties for importing illegal drugs more stringent; increase penalties for selling or pushing illegal drugs to minors; support programs such as DeKalb Families in Action; start local ones for the same purpose. Only through a nation-wide effort can the epidemic of drug-addiction now evident throughout this county be brought under control.

It's not like the plague or small pox that will run its course, wipe out a certain percentage of the population and subside. It has grown from an insignificant problem affecting only a small segment of our society, thirty years ago, to a rampaging law-defying social disease affecting us all.

Are we going to sit still and watch our kids be weaned from pabulum to pot? What is the MATTER with us?