

Drugs

Drug Conference Ends With Plea For Perspective

By Mel Baughman
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"Turn on to the world and what's going on.

"Tune in to knowledge and feeling.

"Drop in to do something about it."

With this paraphrase of the psychedelic slogan, "Turn on, Tune in, Drop out," Dr. Joel Fort Friday concluded a two-week course in the physiological and psychological aspects of drug education at UCSC.

Sponsored by University of California Extension, Santa Cruz, the 10 days of instruction focused on use, misuse and abuse of mind-altering drugs, including alcohol, marijuana, LSD, narcotics, and other stimulants and sedatives. Some 102 educators, law enforcement personnel and health officials attended the course that presented a wide spectrum of opinion and facts about a complex and generally misunderstood subject.

Throughout the ten days, speakers sought to give perspective to the drug problem in America, to remove hysteria, emotion and sensationalism that confuse and cloud real issues of drug abuse in modern society.

Voicing pleas for understanding the drug problem in its true dimensions, leading experts from the San Francisco Bay Area repeatedly asserted that the public fails to appreciate and understand the fact that alcoholism stands as the major drug abuse in the nation today, that sedatives and stimulants also are flagrantly misused and

abused, and that the sensationalism of publicity surrounding marijuana and LSD has magnified the problem of these drugs out of its true proportions.

Speakers urged educators to tackle drug education boldly and with imagination and new techniques, and to offer students — among whom use of psychedelic drugs is increasing — meaningful alternatives for expansion of consciousness and spiritual fulfillment.

In addition to Dr. Fort, UC Davis professor of sociology and former director of the San Francisco Center for Special Problems, experts on the program included Dr. David Smith, chief of the alcohol and drug abuse screening branch at the center and a research associate at the UC Medical Center's department of pharmacology; Dr. David Fisher, co-director of the Behavior Therapy Institute of Sausalito and a research associate at UC's School of Public Health, Berkeley; and Dr. Allan Cohen, staff psychologist in the Berkeley counseling center and a former protege of Dr. Timothy Leary.

But it was the outspoken, controversial and articulate Dr. Fort who set the tone of the intensive program of instruction with his provocative criticisms of prevailing policies and the social attitudes on which public policy is based.

In his concluding lecture on Friday he renewed a plea to understand drug abuse as a social and public health problem and to reform existing laws regarding marijuana so that its use is viewed as a question of

health rather than as a criminal offense.

He stressed his theme that a meaningful life can be lived without drugs and that the present emphasis on the drug scene obscures more important social, health, political and educational problems of society.

He urged a rational approach to drug education free from hysteria, hypocrisy and inconsistency, and he called also for a reform in treatment and rehabilitation of the victims of drug abuse. Noting that institutional confinement can only solve part of the problem, Dr. Fort called for a wide range of techniques, including out-patient clinics, improved programs of vocational training, innovations in mental health services and increased use of group and individual psychotherapy.

Underlying all of these, Dr. Fort believes, must be an effort to improve communication among and between all ele-



Dr. Joel Fort

ments of society, to encourage individualism, and to create a comfortable climate for dealing with social problems.

He sees education as a key element in a comprehensive program of social development. He urges educators to make education a mind-expanding experience, to make the school program exciting and to find ways to transmit the excitement to the students.

At the same time he recognizes that the school can provide only part of the answer to various social issues, including the drug question. And he cites powerful vested interests whose survival depends on the status quo. Among these he includes the advertising and liquor industries, government bureaucrats, and various officials whose power depends on maintaining existing social and legal policies.

Dr. Fort is an idealist, who tempers his ideals with an understanding of reality. He offers an admittedly controversial and indeed revolutionary approach-

ing to a solution of drug problems, especially the abuse of alcohol, which he stresses (with six million alcoholics in the nation) is the most critical of all.

In Friday's lecture he presented an eight-point program, but qualified his presentation with the admission that much of his proposal was not now practical and would not be for the foreseeable future.

On alcohol he would:

1. Ban advertising of alcoholic beverages, which he labels "immoral and improper."

2. Seek to persuade the television and movie industries to de-emphasize alcohol and cigarettes and their use in the "day-to-day life of popular heroes."

3. Require labeling of bottles and packages with warnings of social and health hazards that stem from abuse, especially the impairment of skills and the dangers inherent in drunk driving.

4. Impose even heavier taxation on alcoholic beverages to discourage their purchase.

5. Launch a vast program of public health education to replace the "bare token" that now exists.

6. Begin "in a reasonable way" to reduce the number of outlets where alcoholic beverages are available.

7. Stress in education and communication that people can live meaningful lives without alcohol and to provide a meaningful alternative.

8. Initiate improved programs to correct the social problems that result from alcoholism.

On marijuana reform, Dr. Fort reiterated his belief that present emphasis on criminal law and use of marijuana as a criminal offense complicates the problem and increases its attractiveness. He calls for the criminal law to focus only on anti-social behavior, in which he includes, with

considerable emphasis, the drunk driver.

The marijuana problem should be viewed in its social and health dimensions and laws should regulate use and distribution, but not in the framework of criminal law. He stresses present policy only makes marijuana a focal point of rebellion and alienation.

On the broad question of combating drug abuse, Dr. Fort urges more research not only in physical and mental effects, but also in techniques for changing attitudes and influencing behavior.

Dr. Fort states that society has ignored the big problems of drug abuse for decades. Today the problem is receiving increased attention, but all of the experts who conducted the ten-day course at UCSC believe much remains to be done to bring balance and understanding to an issue of almost incredible complexity.

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