

Marihuana PRESMONT

Presmont telephoned on Nov 26,
wrote me & came up to testify
before the N.Y. Legislative Committee
on Marihuana, I discouraged the idea

6645 Thirty-Second Street, NW.,
Washington 15, D.C.
November 1, 1957

Mr. John Presmont
157 East Thirty-First Street
New York 16, New York

Dear Mr. Presmont:

I have been interested in intoxicants and narcotics during my entire medical career and especially since I became a psychiatrist in 1915. My studies have been centered mostly on alcohol, the opiates, cocaine, and marihuana. My marihuana interest was intensified in 1937 after this drug was brought within the scope of Federal anti narcotic laws. The suppressive measure then taken by the government markedly increased the volume of sensational marihuana stories and articles. All of this made it desirable for me to have a comprehensive, exact knowledge of the effect of the drug, since I was then head of the Lexington Narcotics Hospital and was destined to become Chief of the Division of Mental Hygiene of the Public Health Service. I have of course studied scientific reports and the more or less fictional literature on the subject. By fictional literature I mean the writing of great authors who have experimented with the drug. This literature, excellent as literature and doubtless factual to a certain degree, probably is responsible to some extent for the nonsensical sensational material that the country has been flooded with in recent years.

I have carefully studied marihuana users and have never seen one who has been harmed by the drug either physically, mentally, or in his behavior. However, this does not prove even to me that the drug is harmless. The work of competent authors in Eastern countries where marihuana use is much more prevalent than it is here, and reports of pharmacologists convinces me that Indian Hemp (marihuana) is potentially harmful when used to excess.

You suggest in your letter that marihuana is no more harmful than alcohol and tobacco. This is true if the three drugs are used in moderation, but we must consider all aspects of the subject and perhaps we should not consider tobacco at all because no one feels that tobacco causes insanity or affects behavior.

Copy from here to end
of N

If our people, including legislators and judges, would consider the relative effects of alcohol and marihuana and rely on the evidence of experts, our marihuana problem would lose its fictional nature and be reduced to the relatively unimportant problem that it really is.

Both alcohol and marihuana are sedatives; both cause relaxation and relieve the anxiety due to stress or emotional problems. Moderate doses will do this and when used to moderation both drugs are harmless and helpful. But both drugs are intoxicating and harmful both to health and behavior when used in excess. As to relative harmfulness alcohol is both actually and potentially more harmful. Alcohol causes more physical and mental disease and more crime than marihuana. Of course in this country crime due to marihuana is, and always has been, practically non-existent. Sir Ram Nath Chopra of India who is probably the world's leading authority on marihuana ranks it far below alcohol as a cause of crime, but Dr. Chopra does say that it may lead to irresponsible actions and crime in certain types of people. I reached the same conclusion years ago. Against this but not definitely contradicting it are five comprehensive studies on marihuana and crime in this country that definitely failed to show any connection between marihuana and crime. These studies were made by competent scientists. ^{crimes made by} Practically all the statements and reports about specific marihuana/enforcement officials have been ridiculous. Nevertheless I feel that if we had in this country as many marihuana users as alcohol drinkers (68,000,000) there would be some authentic marihuana crimes.

Marihuana intoxication is less dangerous than alcoholic intoxication. Marihuana intoxication is a mixture of pleasant and fantastic symptoms likely to lead to reverie and contemplation rather than to the fury, irresponsibility, and foolish activity so commonly associated with alcoholic intoxication. Another thing that to my mind is important is that excessive doses of marihuana are likely to bring on unpleasant feelings that cause the user to stop before he becomes completely irresponsible or stupefied while the alcohol drinker is more likely to go on and on.

Insanity and marihuana needs some comment. Many cases of insanity due to Indian Hemp (marihuana) have been reported in Eastern countries. Some of these reports are probably honest exaggerations made by overworked personnel who have attached a convenient marihuana psychosis to marihuana users when a thorough study would have disclosed some other cause. Nevertheless, workers in whom I have great

confidence, Chopra for instance, have reported marihuana induced psychosis and The Mayors Committee in New York, experimenting on prisoners, admittedly an unstable group, induced temporary marihuana toxic psychosis in a few of them.

Marihuana does not produce physical dependence as morphine, heroin and other opiates do and marihuana does not cause its users to resort to morphine and heroin as is so often claimed by the uninformed.

The estimated 200,000,000 marihuana users in the world (we have only a few thousand) do less harm to themselves and to the social order than our 68,000,000 alcohol drinkers. Lest I be misunderstood about alcohol, only a small proportion of our users are harmed by it.

Despite this disparity, I favor a somewhat more rigid restriction on marihuana than on alcohol. Two thousand years of experience has shown that alcohol use is an implaceable and probably useful element in Western culture. We should be realistic however and not snoop around looking for a musician, actor or other law abiding citizen who is harmlessly and pleasantly relaxing with a marihuana cigarette.

I have been told of cases that got ten years imprisonment for possessing one marihuana cigarette. A poor Mexican coming to this country for work had been told to apply a marihuana infusion to a limb for some discomfort. Acting on this medical advice he came across the border with some marihuana in his pocket and was given a four year sentence with no possibility of probation or parole.

In England such persons, if bothered at all, would get from one to ten days in jail. Our handling of the marihuana problem is a serious reflection on our civilization. I look forward to the time when a better informed and aroused public will put an end to the prevalent misdirected frenzy that now results in so much injustice and suffering.

Sincerely yours,

Lawrence Kolb, MD