

MR BARCLAY

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DRUGS

Drug abuse is now a major political issue. The Guardian has run exposés; Mr Meacher is making a tremendous amount of political capital; and huge shipments of cheap narcotics are entering the country from Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Drugs are, indeed, so cheap that they are being bought by large numbers of schoolchildren. And there are signs that teachers are either incapable of preventing abuse, or are positively encouraging it. The problem is particularly acute in inner cities such as London and Liverpool: our contacts in Liverpool suggest that teachers may well be selling drugs there; and the Evening Standard recently reported a case in which a teacher appears to have sold a fatal dose of LSD to a pupil in London.

It is both morally and politically necessary for the Government to respond quickly and effectively. Obvious measures include:

- i. Tough speeches. (Leon Brittan's address to the London Diplomatic Association in December was a start; but much more of this sort is needed.)
- ii. A new initiative to make drugs a priority for the police force. (At present, the Metropolitan Police

drug squad has only about 70 officers, and only 38 of these are full-time drug-chasers.)

- iii. New measures to improve co-operation between police and Customs & Excise. (There is a danger of the buck being passed back and forth between these two groups.)
- iv. A new sentencing policy, which includes measures enabling the police to seize the money made by convicted "pushers".
- v. A new "shock-horror" campaign for schoolchildren, using the really nasty American films that put children off drugs. (Any false sentimentality from DES about the "unpleasantness" of such films should be ignored.)
- vi. A new campaign to train teachers in the art of countering drug abuse. (Most teachers probably do not know how to spot an addict, and may enable "pushers" to get away by making the wrong moves when they do discover malpractice; cheap training sessions for inner city schoolteachers might bring about a dramatic improvement; a unit of 10 experts seconded from within existing DHSS and Home Office pay rolls ought to be able to cover all inner-city secondary schools in a year.)

These ideas are not surprising or original. The Home Office has, in fact, been considering many of them for some time. But the two committees chaired by David Mellor on juvenile crime and drug abuse have not yet produced any answers. When the issue of drugs comes up in the juvenile crime committee, one is told that this is a matter for the drugs committee. And the drugs committee has yet to report.

If something is not done between now and the end of September, Ministers will be in serious difficulty at the Party Conference. A motion has been laid down requesting "Her Majesty's Government to take immediate steps to eliminate drug and solvent abuse". That debate will be a disaster if the Government cannot produce a headline-catching announcement of new measures before or during the Conference.

We recommend that the Prime Minister should hold a meeting urgently with Leon Brittan, David Mellor, Norman Fowler, Keith Joseph and Geoffrey Howe, to ensure that there is action before the Conference.

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