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COVER Image composite of the planet Uranus (center) and five of its moons, as viewed by the Voyager 2 spacecraft. Moons (clockwise from top) are Titania, Miranda, Ariel, Umbriel, and Oberon. See page 1322. [National Aeronautics and Space Administration/Jet Propulsion Laboratory]

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Thinking Tough

The nation is intoxicated with huffing, puffing, and crocodile tears as a substitute for policy in the war on drugs. Our rush to denounce drugs and their suppliers and users is exceeded only by our unwillingness to develop a consistent overall policy. Our youths, particularly our disadvantaged youths, are being taught that crime pays. Our law enforcement system is being corrupted. Our foreign policy is jeopardized. Yet the number of drug addicts and their influence increases. Withdrawal from policies that have not worked, in order to face reality, will be as painful as withdrawal from drugs themselves. But the time has come to act tough or to think tough.

To act tough we would seal the borders, mobilize the military, destroy foreign sources, crack down on the kingpins, enforce zero tolerance, and "round up the usual suspects." Following those policies would help alleviate the drug problem, but even the mention of such measures exposes their flaws. With approximately 200 million people crossing our borders every year, are we likely to seal them? With an average penalty for murder these days of 12 years, are we likely to punish kingpins effectively? When congressional concern over the dangers of paraquat to drug users causes interdiction of the program to spray foreign fields, are we likely to destroy outside sources? If we do not like to enforce zero tolerance on yacht owners, will we enforce it on teenagers? In short, is it realistic that the nation will get tough and stay tough? It would not be impossible if we were willing to project the consequences of toughness, grit our teeth, and live with them.

If we will not act tougher, then thinking tough may be the only approach, and the controversial alternative, decriminalization, deserves attention. A little reading of history yields striking parallels between prohibition of alcohol in the 1920s and prohibition of drugs today. Just as many decent people recoiled at legalizing alcohol in the past, many individuals react against legalizing drugs today. Yet, what are the facts? Many are addicted to cigarettes, alcohol, or tranquilizers, but we do not need to kill, bribe, or form crime syndicates to obtain these substances. Will decriminalization result in many more people becoming addicted? In the 1900s, heroin was legal in the United States, and the proportion of addicts in the population was not appreciably different than it is today. The Netherlands legalized narcotics, and the percentage of addicts in that country decreased.

To say that legalizing drugs is an obvious solution is, however, a vast understatement. A properly planned program would have to be developed with careful thought, to include components like government-sponsored stores, high taxes to support educational and treatment programs, low-cost legal drugs, and only negative advertising. Such a program would at least destroy the incentive of impoverished countries to invest in crops for export, reduce a source of local corruption, and eliminate exorbitant profits by illegal dealers. Although it would not prevent individuals under the influence of drugs from behaving unpredictably, sanctions against illegal behavior rather than illegal drugs would also remove most of the profit motive from addict recruitment. An educational campaign that identified drugs with losers and failure rather than with glamor and success might work.

The time has come to apply more scientific methods to this immense problem. We might approximate sealing our borders, enacting zero tolerance to get underlings to testify against the kingpins, and applying tougher penalties, but the public would have to be convinced that a well-developed consistent plan was in place to justify such extreme and expensive procedures. The alternative of decriminalization would require equally careful thought. To aid in a decision, *Science* will be producing a number of news stories and articles on the history and likely consequences of various approaches. What should no longer be tolerated, whether in erudite publications or in the bombast of political debate, is the advocacy of "get tough" or "legalize" without the development of specific, significant plans of action to make the proposed program successful.

Whatever course of action is advocated will take vision and courage: either to advocate far tougher laws to a rather permissive society or to advocate legalization and control of substances that are known to be bad for people. The first step will be to admit that the present on-again off-again vacillation between indignation and compassion, enforcement and tolerance, panic and complacency, is a failure. Then, perhaps we will be willing to think tough about the real alternatives and develop a rational and effective solution to a historically difficult problem.—DANIEL E. KOSHLAND, JR.