

Soros boosts efforts for drug legalization

by Joyce Fredman

The Drug Policy Foundation, America's leading lobby for drug decriminalization, announced on July 8 that it would be receiving \$10.5 million over the next three years, thanks to financial derivatives kingpin George Soros. The Hungarian-born speculator was already notorious for his generosity to what's commonly called the dope lobby, but he is now surpassing other benefactors from the financial world who find it the latest in radical chic to have as their favorite charity the effort to legalize drugs.

Up to now, the spotlight was on Richard Dennis, a Chicago commodities trader who has contributed more than \$1 million to the Drug Policy Foundation (DPF) since 1986. Such generosity earned him a spot as chairman of its board of advisers. Dennis's laissez-faire philosophy of "it's a self-evident proposition that people shouldn't go to jail for things they do to themselves," comes as no surprise, since commodity traders' livelihoods depend on a moral blindfold. Yet Dennis was considered way out on a limb by his peers for flaunting such large support. Now, Soros has become the number-one sugar daddy for the drug crowd.

According to *Rolling Stone* magazine, "In 1992, the same year Soros earned over \$650 million betting on foreign currency, he began funding DPF through his Open Society Fund. Soros has contributed over \$500,000 so far [thru May 1994], and . . . is ready to give much more."

That hopeful "much more" has now been actualized as a \$6 million pledge, \$3 million for operational support and \$3 million for a grant program. Soros's grant through the Open Society Fund, established in 1969 by Soros, is being matched to bring the total amount to \$10.5 million.

Kevin Zeese, formerly the national director of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML), now the DPF's vice president and counsel, stated that the money would allow for massive expansion on the part of DPF. "Programs may include supporting and evaluating new ways to care for drug users, researching medicinal uses of prohibited drugs, assessing foreign drug decriminalization efforts and, in countries that allow it, supporting drug maintenance for addicts." All these programs are simply a sideshow to sell their main agenda, well known to be legalization by the year 2000.

The DPF, headquartered in Washington, is intent on maintaining a clean-cut image. Over the last few years, its 13,000 membership has grown to include doctors, lawyers,

and other professionals. In 1993, its expenditures went well over \$1 million on conferences and public appearances.

In the last year, public figures, such as Baltimore Mayor Kurt L. Schmoke and New Haven, Connecticut Chief of Police Nicholas Pastore, have gone from outspoken friends of the DPF to members of the board of directors. Also on the board are well-known advocates of decriminalization such as Ira Glasser of the American Civil Liberties Union in New York, Patrick Murphy of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, and Ethan Nadelmann of Princeton University. Some of the luminaries on the board of advisers include Carl Sagan, Cornell University's own "Dr. Gyro Gearloose," and Thomas Szasz, M.D., from the State University of New York at Syracuse, whose claim to fame was his "discovery" that insanity isn't so insane.

To have a so-called respectable businessman backing this wild crew with its horrid proposals has raised more than a few eyebrows even among the jaded on Wall Street. Soros's feeble explanation: "I do not consider myself an expert on drug policy, but I do think we need a more open debate and more humane policies in this country."

Aryeh Neier, president of Soros's Open Society Fund which is providing the money, has been even more blunt: "Soros doesn't think the drug war makes any sense from an economic standpoint. There's an enormous crime problem that is attributable to drugs, there are vast numbers of people in prison and people who are dependent on drugs." Neier reiterated why Soros made the pledge: "Soros does not believe that the drug war makes any sense from an economic standpoint. The current policy is wasteful and it promotes crime and disease. From every standpoint, it is a failure."

The economic cost

One could very well say that Soros is thumbing his nose at the White House. And, indeed, there are those in the Clinton administration who take umbrage at his attitudes. Not only has the Clinton administration made clear that it opposes legalization, despite Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders's wacky suggestions, but the President himself has been emphatic that he considers the enforcement of anti-drug laws responsible for saving his brother's life.

According to press reports, Lee Brown, the Clinton administration's drug control policy director, is "greatly concerned" over Soros's help for decriminalization. Brown urged support for Clinton's 1994 drug strategy, which "calls for putting more money into treatment, more money into prevention, more money into education.

"If he thinks that is wasteful, then he's off-base. I would suggest that he spend some time in the neighborhoods where he can see the end of the cocaine trail, the end of the heroin trail, and see where those drugs bring about misery and despair and all too often death," Brown said recently. But then, what would that mean to someone who makes a fortune gambling off the misery of millions?