

Eastland Works to Ease Pot Laws

By Jack Anderson
and Les Whitten

James O. Eastland of Sunflower County, Miss., one of the Senate's crustiest conservatives, is walking proof that an old dog can learn new tricks.

The veteran Judiciary Committee chairman is working quietly to relax marijuana laws so young students and workers and other "pot" smokers will not be jailed for simple possession of the drug.

Eastland, whose closest contact with drugs is a good cigar and a tot of whiskey, has become convinced that jailing those caught with a few "joints" is not the way to stop marijuana traffic.

The contumacious senator underwent his metamorphosis after his old friend, ex-Marine Commandant Lewis Walt, conducted a world survey on drugs for Eastland's Senate Internal Security subcommittee.

After talking earnestly with Walt and listening to dozens of witnesses at various hearings, the senator came to the conclusion that "pot" may cause genetic, brain, lung and other damage. He also decided that traffickers still deserve stiff penalties and that even possession should not be completely "decriminalized."

But the possibility of a year in jail and a \$5,000 fine for a youth caught by federal agents with a single marijuana cigarette is excessive in Eastland's view. As a result, his Internal Security staff is conferring regularly with the Drug Enforcement

Agency on possible legislation. Shortly after Labor Day, Senate staffers will meet with DEA's legal office to hammer out a formal draft.

Eastland has not made up his mind entirely, but he is toying with the idea of setting a fine for a first "possession" offense, and explicitly banning jail. A second offense would bring a stiffer fine.

Since state laws tend to follow federal statutes, and since Eastland's Judiciary Committee writes federal laws, it may be that a whole generation of marijuana dabblers will praise Jim Eastland's name.

Footnote: On Eastland's Mississippi plantation, state narcotics agents found a marijuana patch near the Sunflower River. The senator cooperated in a stake-out, but the "pot" planters, who had been harvesting by boat apparently learned of the surveillance and abandoned the crop.

Natural Gas—In letters to many newspapers, the American Petroleum Institute, whose members own much of the nation's natural gas, cites numerous figures to try to disprove our disclosures that Big Oil is driving up natural gas prices with faked figures.

It is worth noting that we sent our own figures to the API statisticians before we wrote our story. The API did not quibble with them then, and does not now in its letter. In fact, the API ignores the crucial figures.

To repeat them: Big Oil reported exploratory natural gas

strikes from 7.9 to 9.4 per cent of the time off Louisiana until 1972 when they began to connive for price increases. Then, mysteriously, the strikes dropped to 2.4 per cent in 1972 and to a mere 1 per cent in 1973. This allowed the oil companies to demand more consumer money, supposedly so they could carry out more exploration.

It is small wonder that Federal Power Commission experts told us they had "never seen such a gross aberration" and the Senate Commerce Committee staff suggests the oil companies are "simply lying" in order to get more money.

A few other figures are glaringly omitted from the API letter: some of its members with natural gas holdings report profit increases in excess of 100 per cent since the energy crisis began. Such profits are possible because gasoline and natural gas prices are up from 60 to 100 per cent and likely to climb still higher.

Critical Punishment—The federal judges in Baltimore who stepped aside in the Agnew case to avoid any possible charges of cronyism have nevertheless tried to punish one of Agnew's most vocal critics.

The target of their unsuccessful action was John Banzhaf III, a prominent consumer advocate and law professor in Washington. The Baltimore judges were incensed because Banzhaf had announced in a press release that he had filed suit to block then-Vice President Agnew from subpoenaing reporters

and to force appointment of a special Agnew prosecutor.

One of the ringleaders in the unusual effort to punish Banzhaf was federal Judge C. Stanley Blair, an Agnew pal and aide who was given a lifetime judgeship by President Nixon at Agnew's bidding. The other was Judge Herbert Murray, personally cleared for his job in 1971 after a 30-minute interview with Agnew.

Claiming Banzhaf was in "apparent violation of the Code of Professional Responsibility," the Baltimore judges urged legal disciplinary authorities in Washington to investigate Banzhaf. After much waffling the Washington disciplinary unit threw the judges' request out.

Book Picks—"The Palace Guard" by CBS newsmen Dan Rather and Gary Paul Gates expertly catches the piranha quality of the Nixon White House. There, H. R. Haldeman manipulates Spiro Agnew, John Ehrlichman sneers at honorable men like Bob Finch as "the Pasadena Hamlet" and Pat Moynihan as "our Oscar Wilde," and a Secret Serviceman loathingly confides that "we say . . . come the revolution, be sure and save two bullets: one for Haldeman and one for Ehrlichman."

"The Politician Primeval," by Hubert Humphrey's doctor and adviser, Dr. Edgar Berman, is so outrageously candid about the press and politicians that the book took three months to clear the libel lawyers.

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