

Early 20th-Century critic and social activist Randolph Bourne said “War is the health of the state.” Certainly the number of government workers whose financial health depends in whole or in part on their War on Drugs is huge: myriads of judges, bailiffs, jailers, parole officers, prison guards, court clerks, prosecutors, customs officers, contractors who construct prisons, wardens that run them, bus drivers that haul both pot users and authentic criminals to them, manufacturers of police cars, helicopters, and body armor, the CIA, the FBI, the DEA, the National Guard, the Coast Guard, ... Drug thugs from the czar down to his lowliest serf depend on the perpetual prosecution of the drug war.

Alcohol, tobacco, and pharmaceutical companies reap huge profits from the sales of their products – but they aren’t the only ones. Taxes on these products are very high, and the government rakes in billions. If pot were legalized – even if only for medical use – many users would grow their own. For commercial pot to compete with homegrown, government would have to keep taxes low. Thus government itself has a powerful financial incentive to keep cannabis illegal – and steer potential pot users to alcohol and other drugs.

Is marijuana competition to pharmaceutical companies?

How do pharmaceutical companies view the prospect of legal medical cannabis? Journalist Carl Wagner gave this answer in the *Hull Daily Mail* (United Kingdom) on May 31, 2002:

LITTLE PROFIT IN CANNABIS CURE

The truth is that herbal cannabis in natural forms would yield little profit for pharmaceutical corporations, while eliminating in the long term profit-driven patent drugs. Why allow people to use a safe plant for pennies when you can sell them a pill for a pound?

Nothing dramatizes the difference between cannabis and the products of the pharmaceutical giants than Marinol, the synthetic prescription drug that contains marijuana’s active ingredient, THC – “pot in a capsule.” (Question: Where do you suppose the name Mari – nol came from? Mari – juana, by chance? You bet!)

The following excerpts are from the *Physician’s Desk Reference* (PDR) 2003: pp. 3234-3235:

INDICATIONS AND USAGE

Marinol is synthetic delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol... Delta-9-THC...
A natural occurring component of cannabis sativa [Marijuana]

Marinol... treatment of anorexia associated with weight loss in patients with AIDS.

Nausea and vomiting... metabolites have been detected for more than five weeks... patients should be advised of possible changes in mood... so as to avoid panic... A cannabinoid dose-related 'high.' [Easy laughing, elation, and heightened awareness.]

WARNINGS

Patients receiving treatment with Marinol should be specifically warned not to drive, operate machinery, or engage in any hazardous activity *until* it is established that they are able to tolerate the drug and to perform such tasks safely. [Emphasis added.]

Employers that reject any applicant that smokes marijuana have no problem hiring people who take Marinol – yet the two drugs have the same psychoactive ingredient, and the same psychoactive effects. If Marinol does not automatically invalidate a worker's job performance, neither does organic marijuana.

In fact, there *are* medical differences – and all of them are in marijuana's favor.

Synthetic marijuana compared to the real thing

A pot high lasts for an hour or so, while a Marinol high may last for as long as 12 to 14 hours, and is often so intense one can't do useful work.

Marinol takes about an hour to kick in – an hour that seems endless when you're reeling from pain or nausea.

When Marinol is swallowed, it must proceed through the stomach and into the small intestine before being assimilated into the bloodstream. After absorption, it passes through the liver, where a significant proportion is biotransformed into other chemicals. Due to metabolism by the liver, 90 percent or more of swallowed THC never reaches sites of activity in the body. A recent study showed that, two hours after swallowing 10 to 15 milligrams of Marinol, 84 percent of subjects had no measurable THC in their blood. After six hours, 57 percent still had none. By contrast, two to five milligrams of THC consumed through smoking cannabis reliably produced blood concentrations above the effective level within a few minutes.⁹⁹

Inhaling, whether from a joint or a vaporizer, acts as rapidly as an intravenous injection. Relief from pain and nausea is almost immediate.

Cannabis smokers and vaporizer users can control dosage much more precisely than Marinol users: if one puff doesn't do the job, they can take another – and can easily stop before they become impaired. Incidentally, a vaporizer heats the cannabis to just under 400 degrees. The cannabis does not burn. You inhale only the vapor – no smoke, no tar – and I found that you obtain about twice the medicine from a vaporizer that you do from a joint, so it actually pays for itself. The cost of a vaporizer runs from about \$85 to around \$350.

And imagine trying to swallow a capsule while gagging from nausea and about to vomit.

Are organic cannabis patients treated fairly?

There are other differences as well. Marinol can cost up to \$2,000 a month. On the black market, marijuana is expensive too, but if it were legal, the price would drop by about 90 percent.

Of course, as tens of thousands of Americans have found by bitter experience, the biggest difference between Marinol and marijuana lies in how their users are treated. Users of both drugs are subjected to humiliating, company-required urine tests, but Marinol users are handed a Get Out of Jail Free card, while smokers are routinely forced into drug treatment, fired – or sent to prison.

Marinol users buy their quality-controlled drug from a pharmacist in a reputable drug store. Marijuana users must buy low-quality cannabis on the black market, often from a thug who also deals in dangerous narcotics.

Those who manufacture Marinol are treated as pillars of the community. Those who grow cannabis for the sick and dying are arrested, charged, tried, and imprisoned – and not even permitted to tell the jury *why* they grew marijuana. Under present federal law, benevolent intentions are no defense.

The feds don't really mind if you use drugs, so long as they are corporate *synthetic* drugs that contribute to giant profits for the pharmaceutical companies. They persist in the absurd claim that Marinol has medical value and cannabis doesn't. Next they'll be telling us that Vitamin C tablets are OK, but possession of orange juice is a felony.