

alcohol with the pursuit of self-knowledge and insight.

Secondly, the consumption of alcohol is seldom what Erving Goffman has called a "dominant involvement" in any given situation. Just as people are not usually preoccupied with the changes in their subjective experience when they drink, so they by no means drink just to get drunk. So the experience of drinking is unlikely to impede social interaction with other people.

For alcohol, these factors help to tilt what Goffman has described as the delicate balance between privacy and social accessibility. People begin to lower their inhibitions in response to, or in anticipation of, a similar lowering in the inhibition of others. This is behind the popular belief that a drink or two is a helpful way of "breaking the ice" at a social gatherings.

So alcohol has always been popular among members of all age groups of society. But why the sudden upswing? According to Dr. Unwin, one reason is the growing inaccessibility to pure drugs, mainly of the hallucinogenic type ("It's almost impossible to find pure mescaline in Montreal now—the street kind is usually only 10 percent pure,") and the opiates, but also among the stimulants, depressants and euphorants. Capitalists have clearly sunk their fingers more and more into the drug trade over the past few years. Coupled with the scarcity of good dope is the fact that alcohol is very accessible to anyone who wants it—and it can be obtained without the fear of violence and rip-offs that surround the drug trade. "I can take you to the brasserie down the street on Friday night and show you dozens of under-age kids getting zonked out of their minds with the consent of the owner," explains Unwin. "This is the real crime of our society."

Unwin feels that the legal forces of Canada have got their priorities backwards concerning the use of cannabis and that of alcohol. "People still have a 'Reefer Madness'-type attitude when it comes to grass. They'll look at the statistics, pass by those for alcohol (which is used by 68 percent of our high school kids) and shudder instead at the pot statistics. It's crazy."

Unwin, one of the first professional psychiatrists to advocate the easing of drug laws in Canada, thinks that government efforts to minimise penalties for personal use have not been satisfactory. He sees legalization of pot as the lesser of two evils—while laws regarding the selling of liquor to minors should be reinforced.

Apparently many others in his position agree. Two Toronto researchers noted in 1972 that "Any successful effort to reduce drug abuse will mean that most people in the population have to use fewer drugs such as alcohol, tobacco and psycho-actives." The Le Dain Commission came to the same conclusion, noting that "while alcohol is more harmful than any other drug—it resulted in more than 70.5 percent of all drug related deaths in 1971—560 prison sentences were meted out for simple possession of cannabis." This shows the hypocrisy of Canadian law.

"Sleep tonight with Nyquil"

The use of drugs among the "older generation" helps to aggravate the problem of drug abuse among the young. The Seventies is not only the decade of booze, but also the decade of the pill. People in this society simply expect there is a pharmacological solution to all their problems—if they have an aspirin, if they have a stomach ache, they take Alka Seltzer, if they're nervous, they take a tranquilizer, if they can't sleep, they take a sleeping pill... it goes on and on. "People are using pills and alcohol as a crutch far more frequently these days than ever before," says Unwin. "I go to parties in Westmount or Outremont, and



almost without fail see someone take out a beautifully decorated pill box chock full of assorted barbiturates. All they ever tell me is that they take them to relax with their martinis every once in a while." Unwin said few people taking pills regularly have seen a psychiatrist or sought medical help.

According to Unwin, and many others in his field, the misuse of drugs by parents is not the only thing that influences kids to experiment with dope. The mass media is another important source for kids to find out about the "healing qualities" of pills. "You look at any television program or advertisement today and tell me if you wouldn't be curious to try a sleeping pill if you couldn't sleep," says Unwin. The government has made some attempts to restrict the encouragement of drug use in the media, but has once again not gone far enough. The Le Dain Commission, investigating how advertisers use drug related themes to promote their

products, found that a quarter of all expenditure invested on advertising was spent on advertising for alcohol, tobacco and over the counter pharmaceutical preparations in 1970—a total of \$84 million.

A sinking Titanic

There are no clear-cut solutions to the growing dependence of Canadians on drugs. Dissatisfaction is spreading rapidly through all segments of society as people watch "their" system decaying. As the

contradiction between those who own and control the means of production and those who simply sell their labour-power to those owners to survive sharpens, a feeling of helplessness, alienation and fear sets in which most people find difficult to take without help. In the face of threatening unemployment, inflation, political corruption and pollution, drugs in all its forms proves to offer a temporary crutch.

Fortunately, many people are beginning to realize that an alternative social order cannot be founded on the use of drugs alone. Although youth in the "counterculture," if it can be called that today, may use dope to some extent as an orientation or a rallying point in their protest against the system, they are turning to more concrete forms of protest—as can be seen from the recent CEGEP action.

One thing is clear, however; drugs are here to stay. Cannabis has become as institutionalised as alcohol and prescription pills, and no matter what actions are taken to suppress its use, it will remain a part of Canadian society. The Le Dain and Schafer Commissions have realized this, and have already called for the decriminalization of its use. Alcohol, of course, is also going to be used until kingdom come—the Prohibition Years will certainly never return to Canada. As for the use of other drugs—these will also remain, and until a new social order is formed in Canada through the struggle and willpower of its people, they will continue to be abused. After all, to paraphrase Dr. Unwin, if you're riding on the Titanic, why not make the best of it?