



Mandatory Drug Testing Called Useless

By James Young

Vancouver (CUP) — Canadian students would benefit if Brian Mulroney's support for mandatory drug testing disappeared in a puff of smoke, says a Simon Fraser University psychology professor.

"Mandatory drug testing is a hopeless idea — it creates humiliation and indignation and cannot solve the problem of drug dependence as it is supposed to," said Bruce Alexander.

On a trip to Vancouver in September, the prime minister said the government was examining the legality of mandatory drug testing under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and agreed he implement such tests if possible.

While Mulroney later denied the statements, which were recorded during a press conference, The Vancouver Sun stood behind its original report.

Meanwhile, American Motors Inc. has announced drug tests are being used for all of its employees. In the House of Commons Nov. 4, Mulroney defended his comments on Canada's drug problem, which he called an "epidemic" to the surprise of most health agencies and experts.

"I had the occasion to describe the drug situation in Canada as I saw it and felt it to be at the time. I am delighted to see that most Canadians agree with that," Mulroney said, referring to a recently released poll showing 75 per cent of Canadians agree there is a drug epidemic in the country.

Psychologist Alexander, who researched drug problems for 15 years, says there are many reasons to oppose drug testing.

"I have met a lot of people who lost their jobs in the U.S. because of testing," he said. "There are a lot of cases before the courts right now — people are arguing that the test results are wrong and it is unfair to dismiss them."

Alexander said the tests have a false positive rate of about five per cent, with one man fired for opium use after eating bread covered with poppy seeds.

In the past several years, millions of people have been forced to undergo testing in the U.S., including employees of one-third of the 500 largest companies, the armed forces, and sections within the federal government, said Alexander.

Another argument against testing is its effect on employee relations, Alexander said.

"You go to work and have to pee in a jar — how many people want to work in that kind of atmosphere?" asked Alexander, adding the very premise for testing rests on very shaky foundations.

"It is predicted on the idea of rampant drug use in Canada

and that's not true — 90 per cent of the people who use cocaine and marijuana, for example, do not have a serious drug problem, but are using drugs recreationally and not harming anyone," he said.

"If you fire people for using marijuana at a party two weeks ago, you are only harming them," he said.

Alexander said that man vol-

iticians who succumb to anti-drug hysteria are simply naive, while others, including U.S. President Ronald Reagan, use it to distract from domestic issues and as an instrument of foreign policy.

"It serves all of us to have a scapegoat to blame for high taxes and unemployment — politicians are caught up in the same mentality as everyone else," he said.

Federal Science Policy In Disarray

Ottawa (CUP) — The federal government's commitment to quality research is eroding, warn scientists and research groups.

The National Research Council has been told to cut \$20 million from its budget, and find another \$74 million during the next five years as part of Canada's \$800 million share of the American space station project.

NRC president Larkin Kerwin said as many as 200 scientists could lose their jobs, while some NRC departments and facilities will be either shut down or sold.

Kerwin, calling the government decision "regrettable", said the council administrators have tried to minimize losses. "We have looked carefully at

all our programs and have had to take some very difficult decisions," Kerwin said.

The NRC cutback follows a decision this winter to freeze guaranteed funding to the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, which fund most research on Canadian campuses. As well, the government last year cut 50 per cent of the budget of the Science Council of Canada, a policy and advisory body.

Science and technology minister Frank Oberle, who has been attacked almost daily in the House of Commons by opposition critics, staunchly defends the government's move to reduce the federal deficit, and said reported damage to Canadian research is exaggerated.

"There will be no layoffs and no pink slips (at the NRC)," said Oberle, even though senior NRC officials say layoffs are inevitable.

And even if layoffs are avoided, they say, research will suffer because of insufficient funding for equipment, supplies, and support staff.

"Of what I can see, budgets are dropping, and support is disappearing," said NRC physicist Zbigniew Basinski, a member of the Order of Canada who studies metal strength and fatigue.

"Funding restraint (is making) my research impossible," he said.

"From our point of view, the really terrible thing is that morale is going below sea level," he said.

Mosur Sundaresan, chair of Carleton University's physics

department, said scientists outside the NRC also have reason to lose heart. "Although we have not been directly affected, we are very concerned about the future," he said.

"We are not convinced the government are[sic] very concerned about the future. We are not convinced the government should be putting[sic] so much money into the space station project on such a long-term basis," said Sundaresan.

The Canadian Association of University Teachers is not opposed to Canadian participation in the space venture, but CAUT president Allan Sharp said the cut "is another wrong step to take."

"Canada provides too little money for research in Canada. Mr Oberle seems to be of the view that science policy in Canada can be improved without new funds," said Sharp.

"We think improving science policy will require new money. Mr. Oberle is going to have to accept that fact, somewhere along the line," said Sharp.

David Orlikow, New Democratic technology critic, said the private sector will not provide as much financial support as the government is expecting it to.

"There's no evidence that that's going to work. Opinion in the private sector is contrary to that," Orlikow said.

Opposition MPs have harangued the Mulroney government for backing down on pre-election promises to double research and development spending.

"The prime minister when he was leader of the opposition said he would increase funding to the NRC," Orlikow said.

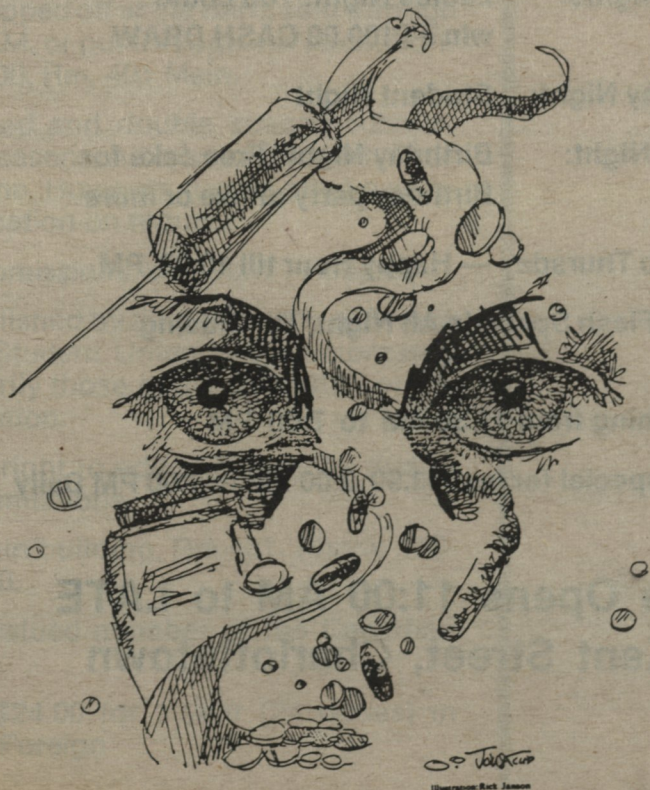


Illustration: Rick James