

THC is a Paper Tiger

Before the National Council (Nationalrat) convened in the autumn of 2004 to discuss the liberalisation of cannabis production and consumption, the Swiss television program “Kassensturz” organised a test of various cannabis products purchased in Zurich. All the tests produced measurements of THC content ranging from 6 percent (birdseed) to a hair-raising 35 percent. The tests were carried out by a certain Dr. Werner Bernard of the Institute of Forensic Medicine (IRM) in Bern. Shocked and made uncertain by such high figures, the National Council decided in a rather cowardly way not to take up the issue.

Every attempt made by the proponents of the cannabis trade to have these figures verified by an independent laboratory was blocked by “Kassensturz”. So began once again the condemnation of the hemp plant in Switzerland. After several years of objective and rational discussion by politicians and hemp producers, the “hard-liners” used their old collection of distortions (fairy tales) by claiming that the new types of cannabis were, in the words of a Council member, one hundred times more addictive than heroin. In test results obtained from over 50 hemp samples of the same type, produced by a known hemp farmer in Canton Fribourg, the THC content had suddenly risen ten times. Even THC-free hemp products available in Growland, seized in a 2001 police raid, were suddenly shown to contain THC.

The Dutch are laughing up their sleeve at Switzerland because through extensive experience they know that recreational hemp with a THC level over 12 percent cannot be smoked because of severe throat irritation. The strongest product tested in Holland showed a THC level of 17 percent and this was intended for medicinal use, such as tea infusions and inhalations, but certainly not for smoking. In view of this, it’s ridiculous to believe that after only several years, Switzerland has been able to increase the THC content of hemp by several times.

In a December, 2005 report on the strength of commercially available cannabis, an EU commission stated clearly that “the figures from Switzerland showing 21 to 24 percent are practically worthless”. In light of this, how can it be that Swiss hemp suddenly revealed such a high THC content compared with 10 years ago?

Simply stated, the test results have been tampered with. Tens of thousands of cannabis users who consumed indoor hemp ten years ago have confirmed that the hemp they smoke today is no stronger than before. It's not the THC content which has changed but the testing methods!

Former testing for THC levels employed the GLC method (Gas Chromatography), using dried, unheated hemp. For the past six years, Bernhard used the HPLC (High Pressure Chromatography) method, a procedure which requires heating the product to 100 degrees centigrade for two and a half hours so as to convert the previously unconverted or practically non-existent THC acid into Delta 9 THC. The aim was to raise the measured THC content to a higher level than when it was seized by the police. The use of phrases such as "the highest available amount of THC in a product", or "the total amount of THC" undermined their own tactics. The Federal Supreme Court in Lausanne, in its (unconstitutional) ruling of March, 2000, stated that all substances exceeding 0.3 percent are classified as narcotics and therefore illegal. Such manoeuvring has achieved nothing while at the same time burdened Switzerland with more than 3,000 unemployed.

These altered testing methods are similar to converting beer and wine into hard liquor. Instead of measuring the alcohol content of the original, the product itself is changed and the results thereby falsified. Because of this scientific sleight-of-hand, Switzerland has been led about by the nose for the last several years. The National Council was so deceived that its members decided not to take up the issue of cannabis legislation at all. Many hemp producers have been put in the enemy camp, and hundreds of innocent farmers, sales personnel and consumers have been unfairly prosecuted. And this in a land of freedom and justice before the law! One is led to wonder whether such behaviour on the part of our "representatives" constitutes a breach of legal procedure.

So what is to be done when someone attempts to knock you down with unfair tactics? First, roll with the blow so as to be able to get back on your feet and then use the force of the attack against the aggressor himself. Exactly this has happened.

Dr. Bernhard, who made such a mess of the tests and felt so proud when supported by obscure groups such as “Youth without Drugs”, has been dislodged from his position by his colleagues for having used unscientific testing methods and produced unreliable results. He no longer heads the IRM.

There is some room for hope that more objective test results can now be obtained. This would vindicate the activists involved in the hemp trade and, when properly handled, rekindle interest in the “Hemp Initiative” launched some years ago. The unfair and repressive decisions recently handed down by the National Council could be scrapped.

So this unpleasant chapter of the hemp story closes with the words of the Great Leader Mao Tse Bong: THC is a Paper Tiger.