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Drug Profits Root of Our Problems

WHY ARE so many people scared into panic by the possibility of being wiped out by an atomic bomb while they persistently pursue their own means of self-destruction?

Scientific and medical evidence should have made everyone aware that smoking causes cancer, drinking causes alcoholism and narcotics lead to addiction. Yet these vices are subsidized and taxed by government, opposed by concerned citizens and are advertised in almost every home.

The seriousness of the situation is made distressingly plain by an article in the February issue of National Geographic magazine. In a foreword, editor Wilbur E. Garrett says the United States has become a "drug culture."

Garrett says that estimated consumption of illegal drugs in 1983 included enough marijuana to make 125 "joints" for each man, woman and child in the nation; enough co-

caine for a billion "snorts;" and enough heroin for 40 million "hits."

"Add to this close to 500 million gallons of the socially acceptable and legal drug in beer, wine and liquor, and the even more devastating use of tobacco," the editor wrote.

He reviewed the long history of mind-warping and body-wrecking drugs and observes that "Not since Prohibition have so many fortunes been made in illegal trade."

Thereby he puts his finger on the cause of the troubles. As long as a profit can be made, trade in alcohol, tobacco and drugs will continue, regardless of their terrible effects.

"Arguments can be made for decriminalizing drug use," Garrett said. "Providing cheap — or even free — drugs to registered addicts would eliminate the pusher, exorbitant street prices, and, presumably, the rampant crime traced to addicts. Realistically, I think the market is too lucrative for dealers and too abhorrent to others for it ever to be legalized.

"Drug abuse will never be eliminated, but we must increase young people's sensitivity to the difference between constructive use of drugs and destructive abuse, and maximum effort must be applied to enforce present laws and treaties."

The continual advertising campaigns to increase usage of alcoholic beverages is meeting new opposition, potent enough to cause manufacturers and distributors to take notice.

A coalition, including the Center for Science in the Public Interest and the National PTA, is backing "Project SMART" — Stop Marketing Alcohol on Radio and Television. The coalition hopes to deliver a million signatures on petitions to Congress demanding a ban on alcoholic beverage commercials or "counter-advertising" that warns of dangers of alcohol use.

Sponsors of SMART say it is not a prohibition movement, but perhaps it ought to be because so many individuals won't "prohibit" their own "non-violent self-destruction."