



SERT. MURAL IN TOWN HALL OF BARCELONA (DETAIL).

DRUGS IN CATALONIA: FROM THE DICTATORSHIP TO DEMOCRACY

WITH THE GRADUAL CONSOLIDATION OF DEMOCRACY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF CATALONIA'S AUTONOMY, IT SEEMS THAT WE HAVE FINALLY COME TO LOOK ON THE PHENOMENON OF DRUG ADDICTION NOT AS THE "DIRTY HABIT" OF A MINORITY SO MUCH AS A SYMPTOM AND AT THE SAME TIME A SERIOUS ILLNESS OF THE COMMUNITY.

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The Spanish Civil War ended in 1939 with the triumph of the *coup* headed by General Franco over the legitimate government of the Republic. Catalonia, and the whole of Spain, remained sunk in the Franco dic-

tatorship until 1975, the year the dictator died.

Until 1966, Spain, compared with other European countries, was unaffected by the legal and social changes that took place on an international level. Until

then, neither heroin nor cocaine were consumed in Spain, but there was one tolerated group of morphine addicts, in part people wounded and/or crippled in the war who had come to depend on the drug for medical reasons, and an-

other made up of hospital staff, doctors, nurses and nuns, who had easy access to the drug.

It is worth mentioning the widespread consumption of amphetamines during the post-war years. This drug was introduced during the war for use for military ends, even as a "test-bed" for the international powers (the object being to increase military efficiency and boost morale amongst the civilian population). Amphetamines at that time were freely available in chemists' and their use was even recommended. Between 1940 and 1960, tobacco and alcohol consumption was very stable. Only men, and not all, smoked or drank.

This situation changed in the sixties. The Spanish state's Stabilization and Development Plan led to economic growth; one of the consequences was rural depopulation, with the development of large metropolitan areas and emigration to other European countries.

These population movements caused widespread upheaval in the social fabric, and the pressure resulting from the uprooting, the disorder and the alienation, under an authoritarian political system, called for new escape routes; one of the most common was alcohol. Between 1959 and 1981 the consumption of alcohol increased from eight to fifteen litres per person per year, while cigarette smoking increased from 1,497 per person per year to 2,547. In both cases, the bulk of the increase was a result of women taking up alcohol and tobacco consumption. During the sixties, alcohol and tobacco became the chief direct and indirect cause of death and mobility and the most serious threat to health.

Between 1968 and 1973, the number of arrests for drug consumption was very low. The drugs in vogue were basically cannabis (as hashish) and LSD. After 1970, there was an increase in the quantities confiscated and the number of arrests made.

One hypothesis we have to consider is that the press campaigns and the belligerent attitude of the Franco regime helped to make drugs like cannabis more widely known, as they provided detailed information about their effects and condemned them on traditional



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moral grounds which were rejected by the majority of the Catalan population. This identification between politics and drugs had a further widespread effect in the country, as many intellectuals and leftists adopted a favourable attitude to drugs.

Consumption increased. The systematic distribution of heroin began towards the middle of 1975. 1976 saw the start of robberies in chemists', and in 1977 the first two heroin addicts were admitted to the Mental Hospital at Santa Coloma (Barcelona) by order of the courts. The need for a new type of medical attention had appeared, and the response was the establishment of the first centre in Catalonia specializing in the treatment of drug addicts: the Barcelona Corporation's Department of

Social Affairs's SPOTT. During this period, increasing liberalization and the last gasps of the Franco regime made for a confused situation in which drugs were seen as a step forward, while abstemiousness represented the fading dictatorship. From 1978 on, hedonistic and couldn't-care-less attitudes began to appear in which drugs *per se* played a central role, and which resulted in the emergence of extensive polytoxicomania.

It was not until the end of 1985, when the Catalan Parliament approved Law 20/85 on "Prevention and Treatment in matters of habit-forming substances", that a network for the treatment of drug addicts was organised in Catalonia. By way of example, in a socio-epidemiological study carried out by the Generalitat de Catalunya in 1986, it was estimated that the heroin-consuming population could number about 20,000 people, mostly between the ages of 16 and 29.

The rapid growth in the number of young people consuming a variety of drugs and the appearance of AIDS presents a new threat to the health of the community today, since in Catalonia 62 % of intravenous addicts are infected by the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV).

This fact called for the adoption of new forms both of treatment and of prevention. In 1990 a Royal Decree was published which "regulates treatment with opiates of addicted people" (the so-called Methadone Law), and whose aims are, amongst others, that as many addicts as possible should receive treatment. The first experiments started in Barcelona with the object of encouraging drug addicts to request treatment (exchange of syringes, distribution of condoms, medical facilities on wheels, etc.). In short, this was the start of the first community programmes for the treatment of drug addiction. With the gradual consolidation of democracy and the development of Catalonia's autonomy, it seems that we have finally come to look on the phenomenon of drug addiction not as the "dirty habit" of a minority so much as a symptom and at the same time a serious illness of the community. ●