

# Reform for pot laws slow

**United Press International**  
JACKSON, Miss. — The first major reform in marijuana laws in the Deep South may have had its genesis last spring in the seizure of a 55-foot shrimp boat along Mississippi's sandy Gulf Coast.

Nine tons of high-grade Colombian grass were confiscated in the pre-dawn raid by narcotics officers. Nine persons were arrested, charged with possession of marijuana with intent to distribute.

The first four suspects went before a circuit court judge in January, just as the 1977 session of the Mississippi Legislature was beginning. They entered pleas of guilty and went free on fines of \$15,000 each. Similar fines have since been levied against other suspects in the case, but no jail terms.

Previous efforts to modify marijuana laws had gotten nowhere in this traditionally conservative state, the last in the nation to repeal prohibition in 1966. But news accounts of the light penalties in the Gulf Coast raid gave new incentive to lawmakers pushing for a revision of drug laws.

If persons accused of smuggling large quantities of marijuana into the country get off with \$15,000 fines, lawmakers argued repeatedly, why should young first offenders face jail sentences for being caught with a few cigarettes?

The arguments proved effective. On April 15, Gov. Cliff Finch signed a bill into law ending jail terms for first offenders for possessing an ounce or less of marijuana. At the same time, the act imposes strict new penalties for hard-drug sales and possession of large amounts of marijuana.

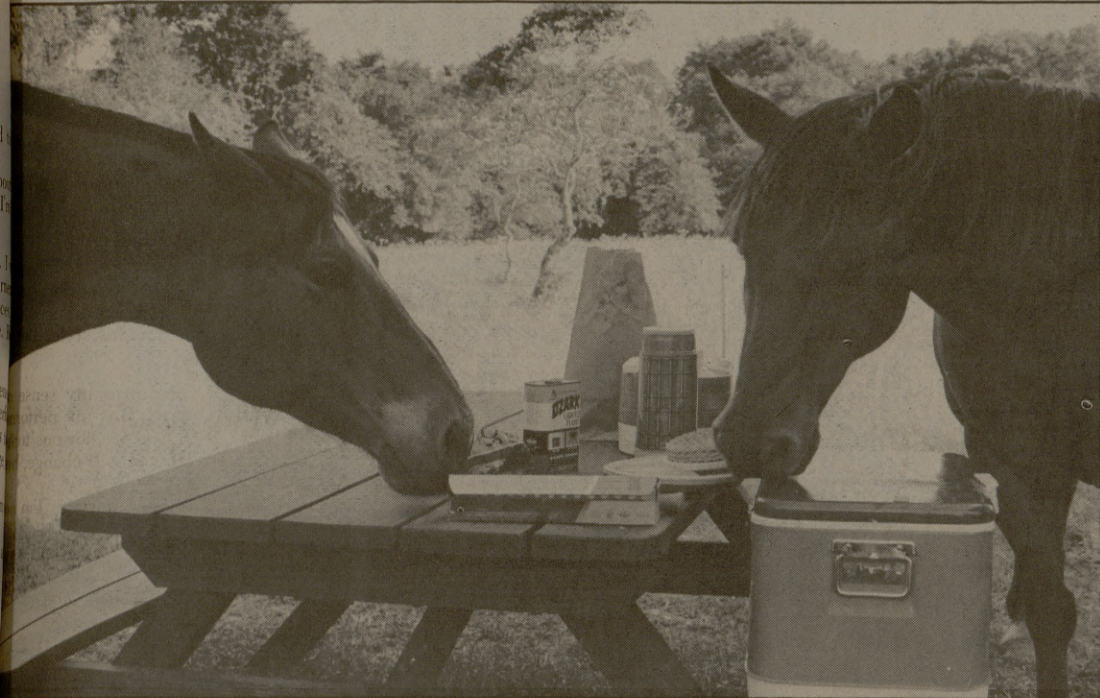
Seven states across the nation have revamped marijuana laws, but Mississippi was the first in the South to act. Keith Stroup, director of NORML, the National Organization for Reform of Marijuana Laws, said he would have opposed Mississippi's act if it had been "in New York, Wisconsin or a lot of other states." "But in Mississippi we support it as a significant breakthrough," Stroup said. "The symbolic value of decriminalizing the marijuana smoker in the Deep South will not be lost on the rest of the country. It

clearly is a version of decriminalization as it pertains to first offenders." Legislators who handled the bill insisted it did not mean decriminalization. First offenders still face fines of \$100 to \$250 for possession of one ounce or less, with increasingly tougher penalties for subsequent offenses and possession of large amounts.

The old law provided maximum penalties of one year in jail and fines up to \$1,000 for possession of one ounce or less, leaving judges wide

discretion in fixing the actual punishment.

Marijuana laws vary greatly in other Southern states, and attempts to change them have met with little success. In Tennessee, a bill to reduce penalties for use of small amounts of marijuana recently was rejected by a Senate committee. Decriminalization bills have failed twice in the Georgia Legislature in the past two years. And few if any changes have been made in Alabama, Florida, or the Carolinas.



**Just horsing around**

Battalion photo by Linda Howard

Rascal and Lady would have no part of mere oats at a recent picnic held in their pasture on Elmo Weedon Road. While their owners were fishing, the horses helped

themselves to a few goodies. The horses belong to Dr. and Mrs. Dennis Howard of College Station.

## Vice, virtue surround bar owner

**United Press International**  
DALLAS — If his life is a mixture of vice and virtue he doesn't seem to know it.

On the shelves of the Body Shop's are bottles of bourbon and gin and vodka; but on his desk is an empty Dairy Queen paragon, the remaining ribbons of color suggesting vanilla, chocolate and strawberry ice cream.

And while the seductive movements of the young topless dancers bring in the paying customers at the front, he sits in his office the back sending thousands in gifts to charity.

"I don't see any conflict," he says. "This, the club, is just what I do for living."

The charities? I don't know why give to charities, I guess I'm just a touchy."

The voice coming from somewhere under the bushy black beard that of George "here let me spell out for you it's 15 miles long" Charalambotoulas.

All Greek to you, eh?" And his name may be found on the list of donors to the Heart Fund, the Cancer Society and the Lung Association. He gives to the March of Dimes and the Crippled Children's Society. He lets himself be overcharged on all buckles so kids can go to summer camp.

His name also may be found on the police record, where either he or his manager, Vince Vinson, are booked after periodic vice raids.

"I give to the Police Association, and they still bust me," he said. "And I still give to them."

Giving (between \$4,000 and \$5,000 annually) is a habit the 29-year-old got into a long time ago, but not necessarily before he got involved in vice.

Charalambotoulas says in one form or another he's been in the strip club business since he was 15, three years after his family migrated from Greece to the United States. In his adult life he has opened taverns and restaurants, owned and managed and sold topless bars, and now has settled — at least for a while — on the Body Shop and the Spotlight Club.

His charitable efforts began with driving a bus for crippled children. In the years since he has been a volunteer worker with cancer patients and has even gotten some of the girls in his clubs to put in time.

"About three years ago the March of Dimes had a thing where businesses would put up some money for every mile some kids could walk," he said. "So we sponsored some of the girls here. They went out and walked 20 miles that day, then came to work that night with blisters on their feet."

Although most businesses usually sponsor the walkers for between a quarter and a dollar per mile, last year the Spotlight Club pledged \$20 to the March of Dimes for every mile a crippled girl in a wheelchair could go.

She made the entire 20 mile trek, and the Spotlight Club wrote a check for \$400.

"Some people ask me why, and all I can tell them is that I want to get involved," said Charalambotoulas. "Some customers come in and say I just want free publicity, or I want to get something out of it."

"But we don't get anything out of it. That thing last year with the girl in the wheelchair was on TV, but that's the first time we got any publicity."

Charalambotoulas, known to his friends as "George the Greek," says at times his customers are surprised to find him involved in charities, and at times charities are surprised to find involved in topless bars.

"As long as you help somebody, what difference does it make," he said. "We give in good faith. Our money is as good as anyone's."

Still, Charalambotoulas says at times he feels that neither he nor his business is quite accepted by some organizations — no matter how good the cause.

"Oh, they're always glad to have the money," he said, with both frustration and humor in his voice. "But sometimes they're not in such a hurry that they want to come by here and pick up the check."

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