

Narco Agents Raid Artists' Workshop

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As forecast in the FIFTH ESTATE (Dec. 15–31, 1966) federal, state, and local “narcotic” agents swooped down upon Detroit’s underground community Jan. 24th to enforce Michigan’s archaic and repressive narcotic statutes. The late night raids resulted in the arrests of 56 persons ranging in ages from 17 to 33 years old.

Sites of the raid, which started in the early evening and lasted until midnight, were mostly in the Wayne University area. A special target was the Artist’s Workshop on John C. Lodge, where the largest number of arrests were made.

The Workshop has long been the center of avant-garde cultural activity in Detroit, providing a place for poets, musicians, artists and writers to practice and perform. The Artist Workshop Press has printed many small books by young poets and writers and publishes several magazines, including a paper, GUERILLA.

The Workshop also served as the meeting place for LEMAR (Legalize Marijuana) Committee which observers feel was a contributing factor in the desire of the police to hit the site.

Although the raid was carried out at eight locations and utilized the entire 22 man Detroit Narcotics Squad, seven federal narcotic agents, five customs agents, three members of the Michigan State intelligence bureau and an agent from the Federal Food and Drug Administration, only a small amount of marijuana was seized.

John Sinclair, head of the Artists’ Workshop and columnist for the FIFTH ESTATE, reports he was in his studio practicing with the Detroit Edison White Light Band, when several men entered. Sinclair said he was unable to do anything because the band kept blasting away with its rendition of “Love Supreme.” When the love band stopped playing, the men identified themselves as narcotic bureau agents and placed Sinclair under arrest for giving two marijuana cigarettes to an undercover agent. Fifteen others who were present were taken to the station under a charge of investigation (an illegal procedure).

Sinclair, who has been convicted twice previously on narcotic charges, said the undercover man was Vahan Kapagihan, the same agent who last arrested him. Kapagihan grew a beard and long hair and going under the name “Louie,” gained the confidence of the Artists’ Workshop. “He even brought fried chicken to our communal dinner and his wife helped with putting together our magazine.”

“That’s the way these people operate,” Sinclair concluded.

The January 24 raids were masterminded by Lt. Warner Stringfellow, of the Detroit Narcotics squad. Stringfellow led the raids during Sinclair’s last two arrests. Artist Workshop magazines, posters and books were confiscated by the police. The agents had no warrant, but said the matter would be explained later.

Sinclair told one narcotic agent that he must be quite a danger, to which the cop replied, “I just hope none of those kids are listening to you.”

“We aren’t criminals,” Sinclair said, “and these laws can’t make us ones. This wasn’t just an attempt to stop ‘drugs,’ but an attack on a whole way of life.”

Another building hit in the raid was occupied by Sandy Weinstock, proprietor of Plum Street's Reality Toke Shop. Weinstock said about ten police officers forced their way into his home at 647 W. Forest, without showing a warrant.

He added that his place was torn apart by the agents in their search for illegal drugs. The police also arrested ten people coming to visit Weinstock. Barbara Shapoff and Mike Knight were arrested while walking in front of the building. Knight was charged with sales and possession, but Miss Shapoff was released with no charges filed against her.

One of the occupants of the house, Mary Kay Tomaino, charged that police opened her contact lens case and dropped both of them to the floor, where they were crushed.

Inspector Joseph Brown, chief of the Detroit Narcotics Squad, said members of his bureau had infiltrated the groups arrested and claimed they had made purchases from the accused. All those arrested deny this allegation.

Brown was quoted in the Detroit News as saying "This is one of the largest raids in Detroit in recent years. Among them were suspected LSD users." He described the men seized as "bearded, booted and dressed in 'way-out' manners. The women were in mod."

Brown told the FIFTH ESTATE that he thought those arrested were a danger to the population of Detroit, but he would not be drawn into a controversy about it.

Of the fifty-six arrested, only ten were held for arraignment and the others were released. The ten stood mute before Judge Geraldine Ford in Detroit's Recorder's Court and released on personal bond with the exception of John Sinclair, who had to post \$1,500 bond. Also among those arrested were Penny Pepper, Charles Scruggs, Don Mayes, Marlene Croghan, John Nagel, Ralph Greenwood and Norman Weingarden.

In later developments the Detroit chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) Board of Directors met and voted to set up a special committee to investigate possible infringements of civil liberties. Those arrested claim all of their houses were searched illegally and are especially irate about the unnecessary arrests and detainment of the 46 persons released with no charges.



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