



SIGHTINGS

TURNING AN OLD LEAF

THE WAR ON DRUGS IS GOING UP IN SMOKE. Each year, the Mexican government burns tons of seized marijuana, sometimes creating public ceremonies around bonfires to reassure the public that authorities are making progress to fight the nation's rampant illegal-drug trade. Of course, weary Mexicans know that where there's smoke, there are mirrors. No amount of torched cannabis—including the forty-six tons, shown above, recently incinerated at a Tijuana military base—will convince the country's citizens, or anyone else, that the government is winning a losing battle. Increasingly, Mexican officials are conceding that it's time to clear the air. Literally.

Soon enough, there won't be any pot to set aflame—that is, if current efforts to decriminalize marijuana become law. What was once a fringe movement in Mexico just recently got the backing of former Mexican leader Vicente Fox, whose presidency was partially defined by fighting drug-related crime. Today, Fox publicly supports legalization of pot, recently stating that "Mexico should become an authorized producer, and export marijuana to places where it is already legal."

He's not alone. Throughout Latin America, leaders are rejecting decades' worth of tactics to stamp out illegal drugs, favoring varying degrees of decriminalization instead. In Uruguay, despite polls showing that most citizens oppose legalizing pot, President José "Pepe" Mujica continues to push for new laws, stating that the population "must be educated" on the benefits of legalization. Meanwhile, Guatemalan President Otto Perez Molina continues to argue against prohibition of not just marijuana but even narcotics like cocaine.

Most critics agree, however, that until the United States—which has one of the world's highest rates of marijuana use (Mexico, incidentally, has one of the lowest)—makes greater strides to legalize the plant, the struggle against drug cartels will persist. Even if certain Latin American countries were to legalize pot, doing so would only transfer violence to other areas. In other words, reducing crime demands—get ready for the pun—a joint effort. —VADIM LIBERMAN