

The Legendary Ed Sanders

A Head of his Time

Fug You
By Ed Sanders
Da Capo, New York, 2011
424 pp.

Reviewed by Martin A. Lee

When poet-activist Ed Sanders published the first issue of his "Marijuana Newsletter" in 1964, cannabis legalization was not on America's political radar.

"Time is NOW for a Total Assault on the Marijuana Laws!" Sanders declared. "We have the facts! Cannabis is a non-addictive gentle peace drug!" Calling for "an intelligent, sensitive public campaign" to change the law, Sanders advocated "pot-ins at government headquarters, public forums and squawking, poster walks, hemp farm disobedience."

"Hemp is the WAY!" he proclaimed.

Three years later Sanders and his outrageous folk-rock ensemble, the Fugs, stood on a flatbed truck and performed "The Exorcism of the Pentagon" at a huge antiwar protest that bequeathed to the world the indelible photographic image of flowers sprouting from the rifle butts of young soldiers guarding the high church of the military industrial complex.

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Those were the days, as Sanders recounts with wit and verve in Fug You, his engaging memoir of the Sixties. Fug You parts the curtain on a little-known chapter of early marijuana activism in the United States. It describes the beginning of a grassroots countercultural movement that would eventually grow into a widespread populist revolt against conventional medicine and extraconstitutional authority.

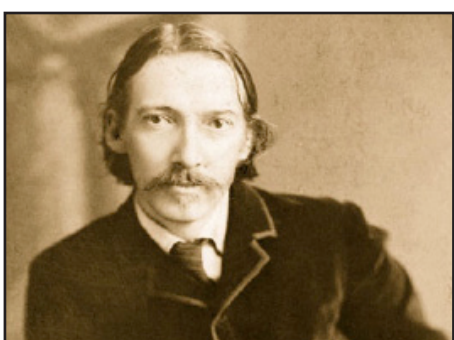
And who better to tell the story of the origins of the legalization struggle than Ed Sanders, an unflappably creative, nonviolent agitator for social justice? He's an American treasure - classics scholar, songwriter, investigative bard, sculptor of resonant phrases ("punk rock"), author of the three-volume America: A History in Verse, inventor of oddball musical instruments. A former boy scout from Missouri, Sanders fell under the gene-shredding influence of Ginsberg's Howl as a teenager. He moved to New York City's East Village, where he ran with a loose-knit cadre of literary bohemians who sought to translate the Beat critique into political activism.

In 1961, Sanders and several cohorts tried to board a Polaris submarine docked in Groton, CT. Their intent was to conduct a peace vigil atop the missile hatches to protest cancer-spreading open-air nuclear bomb testing. After serving sixty days in jail for this exercise in agit-prop, Sanders acquired a mimeograph machine (then the cutting edge information technology) and began publishing Fuck You / A Magazine of the Arts. Every envelope-pushing issue of Fuck You was a no holds barred attack on the state of the planet. Copies were available at Sanders's Peace Eye Bookstore, a vibrant, countercultural hub on the Lower East Side of Manhattan.

A Hipper Mr. Jones

In The Amateur Emigrant, Robert Louis Stevenson writes about Mr. Jones, an "excellent friend" he met on the passage from Glasgow to New York.

"He was from Wales, and had been most of his life a blacksmith...strong and skillful in his trade... His was the nature that looks forward, and goes on from one year to another and through all the extremities of fortune undismayed; and if the sky were to fall to-morrow, I should look to see Jones, the day following, perched on a stepladder and getting things to rights. He was always hovering round inventions like a bee of a flower, and lived in a dream of patents. He had with him a patent medicine, for instance, the composition of which he had bought years ago for five dollars from an American pedlar, and sold the other day for a hundred pounds (I think it was) to an English apothecary. It was called Golden Oil; cured all maladies without exception; and I am bound to say that I partook of it myself with good results, It is a character of the



ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

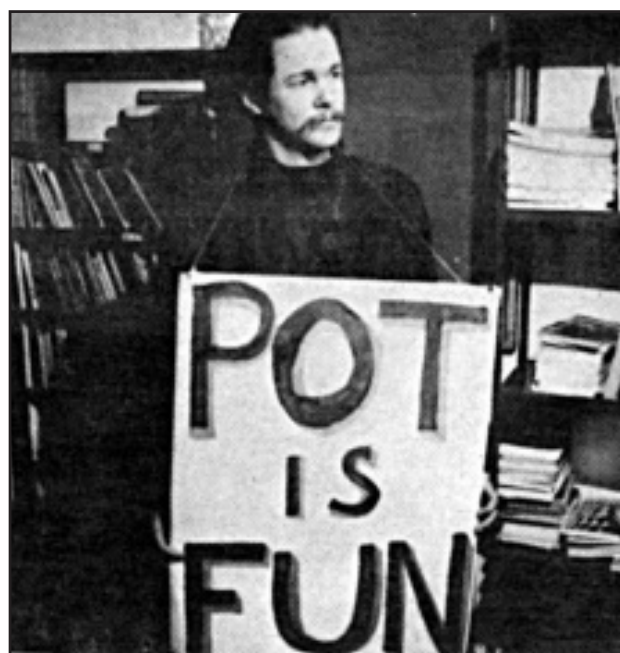


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During the mid-1960s, the Peace Eye Bookstore served as the unofficial headquarters of the Committee to Legalize Marijuana (Lemar), a group launched by Sanders and Allen Ginsberg to liberate cannabis "from the grousches of the uberculture." The idea, Sanders explained, was "to get people who use marijuana to stand up and agitate for its legalization."

For these early marijuana activists, the struggle against censorship and the fight against pot prohibition were inseparable. Lemar members broke taboos of conformity and silence; they made free speech freer. They published pro-marijuana leaflets and picketed for drug policy reform, hoisting signs with iconic messages that still ring true: "POT IS FUN" and "POT IS A REALITY KICK."

Sanders's saga is great history. It's also a timely reminder that the pro-marijuana movement began not as a single-issue affair. From the outset, efforts to end pot prohibition were part of a broader movement for peace and social justice that drew inspiration from many sources and



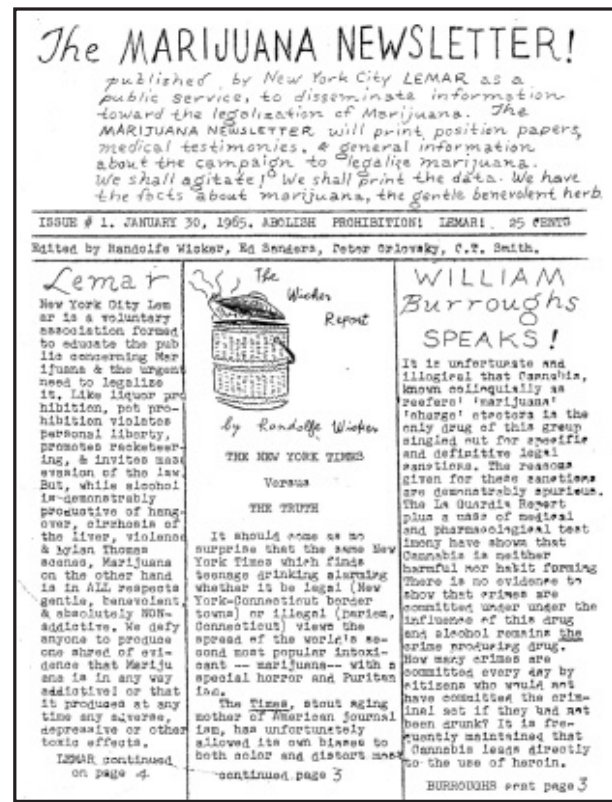
ED SANDERS TELLING IT LIKE IT IS IN THE MID-1960S.

man that he was not only perpetually dosing himself with Golden Oil, but where there was a head aching or a finger cut, there would be Jones with his bottle.

"If he had more taste more strongly than another, it was to study character. Many an hour have we two walked upon the deck dissecting our neighbors in a spirit that was too purely scientific to be called unkind..."

Stevenson made the acquaintance of Mr. Jones in 1879 - a period when American patent medicines were quite likely to contain cannabis and/or opium. The fact that an English druggist was willing to lay out £100 for the formula suggests that Mr. Jones's Golden Oil was effective and potent. There's no determining its contents now, but what ingredients besides cannabis and opium could have had such healing effects?

Stevenson, an instinctive bohemian, had smoked plenty of hashish on an earlier trip to France... He came from Edinburgh, Scotland, where William Brooke O'Shaughnessy went to medical school, and where seeds WBO sent from India were grown out for possible medical use.



FOUNDING DOCUMENT OF THE LEGALIZATION MOVEMENT was produced by Ed Sanders and friends on a mimeograph machine. Lemar was "formed to educate the public concerning Marijuana & the urgent need to legalize it. Like liquor prohibition, pot prohibition violates personal liberty, promotes racketeering, & invites mass evasion of the law..." The key points made in the four-page leaflet seem relevant today (because prohibition still prevails). The herb is "benevolent." The suppressed LaGuardia report documented its true impact on users and the city at large. The press, led by the New York Times is biased.