

eyewitness

talism. Creating jobs [in the hemp industry] will also create votes. You've got to have money to be able to lobby people."

His pragmatic approach is shared by younger hempsters as well. "For us, it was just a matter of realizing the potential was there," shrugs Scott Hitchcock, a twenty-three-year-old Tennessean, munching on one of Amsterdam's famous "spacecakes"—round pastries packed with a potent dose of weed. He and partner John Morris took a leave from college in Knoxville a year ago to join Bryan Sturgill in starting Ampt Apparel. They make some of the better backpacks on the market, along with earth-tone hemp jeans and recycled cotton T-shirts.

"Our approach is, integrate and infiltrate," Morris explains. "If you roll all these issues into one big joint, you're gonna sell yourself short. People are gonna write you off as a zealot. You can't pull a total 180 on society. Hopefully this is a new way for our generation to be in business—just being honest. We're not trying to con people into buying hemp. It should be able to sell itself."

For all the new start-ups, there are also seasoned entrepreneurs venturing into hemp. Richard Rose is one of the founders of Sharon's Finest, a natural-foods company that makes TofuRella and VeganRella, popular soy- and nut-based cheese alternatives. With a reported \$4 million in sales, the firm made *Inc.* magazine's list of the five hundred fastest-growing firms in 1993. Rose hopes to use his company's clout to gain acceptance for hemp-based foods.

"We were pioneers in soy food in the '80s," says Rose, a bouncy thirty-eight-year-old Californian with bushy blond hair. "Now we're trying to do the same thing with hemp. We found out that hemp seeds are in many ways a better source of protein than soy, and they don't make you fart all day." Made from sterilized hempseed to satisfy the DEA, his trademark HempRella cheese comes in a Jamaica Jack flavor and has a curiously meaty taste. It's marketed with the phrase "Barely Legal" and has a cannabis leaf on every package. But so far the nation's largest natural-foods distributor and retailer have refused to carry it for fear of appearing pro-dope. That doesn't daunt

Rose, who can remember when most Americans thought tofu was a martial art. His company has also developed the Hempeh Burger and plans to introduce a hemp-based beverage and ice cream. "We're trying to demonize cannabis in general, and certainly hemp in particular. No one's ever gonna say that if you eat our cheese you'll be out buying heroin tomorrow."

"THE BIGGEST PROBLEM WITH AMERICAN hempsters is, they don't separate the rope from the dope," complains Robert Connell Clarke, when I run into him at the Cannabis Cup's Hemp Symposium. Clarke is a recog-

hemp-silk shirt sewn from textiles produced at one of the Chinese hemp mills he's been working with. But then, Clarke's trying to distinguish himself from hemp "zealots" like Jack Herer. He and a group of American and Dutch scientists recently formed the International Hemp Association, whose aim is to create a reliable database of cannabis research. "There's still not enough hemp produced in the world to be competitively priced with cotton and other natural fibers," Clarke says. "It's gonna be a long time, but of course it can get there"—if companies invest in it. That will never happen, Clarke believes, as long as dopers like Herer con-



Left: A hostess at the Cannabis Castle offers a warm fuzzy welcome and a trayful of the winner, the Jack Herer bud. Right: Two dreaded connoisseurs fire it up at the Cannabis Cup.

nized cannabis expert. A former columnist for *High Times*, his 1981 book *Marijuana Botany* is considered one of the most informed manuals in the field by both botanists and pot growers. But these days he's parlaying his expertise in plant breeding into a mainstream career as a consultant to American companies looking to cash in on the growing hemp market abroad.

So needless to say, Clarke has a vested interest in seeing the industry fly—though he'd prefer it to happen in America. "You think I want to spend my life breeding hemp varieties in China or in this god-awful wet, dark country?" the forty-year-old Californian laughs, gesturing at Amsterdam's blustery skies. He arrives for the symposium looking every bit the successful businessman, dressed in a conservatively tailored, off-white hemp blazer and a button-down

continue to use hemp as a coattail for their marijuana legalization agenda. "The biggest fear in America is that we're going to legalize hemp"—he adopts the voice of a hick politician—"and some fucking little seditious hippies are going to sneak out in the middle of the field and plant dope, and how are we going to tell the difference?" In fact, as Clarke explains, the conditions and methods for growing hemp are antithetical to those required to grow good herb. Hemp fields are planted so densely you can't walk in them; marijuana plants require generous light and space to generate their THC. If someone tried to slip a few pot plants in a hemp field, it wouldn't do them any good; the hemp would inevitably cross-pollinate with the pot plants, lowering their THC levels.

"There's a screaming demand for natural fibers, and America's missing it," he rages. "You want to hear my prediction? America will never be a major player in the hemp industry because of the drug hysteria. And while we're sleeping, the rest of the world is taking off."

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