

ELECTION '87

What the parties said about drugs



CONSERVATIVE

Under the heading "Fighting Crime", the Conservative Party's election statement Our first eight years trumpeted their record on drugs law enforcement. This section in the manifesto itself — The next moves forward — repeated those claims and added a promise for the future.

We have taken the battle against drugs into every corner of the globe where production or trafficking flourishes. We have more than doubled the number of customs specialist drug investigators. We have strengthened the effectiveness of the police in the fight against drug abuse. Traffickers can now be sentenced to life imprisonment. They also stand to lose all the wealth generated by their evil trade under the most far-reaching asset seizure provisions anywhere in the world.

We have funded about 200 new drug treatment facilities. Our prevention cam-



LABOUR

Labour's manifesto was silent on drugs. But their election document on crime prevention, Protecting our people, criticised the government's record and promised more vigorous pursuit of similar policies.

The rapid rise in the misuse of drugs and intoxicating substances such as solvents (glue sniffing) has emerged as a serious problem.

● A minimum of 50,000 people are dependent on drugs such as heroin, methadone, Diconal, amphetamines and cocaine — with 335 drug-related deaths known to the Home Office in 1983.

● There is a growing incidence of serious crime associated with the illegal supply of drugs to young people. In 1985, England and Wales had nearly 8,000 recorded offences of drug trafficking — a 22 per cent increase on 1984.

● Social and economic factors are partly responsible for stress, boredom and despair which may in turn lead to some young people experimenting with and becoming addicted to hard drugs.

The Tories have failed to tackle this huge social problem. They have cut the number of Customs and Excise officers in the front line of the battle against drugs. There are ports in Britain where there is no physical presence of a customs officer to prevent and deter the importation of drugs

paign, targeted on youngsters at risk, is encouraging a strong resistance to hard drugs amongst teenagers.

The battle against drugs can and must be won. Already there are some signs that the heroin problem may have passed its peak. The cocaine explosion has never happened. It need never happen.

We will continue to make the defeat of the drug trade a key priority.



Thatcher wins another five years to defeat the drug trade

and other illegal goods. Such ports may already be targeted by criminals.

There are only 41 special drug treatment clinics and drug dependency units in the country. The £2 million allocated to the health education programme is totally inadequate to stem the tide of drug abuse.

Labour will:

● act decisively against the traffic in drugs. We will increase the resources of the Customs and Excise, the police and other agencies who combat the traffic in drugs and work with other countries to suppress illegal drug production and trafficking.

● take effective action to detect and convict drug dealers. We are determined that drug traffickers will receive effective prison sentences and that their assets will be seized. We have supported this position in Parliament and will continue to do so. We will give courts the powers to pass sentences appropriate to the seriousness of their crime. We will ensure that they forfeit the assets of their crime by seeing that those assets are not hidden by banking or other practices.

● promote a well-funded drug abuse prevention programme, aimed particularly at young people. The government have cut treatment facilities for drug addicts. These cuts will force some addicts to turn to crime. Drug users who need treatment should be helped to overcome addiction.

● improve and expand services for recognising, treating and rehabilitating drug misusers and ensure they have the same rights to proper treatment as people with other health and social problems.

Was the drug problem an election issue? In a small way it was, increased government action giving scope for manifesto claims and opposition criticism. But the arguments were about how much rather than what should be done.



ALLIANCE

The SDP/Liberal Alliance manifesto did not mention drugs. Their election leaflet on health policy, The alliance for health, did — but it was no more than a mention.

To complement direct government action, we will encourage people to adopt healthier lifestyles. We will restore an independent health education body and increase funding for health education. We will launch major campaigns to improve the national diet and to eliminate smoking and the abuse of alcohol and of illicit drugs.

"The one thing I see a great need for, is a political initiative, because that is the one thing that's lacking here. Most American politicians are aware of what's happening . . . Until we have that sort of national awareness, which will then permeate through all the other sections, we're not going to get very far . . . I've been trying for the last 29 years to instill a little bit of interest in this problem in the areas where there is power to do something. It's been very difficult . . ."

— Bing Spear, Chief Inspector of the Home Office Drugs Branch, 1981.

"When I heard the party was insisting we had a debate, for the first time I can recall, on drug abuse, I was surprised . . . But . . . I have become sure this decision . . . was the right one."

— Kenneth Clarke, Minister for Health, addressing the 1984 Conservative Party conference.

"Many years ago, in my naivete, I was saying what was needed was more political interest. Now we've got nothing but political interest."

— Bing Spear, ex-Chief Inspector of the Home Office Drugs Branch, 1987.

In a message to the international conference on drug abuse and illicit trafficking, Pope John Paul II extended his "encouragement and admiration . . . to all those countries in which government leaders and citizens are truly committed to combating the . . . misuse of drugs . . . If it is true that the youth of today are the greatest consumers of hard drugs, then it is legitimate to ask if this is due to the kind of society in which our young people are being reared".

— *The Tablet*, 4 July 1987.