



Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform (ACT) Inc.

committed to preventing tragedy that arises from illicit drug use

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NEWSLETTER

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Next Meeting

Thursday, June 27th

**at St Ninians Uniting Church,
Cnr Brigalow and Mouat Streets,
Lyneham
7.30pm**

GUEST SPEAKERS at 8pm

Sally Pink and Bruce Munro from the ACT Alcohol and Drug Program will talk about the services provided by their organisation. Sally is the Director of the service and Bruce has been employed specifically to assist families.

Friday 28th June, 12 noon - 2pm

A Public Forum

"Law, Justice & Drugs"

**in the Theatre at the Canberra Museum & Gallery,
Civic Square, London Circuit,
Canberra City..**

This event will take place during Drug Action Week in which the Alcohol and other Drugs Council of Australia (ADCA) encourages activities nationally to raise awareness of drugs in our society.

Topics will include:

The effect of the criminal law and its enforcement on:

- the availability and attractiveness of drugs,
- the health and welfare of drug users,
- families coping with drug use by a member, and
- the community through issues such as disposal of syringes, property crimes and crimes of violence.

Implications for the criminal law and its enforcement on the adoption of strategies such as:

- decriminalisation of use and possession for personal use of cannabis and possibly other drugs,
- diversion by police and courts of drug dependent offenders,
- medically supervised injecting rooms, and
- medical prescription of heroin.

Further details are on the enclosed brochure. Members who can contribute a cake or slice for this forum please ring Marion 6254 2961.

Editorial

Prior to publication of this newsletter we have been organising for Drug Action Week. We decided to hold a forum on Law, Justice and Drugs to coincide with Drug Action Week's "Drugs and the Law" day.

This prompted me to wonder if there has been any lasting reductions in illegal drug supply because of use of the law to stop people using certain drugs. I could find no evidence that it had, despite the rhetoric from the politicians or those that represent political organisations.

On the United Nations Drug Control Program website their Executive Director proudly proclaims: "A drug-free world, we can do it" . And he later told a Reuters correspondent: "We are winning. And we have to believe that we can win and eliminate drugs." He was confident that a 1998 UN pledge to eradicate cultivation of opium poppy and coca bush by 2008 could be met ahead of schedule.

It is now just over four years since the UN made that pledge and there is little to show for its efforts. Graphs of opium and coca production have shown no decrease (other than what appears to be seasonal fluctuations, with some blips in good years). Coca production varies from year to year but always around 300,000 tonnes. Opium production shows an upward trend, starting at about 2,500 tonnes in 1988 and doubling at 5,000 tonnes in 2000.

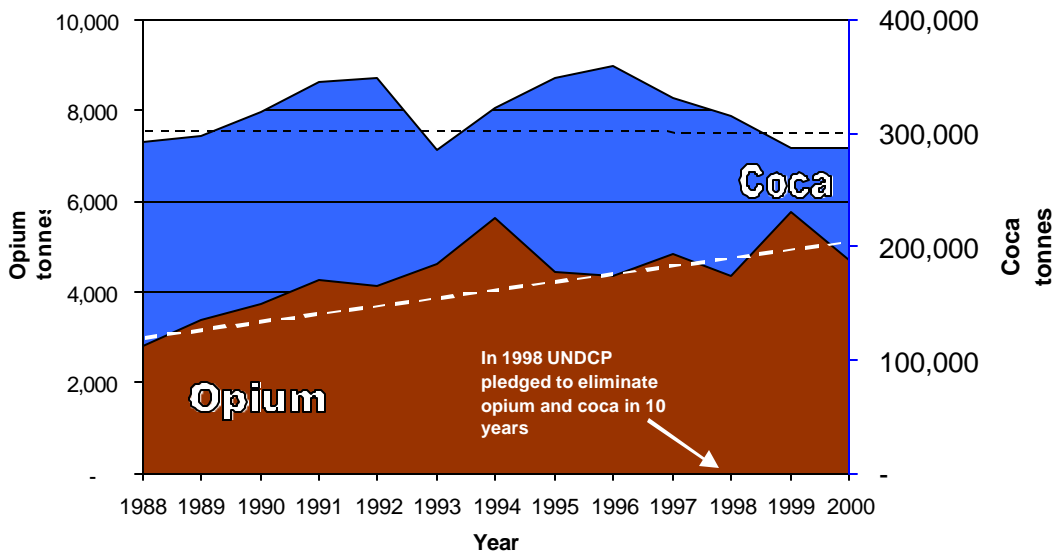
While coca production has remained stable over the years various attempts by the US to eliminate production (by defoliation and other more drastic measures) has moved the majority of production from Peru to Columbia. In Ralph Seccombe's words this is "squeezing the balloon" – put pressure on in one place and it will pop out in another.

While the defoliation attempts may have reduced coca plantations, producers have discovered that the quicker growing opium poppy crops can be planted immediately after the spraying and harvested before the next round of spraying. Hence opium production has spread from Asian areas to the Americas.

Closer to home the federal government is claiming to have had a significant effect on opium production in South-East Asia and has caused the shortage of heroin in Australia. This shortage started to be noticed late in 2000 and the graph shows reduced production in that year. My view is that it is a result of weather conditions and interestingly resembles a drop from a similar peak in 1994.

Whatever the cause it has again squeezed the balloon and it has popped out in the form of increased use of amphetamines and increased use of cocaine here in Australia.

Peter Watney reminded me recently that our prohibition laws have had the unintended consequence of producing a very large and lucrative black market. And that black market is driving the supply and demand for these illicit drugs.



He predicted a strong backlash from parents and others opposed to drugs.

"With all the information we have from South Australia where the usage sky rocketed (after decriminalisation), parents will not have a bar of this," he said.

"Geoff Gallop will be hounded on this all the way to the next election."

WA Police Union president Michael Dean also said he was concerned.

"There is a risk with this sort of legislation of making it (cannabis use) seem like

"Until we can remove the black market," he says, "we will make very little difference to the illicit drug market".

It is hard to argue with this view. The question is "how do we get to that point?"

The Australian Drug Information Network For those with access to the web - www.adin.com.au

This website gives access to many good reference pages and links on issues related to drugs.

ADIN is funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care, as part of the Commonwealth Government National Illicit Drug Strategy, and is managed by the Australian Drug Foundation.

Drug Reform Support Grows

West Australian (Australia) Mon, 27 May 2002 Grant Taylor and Ben Harvey

THE decriminalisation of cannabis was long overdue and would not lead to increased drug usage, according to drug law reform campaigners.

But the anti-drug lobby has attacked plans to overhaul WA's cannabis laws, claiming drug use will rocket, especially among children.

Under legislation to be presented to State Parliament later this year, people caught with two plants or less than 30g of cannabis will face on-the-spot fines instead of a criminal conviction.

No limit will be set on the number of times a person can be fined, though police will retain discretionary powers to lay criminal charges. Australian Drug Law Reform Foundation State president Jason Meotti said the reforms, outlined yesterday, reflected changing community attitudes and a growing acceptance of cannabis use.

He said removing the stigma associated with the drug would also encourage those with dependency problems to seek help.

"By taking it out of the criminal realm, people with cannabis use problems may actually seek help, particularly those who hold significant positions who may have been reluctant to come forward in the past," he said.

Australian Family Association State president John Barich disagreed, claiming the Government was sending a message to young people that drug use was acceptable.

acceptable conduct," Mr Dean said.

He said leaving it up to police to decide who was charged and who received a fine could also cause problems. "I understand why they are changing the laws because it will free up police resources to focus on suppliers," Mr Deans aid.

"But I am concerned that the discretionary powers they plan to create could create confusion if the police service does not outline clear guidelines."

The police service has supported the proposed plan.

Commissioner Barry Matthews has told the State Government that the planned changes are workable and will help free police resources to focus on more serious crime.

But Liberal Party leader Colin Barnett said the proposed legislation would be opposed by his party when presented before State Parliament.

He said if the Government proceeded with its plans, drugs would become the main issue that the next election would be fought on.

"You have a Government in this State simply pandering to minority groups," Mr Barnett said.

Cannabis Laws Will Not Lift Use, Says Researcher

West Australian (Australia) Wed, 29 May 2002 Mark Mallabone, Kate Gauntlett, Andrew Gregory and Ben Harvey

CLAIMS by the anti-drug lobby that WA's new cannabis laws would increase use and spur social problems were wrong, a Curtin University academic said yesterday.

National Drug Research Institute senior research fellow Simon Lenton said studies showed that prohibition with civil penalties for minor cannabis offences did not result in increased use of cannabis. Criminal penalties were no better at deterring use than civil penalties such as fines.

Mr Lenton, who was on WA's cannabis reform working party, helped review South Australia's laws.

He said some groups opposing the legislation could be focusing on anecdotal stories rather than scientific research. "People need to look at carefully controlled research that has been published internationally, rather than where research has been ignored, distorted or misquoted," he said.

The Australian Family Association and the Coalition Against Drugs have warned that the WA Government is sending a message to children that drug use is acceptable.

Wendy Herbert, spokeswoman for the Coalition Against Drugs, claimed people could embark on a life-long program of cannabis cultivation if they were prepared to occasionally pay up to a \$200 fine or attend an education session. The WA scheme will be monitored continually and reviewed regularly. The National Drug Law Enforcement Research Fund has given the National Drug Research Institute money to evaluate the scheme's impact.

For more information visit www.wa.gov.au/drugwe/taustaus/

International

The Folly of Prohibiting Drugs

Financial Times (UK) Wed, 29 May 2002 Martin Wolf

European Countries Are Starting To Realise That A Policy Of Retribution Against Drug Addicts Is Both Immoral And Stupid

Small chinks are opening in the wall of stupidity that surrounds drug policy. In the US, a few brave souls are challenging the "war on drugs" - a euphemism for a war upon its citizens. The Netherlands and Switzerland are experimenting with decriminalisation. And, last week, a report from a select committee of the House of Commons even opened a few holes in British government policy. It is regrettably timid but still a small step in the right direction.

Fresh thought is desperately needed. In the early 1970s the UK followed the US into the war on drugs, with disastrous results. According to Transform, a British campaigning group, "in 1970 there were just over 1,000 heroin users. By 2000 that figure had grown to at least 200,000." According to the British crime survey for 2000, a third of those aged 16-59 had used illegal drugs, mostly cannabis, at some point in their lives. Of 9.5m young people aged 16 to 29, some 2.3m had used an illicit drug in 2000 alone.

Supply has not been halted: street prices of drugs have fallen over the past 12 years, not risen. Yet prohibition has inflicted substantial collateral damage. Ten per cent of all British people sent to prison in 2000 were convicted of drug offences. On some estimates, a third of all property theft is drug-related. Overwhelmingly, these criminals, have been the so-called "problematic drug users" - estimated to number 250,000. Each of these people spends an average of about Pounds 16,500 a year on drugs, of which about Pounds 13,000 is the proceeds of crime.

Prohibition also creates an illegal market in the UK worth an estimated Pounds 6.6bn a year - a honeypot for organ-

ised criminals. But drugs are a global industry. Consider what it has done to Afghanistan and Colombia.

Thus, "if we judge whether the existing drugs policy is working by measurable reductions in the number of people who use drugs, the number who die or suffer harm as a result, the supply of drugs, the amount of crime committed to get money to buy drugs and the organised criminality involved in transporting and supplying drugs, we have to say that the results are not coming through." The radicals making this damning judgment are the Association of Chief Police Officers, no less.

There are three broad responses to the failures of this "war": moralistic, libertarian and utilitarian.

Moralists believe that the right response to failure is to try harder. In the US, federal government

spending on anti-drug programmes rose from Dollars 900m in 1979 to Dollars 18bn (Pounds 12.3bn) in 1999. For moralists, the taking of drugs is downright wicked. William J. Bennett, America's first drugs tsar, argued that users of drugs were "slaves" of their vice. These slaves must be forced to be free - by being incarcerated, if necessary.

This Orwellian policy is stupid and immoral - stupid, because it does not work, and wicked, because the harm done by users to themselves is modest compared to the harm done by the state to users. As authors of an excellent book from the Washington-based Cato Institute argue, in attempting to stop people doing what they want, the state is forced to act in ever more intrusive, coercive and, in the US, simply unconstitutional ways.

The libertarian response is that, in the words of one of the Cato Institute's authors, "we cannot protect free adults from their own choices and we should not use the force of law to try". I find this position persuasive. Others, alas, do not.

For this reason, it is necessary to focus on the third approach: the utilitarian one of harm reduction. Drugs are harmful - but so is prohibition. The utilitarian's approach is to reduce the total harm to a minimum. Along with restricting supply, policy should aim at reducing demand, educating potential users, treating drug abusers and minimising harmful consequences for public health.

Someone committed to harm reduction could be a legaliser, since dangerous substances become more harmful if illegal and unregulated. But this combination is rare. This is partly because of fear of public opprobrium. It is also because of the concern that legalisation would lead to increased use (a concern that heavy taxation can alleviate but cannot eliminate).

The latter worry leads the House of Commons committee to end up opposing the idea of legalisation, even though it recognises - a remarkable step in itself - that in future "the

balance may tip in favour of legalising and regulating some types of presently illegal drugs".

The result is a series of modest but useful reforms. These include: focusing the whole of policy not on casual users but on the most problematic drug abusers; reclassification of cannabis, in line with the proposals of Jack Straw, the home secretary, as a class C drug (the least harmful category); and reclassification of ecstasy as less harmful than either heroin or cocaine.

In addition, the report argues there should be: a substantial increase in treatment places for cocaine abusers; universal availability of methadone treatments; and complementary therapies for heroin users. It also recommends creating an evaluated pilot programme of safe houses for injections by heroin abusers, with a view to extending the programme across the country; and a pilot programme for structured heroin prescription, on the lines of the Dutch and Swiss programmes.

All this should be helpful, so far as it goes, which is not far enough. But the crucial point in the report is the admission that "if there is any single lesson from the experience of the last 30 years, it is that policies based wholly or mainly on enforcement (of prohibition) are destined to fail". It follows that "harm reduction rather than retribution should be the primary focus of policy towards users of illegal drugs".

Bravo! The UK is at last moving out of the US-led camp of hysterical moralists. Now it can start to think seriously. Sensible policies would provide treatment and hope for the drug-dependent, not punishment; they would deprive gangsters of their income, not try to push prices higher; they would provide honest information to potential users, not offer lies; they would reduce threats to public safety, not increase incentives for crime; and they would limit the spread of disease, not promote it.

The UK debate is improving. In time, policy may even reduce the costs of drug abuse, not raise them.

References can be found at www.ft.com/martinwolf martin.wolf@ft.com

German Heroin Deaths Decline After Safe Injection Sites Introduced

<http://www.drcnet.org/wol/236.html#injectionsites>

The German Health Ministry reported on Tuesday that heroin overdose deaths in that country declined by 9.6% last year, the first decline in four years. According to the ministry, 1,835 people died of heroin overdoses in Germany last year. The ministry attributed the decrease to the introduction of government-operated safe injection sites where addicts can inject drugs in a supervised setting, as well as receive counseling and harm reduction information. About 20 safe injection sites run by state governments are in operation around the country.

Meanwhile, an experimental program to provide addicts with heroin under medical supervision is in its second month. Under that program, addicts in seven cities are undergoing what the Germans call "heroin-supported therapy."

Crime Falls in Cannabis Trial Area

BBC News (UK Web) Wed, 29 May 2002

Brian Paddick Pioneered The Lenient Treatment Of Users

The south London borough which is piloting a scheme to treat cannabis offenders more leniently has seen a dramatic

drop in the level of street crimes. The number of robberies and muggings in Lambeth has halved in the last six months, and the latest figures for this month show the trend is continuing.

Police have stemmed the rate of increase in the number of street crimes right across London.

But the drop in Lambeth is considerable, according to figures released on Wednesday.

There is a massive saving of resources achieved by this reduction in crime says Det Supt Jim Webster, Lambeth Police

There were 468 robberies and muggings in the Lambeth area last month, compared with 916 in October.

So far this year, robbery is down by 18% - the highest street crime reduction in London.

Police say the use of traffic officers on robbery patrols and operations targeted at known suspects have helped bring about the reduction.

Cannabis Warning

Senior officers also acknowledge the contribution by the borough's former Commander Brian Paddick, who was removed from his post in March.

His scheme, to warn those caught in possession of cannabis rather than arrest them, was part of a plan enabling police to focus on street crime.

Detective Superintendent Jim Webster, crime manager for Lambeth Police, told BBC News Online that putting an extra 40 officers into the area had played a key part in crime reduction.

He said "it would not be useful" to comment on any role the cannabis scheme may have played in the reduction of crime, while a "serious study" was looking at this issue.

"We are prioritising the areas that local people hold to be vital, such as street crime and drug dealing," he said.

"There are some 450 fewer people per month becoming victims of street robbery now as compared to six months ago.

"This the result of concentrated effort from many agencies within the borough.

Successful Initiatives

"There is a massive saving of resources achieved by this reduction in crime."

Police said successful initiatives included the use of robbery response cars operating six days per week between 1600 and 0200 BST Monday to Saturday.

Police, working with Lambeth housing department, have also been targeting convicted youngsters and teenagers suspected of involvement in crime.

Their parents are being visited and in some cases they have been warned that their children's behaviour could lead to their eviction.

Police have also concentrated on a number of Tube stations to carry out crime prevention and have installed surveillance cameras at key crime hotspots.