



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

committed to preventing tragedy that arises from illicit drug use

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NEWSLETTER

October, 2003

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Next Monthly Meeting

**Thursday, October 23
7:30pm**

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

**Annual General Meeting will be held on
Thursday 27th November, 2003**

Editorial

A moment in time can change the direction of a life.

I sat listening to the Chorus of Women singing in The Ceremony of Memory at the National Museum of Australia and idly watched this statement unfold on the big screen advertising the museum.

Many of us will recognise that moment in time.

The Remembrance Ceremonies (notified in this newsletter) give us an opportunity for time-out to reflect and to consider future directions. And perhaps in considering those future directions we may be able to create a moment in time for someone else that might make a difference.

Consider for example, what might happen if all the parents whose children have been caught up in illicit drugs, all spoke out with one voice about the injustice and the failure of the present prohibition system. This would certainly be a moment in time that would change the direction of many lives.

Such a moment in time is the stuff that historians write about – a single event, or perhaps a series of events leading to a point where, from that point on, history has changed.

There was such an event in 1953, some 50 years ago when the prohibition of heroin was introduced by both the federal government and state governments. The federal government was responsible for matters relating to importation and thus, through trade regulations, prohibited the importation of heroin. The states had responsibility for all other matters and therefore enacted legislation to prohibit use, possession, trafficking, manufacture etc.

Up to that point there had been a certain amount of pressure exerted on Australia because of its high medicinal use of heroin.

FFDLR 'S 8th Annual

Remembrance Ceremony

Monday 27th October

12.30pm, at our memorial at Weston Park..

Speakers:

Bishop George Browning

Bob McMullan MP

Choir: A Chorus of Women

**BRING CHAIRS OR RUGS FOR
SITTING**

Please see enclosed invitation for details.

**DON'T FORGET TO LET MARION OR BRIAN
KNOW IF YOU WOULD LIKE A LOVED ONE
REMEMBERED BY NAME AT THE CEREMONY.**



Help needed

Please let Marion know (6254 2961) if you can bring sandwiches, cakes or slice for **refreshments** following the ceremony. **Flowers** to be placed at the memorial rock are also needed. Again let Marion know.

OTHER REMEMBRANCE CEREMONIES

SYDNEY

Ashfield Uniting Church, 180 Liverpool Road, Ashfield, Saturday 1 November at 6pm. A light supper will follow. Enquiries: (02) 9798 0001

Anglican Church, Cumberland Street, Cabramatta, Friday 7 November, 10.30am. Enquiries: Lindsay (02)8707 0649 or daparents@cabracc.org.au

ADELAIDE

Park venue in Morphett Vale on Sunday 26th October at 2pm. Enquiries: Kath (08) 8384 4314

QUEENSLAND

Emma Miller Park, Roma St, Brisbane (near entrance to Roma St Parklands), Saturday 1 November at 11am. Enquiries: Tamara (07) 3369 0166 or 0438 173 559

The Sydney Morning Herald of 12 July 1953 carried a very comprehensive story of this point in history, which is published in this newsletter.

One by one those who opposed the banning fell away. The states at first were not convinced but eventually capitulated. The medical profession held out the longest.

... it was the first time a drug had ever been banned from use by the medical profession and was against the interest of medical science.

....

Dr. A. J. Collins, said the B.M.A. at first had opposed the ban ...

....

Heroin addiction is not a problem in Australia...

And so at that moment in time the stage was set for the tragedies that were to follow. The SMH report stated that heroin consumption was "5.32 lb per million people

in 1946 and 11.35lb in 1951", about 2.4 kg and 5.15 kg respectively (medicinal use only).

All that was needed then was a trigger to set events into motion. It was the US soldiers on R&R from the Vietnam War in Australia that provided that trigger. US Soldiers who could buy heroin in Vietnam for small change brought it with them to Australia and introduced Australians to it. And it was not long before it was realised that a large profit could be made.

And so a medical use of heroin of 5.15kg per million in 1951 (which was seen as excessive) has risen to a non-medical use in 1998/99 of 350kg per million and was sold for between \$2 – \$4 billion, and has produced so much suffering and tragedy.

A 'thoughtless' moment in time that did change the direction of so many lives.

Sydney Morning Herald

12 July 1953

A Sedative, But Can Be Dangerous

Concern at Australia's High Consumption of Heroin CAUSE OF BAN

International organisations were becoming concerned at the high consumption rate of heroin in Australia, a Health Department official said in Canberra yesterday.

The official was explaining the Federal Government's decision, announced last week, to ban imports of heroin into Australia.

Heroin is used as a sedative in some patent cough mixtures but it is also a highly dangerous drug to which people can become addicted.

A medical authority in Sydney said yesterday that the ban on imports of heroin would help to guard young Australians against a threat of degenerating addiction.

But another medical authority said it was the first time a drug had ever been banned from use by the medical profession and this was against the interests of medical science.

Earlier this year the Central Opium Board, in a report to the United Nations, warned the Australian Government of the sharp increase in heroin consumption in Australia.

The board said the consumption rate had risen from 5.32lb per million people in 1946 to 11.35lb in 1951.

A Sydney drug expert said the increased consumption was not due to addiction, but to increased use in proprietary cough mixtures and to "leakage" to other countries where heroin is banned.

The Health Department official in Canberra said that the 1951 consumption rate of heroin in Australia was among the highest in the world.

The Government had been discussing imports of heroin for a long time and had decided that it would be wisest to place a total ban on it.

"International organisations have been trying to control the use of heroin for some time," he said.

SUBSTITUTES

Admittedly heroin is used in some cough mixtures but there are plenty of suitable substitutes.

"America has had a ban on heroin for several years and she has managed all right without it.

"Australia should be able to do the same."

The official said large medical organisations, including the British Medical Association and the National Health and Medical Research Council, had been consulted before it was decided to ban imports.

B.M.A. VIEW

The Federal president of the British Medical Association, Dr. A. J. Collins, said the B.M.A. at first had opposed the ban, but after further consideration had agreed to it with only the Queensland branch dissenting.

"Heroin addiction is not a problem in Australia, but we are advised that overseas heroin has become the favourite drug of addiction and its effects are more dreadful than those of other drugs" he said.

"In the United States dope pedlars have got heroin among the children with disastrous effects.

"They peddle sweets loaded with heroin among the teenagers who become addicted to the drug.

"We don't want to see the same thing happen here.

"This ban is a distinct departure on the part of the Government. But heroin is a drug that causes moral and social degradation and its effects are far more degrading than those caused by other narcotics.

"We do not like interfering with the doctor's right to prescribe whatever drug he thinks is most suitable for his

patient but we feel there are alternatives to heroin and we should surrender something if it is to the good of the civilised world.

THE HABIT

"Personally I feel that it is much like a prohibition on alcohol. It is not the drug that is at fault but the habit behind it.

Another medical authority who said that for professional reasons he would have to remain anonymous, said it was against the principles of medical science to ban a drug that had been used for nearly half a century.

"It is wrong to abuse the application of a drug such as heroin, but it is equally wrong to abolish the use of a drug that serves a useful purpose to humanity," he said.

"The doctor should be allowed freedom to make his decisions on the use of drugs in the presence of his patient - and not be bound by legislative action to be restricted to this or that drug.

"The bureaucratic banning of a drug is something that should not go unchallenged."

NO SIDE EFFECTS

A representative of a leading drug firm said: "Some individuals who cannot take morphine are given heroin instead.

The representative said the ban on imports of heroin would lead to a general ban on the use of handling of heroin in Australia.

The use of heroin in Australia had increased in recent years purely because of the wider use of heroin in proprietary cough mixtures and not because of addiction. "There is extremely little evidence of heroin addiction in Australia," he said.

Professor R. H. Thorpe, Professor of Pharmacology at Sydney university, said heroin was the worst known drug of addiction.

"Heroin is banned in 47 countries, including the United States," he said.

"Its effects vary from person to person. Some become drowsy and sleepy; in others it causes euphoria - a feeling of extreme well-being.

"If you take whisky from people addicted to it, they will take gin or methylated spirits. If you take one drug from them, they will take others.

"But if heroin can be suppressed in all decent countries the manufacture of it is likely to cease."

Dr Collins said heroin was a chemical derivative of the drug morphia, and its main medical use was as a reliever of pain after surgical operations.

"Bureaucratic"

"As a cough sedative heroin had the advantage of causing no side effects.

"Most other drugs that will control a cough have other effects - such as causing constipation, loss of appetite, and so on.

"The normal amount in a dose of cough mixture is 1-18th part of a grain of heroin. It is so compounded with other ingredients that it is almost impossible to get an addict dose in this way.

COUGH MIXTURES

"Many physicians consider heroin by far the best drug for this purpose and it therefore cannot be replaced entirely as a cough sedative."

"It is frequently associated with sexual excitement and moral degradation."

Professor Thorpe said there were alternative drugs with all the advantages but not the dangers of heroin.

Dihydrocodeinone was one drug that could be used as an alternative cough sedative.

OFF LIST

"Last March the Minister for Health, Sir Earle Page, announced that heroin had been removed from the list of free lifesaving drugs under the Commonwealth health scheme.

Commonwealth authorities said Customs officers would intensify their efforts to stamp out any illicit traffic in heroin and other narcotics in or out of Australia.

Norwegian Professor Nils Christie warns of upcoming alcohol problems, questions prohibitionist approach to drugs

Christie Calls for Rational Debate - Opposes Taboos
Helsingin Sanomat International Edition (Finland)
Copyright: 2003, Helsingin Sanomat, Fri, 26 Sep 2003

At a seminar at the auditorium of the Finnish Parliament on Thursday, the world-renowned Norwegian criminologist Professor Nils Christie told his audience of more than 100 people that the war against illegal drugs cannot be won, and that it is therefore better to concentrate on reducing the harm caused by the drugs.

Christie's message did not come as a surprise to the listeners. About two decades ago he and Finnish sociologist Kettil Bruun wrote about these same ideas in a book entitled *Den gode fiende: narkotikapolitikk i Norden* ("The Good Enemy: Drug Policy in the Nordic Countries").

On Thursday Christie warned that Finnish policy toward intoxicants was facing serious trouble - not because of illegal drugs, but rather because of alcohol. Christie was alarmed about the prospect of a lower tax on alcohol in a situation in which problems caused by drinking are constantly on the increase. He pointed out that about 3,500 people in Finland die each year as a result of using alcohol.

Christie emphasised that he is opposed to using all drugs, including cannabis, recommending as an alterna-

tive stimulation from activities such as hiking in the mountains.

However, he also said that society must accept the fact that not all people are able to stop using drugs, and that such people need to be helped.

"We cannot win the war against drugs. Drugs always exist and they should be seen more as a problem of social policy rather than one of criminal justice. We must assess the damage caused by various options, and choose the one that involves the least amount of damage", Christie emphasised.

Christie is also concerned about the increasing prison population in Western countries, which he largely sees as the result of the war on drugs.

The problem mainly affects the United States, where there are 730 prisoners for every 100,000 inhabitants. The figure is about ten times as high as in the Nordic Countries.

He pointed out that crime rates can be influenced through choices of penal policy. One example of this is the Finland of the 1960s, which had an incarceration rate that was equivalent to that of East European countries, but which later brought its policy more in line with practice in the other Nordic Countries. Christie was also critical of the fact that in the war on drugs Sweden - and to some extent Norway - have allied themselves with the United States. In this respect, Sweden, which has the reputation of being a "welfare paradise", gives legitimacy to the war on drugs, while the United States provides the power.

Christie feels that it is not realistic to base drug policy on total prohibition. Instead, he favours harm reduction.

One example of harm reduction mentioned by Christie is to provide hygienic conditions for the use of drugs - clean needles for intravenous users, for instance - as well as easy access to drug maintenance therapy. He pointed out that heroin addicts require their doses even if they are in prison.

Christie also said that dangerous substances should be taken under official control - as prescription medicines, for instance.

"After all, explosives are not sold at kiosks." Christie warned against demonising drugs or turning them into such a taboo that it would prevent rational debate on the problem. He recalled the uproar that the book *Den gode fiende...* caused in Norway 20 years ago. He said that at the time it was quite impossible to advance opinions opposed to the official policy of total prohibition, as drug crime was seen as the moral equivalent of murder.

Now Christie says that the situation has calmed down, although he still gets some bitter comments.

"Most recently a listener said that he is happy that I am so old that I will not be able to express my opinions very long."

At the seminar Tapani Sarvanti, an official at the Ministry for Social Affairs and Health, pointed out that Finnish drug policy differs from that of Sweden in an interesting way.

Sarvanti said that in recent years Finland has implemented an "elegant" shift in the direction of harm reduction, away from the prohibitionist approach.

Drug War, Chinese Style

Newsbrief:

<http://stopthedrugwar.org/chronicle/300/full.shtml#china>

Chinese authorities in the southern city of Guangzhou collectively sentenced 26 felons to death on August 9 as part of the government's four-year-old "strike hard" program against crime. Those sentenced in the mass hearing in Guangzhou were mostly convicted of "drug trafficking and other heinous crimes," the Chinese news agency Xinhua reported.

The collective death sentence was handed out in Guangzhou municipal court as some 150 armed police and security guards on hand to maintain order, Xinhua reported. The sentencing came as part of an effort to clear a back-log of cases awaiting verdicts and sentencing.

The Chinese government does not reveal execution statistics, but according to a book titled "Disdai" and written anonymously by a purported high government official, China has executed 15,000 people a year since the "strike hard" campaign began in 1999. According to Amnesty International, at least 150 people were executed in China for drug offenses in June alone, marking the UN's "International Anti-Drugs Day" on June 26, and at least 5,900 death sentences were pronounced and more than 3,500 executions carried out in 2001 and 2002, with the actual numbers believed to be much higher.

The government announced last month that the "strike hard" campaign would continue for at least another year.

USA: The American Osteopathic Association Takes Strong Stand On Methadone Maintenance And Breastfeeding

The American Osteopathic Association's House of Delegates has gone on record to "strongly encourage women on methadone maintenance . . . to exclusively breast-feed their children," noting that "the low levels of methadone in breast milk did not have adverse effects on newborns."

<http://opiateaddictionrx.info/whatsnew.asp?id=449>

Greece: Heroin Overdose Deaths Decline For First Time Since 1990: Officials Credit Methadone Treatment

Agence France Presse reported that heroin overdose deaths have declined in Greece for the first time since 1990 and Greek officials are crediting the decrease mainly to methadone treatment.

An official report released on Wednesday July 9th cites a 20% decline in drug overdose deaths in 2002 from the previous year, the first decline after more than 10 consecutive years of increases.(Source: Agence France Presse, International News; July 9, 2003)