

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 07

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NEXT Meeting
Thursday 25 October 2007
at 7.30pm

Topic: Election Fever

Venue: St Ninian's Uniting Church, cnr
Mouat and Brigalow Sts, Lyneham.

Refreshments will follow

12th Annual Remembrance Ceremony

'for those who lose their life to illicit drugs'

Monday 22nd October, 2007, 12.30pm – 1.30pm

Weston Park, Yarralumla, ACT

Please put this date in your diary.

Speakers include:

- Rev'd James, Barr, Senior Minister, Canberra Baptist Church
- Bill Stefaniak, Leader of the Opposition, ACT Legislative Assembly
- A family member

Music by the 'Union Voices'

Refreshments will be served following the ceremony.

If you have a family member or friend who has lost their life to illicit drugs and would like them remembered by name at the ceremony please phone Marion on 6254 2961 or Bill on 6257 1786.

Editorial

This week an old friend and neighbour returned to Canberra for a respite from the "beautiful one day state...". He had kept an eye on the papers for articles of interest. Three of those articles are reproduced in this newsletter.

Other articles

- report the increase in opium poppy production in Afghanistan that threatens to be a flood into Australia,
- report that drugs are freely available in jails according to former inmates,
- talk about Australia's high society, that it is time to come to grips with the reality of drug habits in Australia today, and why a reality check is needed,
- have opinions about the "war on drugs".

In the latter respect Mike Carlton had this to say in the Sydney Morning Herald on Sept 1-2 2007 edition,

"...we are all hypocrites when it comes to drugs. In this city this weekend, the dance clubs will be throbbing with hundreds, probably thousands, of kids

blown away on ecstasy. Others will be doing cocaine, heroin, and that most terrifying mind-bender, crystal methamphetamine, or ice. For the baby boomers, its pot or alcohol. Lots of alcohol.

With booze, its legal and public. The other drugs are not. Dealing than and using them is a crime, which is where the whole thing falls apart. It simply doesn't work. The so-called war on drugs is a futile delusion on an epic scale."

The drugs in sport debate is also still reverberating across the country, and has been given new life with a famous AFL footballer having relapsed. The Sunshine Coast Sport section reported on 1 Sept 2007 that "AFL legend Leigh Matthews has described the battle against illicit drugs as a 'losing fight'". And he went on to say "the millions and millions that have been spent on 'don't use drugs because it is going to do you harm' (campaign) crikey, this year has sent that down the gurgler."

There is a pattern in all of this, and not just because the articles are selective. It is because the problem has not gone away and that more people are recognizing that it has not gone away and they are speaking up about it.

Change is happening. Perhaps it is like watching the clock and trying to catch the hour hand moving. It may be slow but changes are occurring.

Of course the evidence that the problem continues is all around us. A recent radio report said that ice use was down but heroin use and availability was increasing. Afghanistan opium poppy production was increasing, the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime reports (18/10/2007) that there are "25 million problem drug users in the world" and "an alarming upsurge in opium cultivation in Myanmar. In 2007, opium cultivation rose by 29% from 21,500 to 27,700 hectares. Production was up 46% as a result of higher yields. These increases are dwarfed by the opium boom in Afghanistan, but they entrench Myanmar's position as, by far, the world's second largest opium producer (460 tonnes).

"Over the past few years Myanmar was priced out of the opium market by much higher yields and cultivation in Afghanistan, leading to a drop in production", said Antonio Maria Costa, Executive Director of UNODC. "Nevertheless, the sharp increase in the amount of opium grown in Myanmar in 2007 is worrisome and undermines progress towards a drug-free South East Asia", said the UN drugs chief."

There are however many that either do not recognise these facts or refuse to do so. Many are our political leaders who have in the past claimed that their efforts have caused the heroin drought and thus stopped the supply of heroin into Australia. They said nothing about the flood of methamphetamines from the same

source that followed. They now claim credit for a possible reduction in ice but say nothing about the increased availability of heroin that is following the improved opium poppy crop production.

But, now there is an opportunity to put your views to the next batch of political leaders, to ask them if they recognise the facts about this failed war, and perhaps plant some thought in their mind that if they tried a different approach, it might just make a difference.

No doubt they will ask you what your solution is. Here are some suggestions to put to them:

- treat addiction as a health problem and increase the funding significantly. Every addicted person who overcomes their addiction means one less person buying the drugs and potentially one less user-dealer,
- provide services that encourage people into treatment – services that do not stigmatise and marginalise and drive them away from services,
- recognise that we are a drug using species and put in place a balanced drug policy based on the evidence,
- undercut the black market in drugs by whatever means one can. The drug trade thrives because of the profit so if the severely addicted were provided the drugs under strict conditions, there would be no profit in it for the dealers,
- buy the opium poppy crop from the impoverished farmers in Myanmar and Afghanistan and use it for medicinal purposes. The farmers need to live and feed their families, while crop substitution has not been effective, opium poppies will grow where little else will.

Let's All Grow Up, Stop Pushing Lies And Have An Honest Debate About Drugs

By Lisa Pryor, September 1, 2007 - Sydney Morning Herald

What a disservice Andrew Johns has done to the kiddies of Australia. How irresponsible to reveal years of drug use when he knows it is official policy to scare people off drugs by making them believe anyone who tries them ends up a derro.

At least he had the decency to speak of a struggle with depression. Because we all know the only permissible way to talk about drug use is to say it was a past mistake or the result of some kind of trauma or mental illness.

When is this stupidity going to stop? When are we going to stop dealing in hyperbole and trickery and have an adult debate about drugs? A debate that is not dominated by what-will-the-kiddies-think lies? My generation grew up with plenty of shocking warnings about druggies and drug pushers and plenty of us take drugs because we know those warnings were a complete crock.

The truth is that recreational drug taking is like mountaineering. When all goes well, as it does most of the time, the experience can be fun and even profound. Not only can the experience be great, it can also give the adventurer insights into his or her own character and the workings of the brain, insights that can be applied to the

rest of life. But drug taking, like mountaineering, can be dangerous.

Drug takers can develop addictions, scramble their brains and a small minority will die. Mountaineers lose fingers and toes to frostbite. Plenty die. They put the lives of rescuers at risk. When things do go wrong, it always looks like an unnecessary risk in hindsight. Families are destroyed.

The difference between drug taking and mountaineering is that no one tries to ban mountaineering. Most crucially, no one would be despicable enough to try to make mountaineering as unsafe as possible to discourage people from trying it. No one would be cruel enough to try to increase the number of mountaineering deaths by making safety equipment hard to come by, all so they could say: "See, I told you so." Yet this is exactly the policy that is applied to recreational drugs.

The illegality of drugs such as ecstasy means the quality and content of a pill is unreliable. Pill testing kits are hard to come by when they should be as freely available as free syringes. There is a real generation gap on this topic. Older people who came of age before drugs such as ecstasy were popular and freely available assume that it is only deadbeats and troubled youngsters who are partaking because all the normal people taking drugs keep quiet about it. If only they knew the truth.

This generation gap has developed because my generation is too gutless to stand up for the truth. Plenty of people my age take recreational drugs occasionally. It tends to be a seasonal thing, something saved up for New Year's Eve and dance parties over the summer.

As a generation, we passively accept that it is illegal. We passively accept that occasionally someone we know will be caught and have their career destroyed. We are willing to see friends get criminal records, see girls such as the young dance teacher Annabel Catt die because they mistakenly take strange substances passed off as ecstasy. We see public figures who are caught have their reputations besmirched and we say nothing.

No one is willing to stand up and admit to it because the risks are so high. The risks are high precisely because so many recreational drug users are leading normal lives with serious jobs that they don't want to put at risk. They are not radicals. They have families they don't want to embarrass.

This timidity is pretty inexcusable when you think of what people have been willing to stand up for in the name of ending hypocrisy. Think of activists in the 1970s who spoke out against laws banning gay sex because honesty and principles counted. It is time to end the lies and start having an honest debate about drugs.

Breaking Taboos: It's Time We Recognised That Illegal Drugs Are Fun

By Michael Duffy, September 7, 2007 - Sydney Morning Herald

Three cheers for my fellow columnist Lisa Pryor, who last week suggested we acknowledge the elephant in the room where public debate about drugs occurs. It's time to stand up and say illegal drug use is fun and -- unless you get caught -- harmless.

Yes, there are exceptions to this. But far fewer than if you tried to make the same claim about nicotine or

alcohol or junk food. The criminalisation of recreational drugs will one day be looked back on with the incredulity we now reserve for Prohibition.

The criminalisation of fun drugs is based on claims about the harm they do, which fly in the face of the experience of a large proportion of the population. The six-week "drug holiday" for rugby league players announced this week is surely an acknowledgment of just how common and acceptable recreational drug-taking is among young people, including very fit and healthy young people.

The persistence of drug criminalisation reflects the self-interest of a loose coalition of politicians, moralists and law enforcement officials, in search of headlines, bigger budgets and more power. They've been winning the argument for a long time now, at least in terms of public policy. What might alter this situation?

The change will eventually come from a growing awareness of the terrible and accelerating damage the illicit drug economy is doing to peace and prosperity around the globe. That trade is booming today because of the trade liberalisation and globalisation we've experienced since the 1990s. These have created enormous wealth, thereby expanding the markets for fun drugs, and making it even easier for drug growers and manufacturers in other countries to reach those markets.

This is the theory of Moises Naim, editor of the magazine *Foreign Policy*. Recently Naim told me: "The United Nations Office of Drug Control and Crime just released a report estimating the value of the international drug trade at \$US660 billion (\$800 billion) a year. It is great, it is growing, it is diversifying, both geographically and in terms of product lines. It's a vast industry that moves a lot of money and has huge requirements in terms of infrastructure, transportation and so on. All of that on a daily basis, on a systematic basis, would be impossible without the active complicity of governments around the world."

In many Third World countries (or "narcostates"), governments and their agencies are now corrupted by drug traders and their allies in politics and legitimate business activities. This makes much of the international war against drugs -- estimated to cost \$US100 million a year -- an ineffectual farce.

The scale of the drug economy is only possible because First World countries have been unable to stop the immense craving for fun drugs among their own populations. As Naim puts it: "The markets are massive and they're created by state intervention [ie criminalisation]."

He believes the international drug trade is now so big and corrosive of national sovereignty that it, along with other cross-border crimes such as people smuggling and money laundering, "are reconfiguring and transforming the world's politics and economics today far more than terrorism".

Everywhere you look, the growing spread of drugs is trashing public morality and everyday life. Naim has written that the world is undergoing an unprecedented pandemic of crime. In 2003 the UN reported that crime rates were increasing almost everywhere. In cities such as Johannesburg and Milan there have been large protest

marches complaining about rising crime. The World Bank says Latin America's economic growth could be 8 per cent higher if its crime rates dropped.

What drives up crime? Poverty doesn't seem to matter. Inequality and urbanisation play a part. But researchers agree a big contributor is the combination of a high proportion of young men, easy access to guns, and ample drugs.

The Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation leaders this weekend ought to be talking seriously about drugs. But of course they won't, because that would offend the United States, whose expensive and long-running war on drugs is possibly the greatest public policy failure of all time.

The latest issue of *Foreign Policy* has an article on this by Ethan Nadelmann, founder of the [Drug Policy Alliance](#), which argues for decriminalisation. He notes that the number of Americans incarcerated for US drug-law violations has increased from 50,000 in 1980 to 500,000 today. The US, with five per cent of the world's population, has 25 per cent of its prisoners.

For a long time the US and its punitive-moral agenda has dominated the international agencies set up to deal with drugs. But Nadelmann says this hegemony is now under challenge for the first time. "The European Union is demanding rigorous assessment of drug-control strategies. Exhausted by decades of service to the US-led war on drugs, Latin Americans are far less inclined to collaborate closely with US drug enforcement efforts. Finally waking up to the threat of HIV/AIDS, China, Indonesia, Vietnam and even Malaysia are increasingly accepting of syringe-exchange and other harm reduction programs [which the US opposes]."

This is good news even if it is only a start. The truth is that the West's war on drugs can never be won, because too many people don't want it to be won. And while fun drugs do some damage, it is only a tiny fraction of the destruction caused around the globe by drug prohibition.

DRUGS ARE A MEDICAL ISSUE

The Tablet, The International Catholic Weekly, Dec 2006

The five murdered Ipswich prostitutes whose deaths dominated the headlines in the days leading up to Christmas were victims in more ways than one. They were regular users of hard drugs - heroin and cocaine in particular. Selling their bodies was a way of obtaining money to pay for their next fix. Thus they were also victims of the men who used them and of the dealers who supplied their drugs. They were, at arm's length, victims of the producers of these drugs, notably Afghan poppy farmers for whom this year's harvest, despite international efforts to disrupt it, was said to be a record. The price is bound to fall further on British streets, suggesting that there is no way the authorities are winning the so-called "war on drugs". It is not inappropriate to ask, therefore, whether the five Ipswich women were also in some sense victims of official British obstinacy in pursuing anti-drugs policies long after they are known to have failed.

It is significant that as an emergency measure while the police manhunt continued, prostitutes were being offered funds to enable them to buy drugs without exposing

themselves to the danger of being murdered by a client. Obviously that could, not be a universal policy: in the long term it could encourage more addiction. That is also the objection made to the proposition that hard drugs could be decriminalised by allowing them to be legally prescribed by doctors. Before the Misuse of Drugs Act of 1971 that practice was widespread, but it notoriously led to certain GPs' surgeries becoming in effect drug purveyors to all who wanted them, including those wanting to sell them on. The Act was the Government of the day's response, driven by tabloid headlines. But it now stands in the way - at the very least - of useful experiments to find alternative ways of coping with drug addiction.

The lack of legally available class A drugs is an enormous engine of crime in cities across Britain. It drives organised crime because of the network of dealers and smugglers it supports, and it is a major factor in gang warfare which is now increasingly conducted with firearms. It explains the rapid increase in the prison population. Drugs addicts in Ipswich, as elsewhere, soon acquire a long record of petty crime, if not for prostitution then for shoplifting. Their relationships are unstable, their health problems are appalling, and their disintegrating lives mean that any children they may have are almost always in care.

Yet hard drug addiction is not intrinsically unmanageable. There are apparently respectable cocaine users now, as there were apparently respectable opium users in the Victorian era. A policy of controlled prescription would need careful supervision to prevent the abuses that led to the 1971 Act, and would need to be accompanied by greatly expanded facilities to treat addicts and rehabilitate them. Such facilities have been scandalously neglected in the past. So far government policy, such as the 2005 Drugs Act, has concentrated on tightening the criminal law even further, as if one more effort could succeed. A cultural change is needed that would see drug addiction as primarily a medical problem with medical solutions, and users primarily as victims and patients rather than as criminals. An apt memorial to the Ipswich women would be a national resolve not to perpetuate the conditions that drove them to their deaths.

Response to Australia Talks

This email was sent by one of our members to ABC's Australia Talks which related to the "Bronwyn Bishop report". The email was read out on air.

Imagine we approached traffic safety the same way the Howard Government approaches dangerous drugs, and we had a dangerous intersection where a number of people had been killed and horrifically injured over the years.

Under the Howard Government approach we would increase the penalties associated with dangerous driving at the intersection. We might increase the police presence at the intersection. We might install a speed camera. And some of this might, might prevent an accident or two.

The harm minimisation approach would, without necessarily changing or reducing any current laws, involve asking an engineer to assess the intersection and figure out if there is a way to redesign the intersection to

prevent accidents. While the solution would probably not be perfect chances are it would be far more successful than a pure law and order approach.

People who advocate harm minimisation aren't asking for the law to be abandoned (just like the traffic engineer who wouldn't want the highway code thrown away). But, being close to the problem they are trying to advocate practical and real solutions based on expertise rather than ideology.

Just imagine if there was a device that could prevent half the car accidents in the country, but the Government refused to implement it because "if people followed the road rules accidents wouldn't happen anyway". We would be outraged, and we should feel the same way about the blinkered approach the Government takes to dangerous drugs.

AUSTRALIA'S DRUG BUDGET

All of the areas of Australian government spending has been estimated to be \$3.2 billion in 2002-03, with \$1.3 billion spent on "proactive" policies and \$1.9 billion spent "reactively", dealing with the consequences of illicit drug use. The consequences of drug use are much larger than the proactive expenditures.

Crime-related consequences alone form half of all expenditures. Health and other consequences are, by comparison, much smaller components.

Proactive expenditure accounts for 42% and of this over half of this type of expenditure - the most significant category - is on law enforcement and interdiction.

Only 7% is spent on treatment and only 1% on harm reduction!

Australia's Drug Budget 2002 - 2003

Item	Expenditure \$Millions	Percent
Proactive policies		
Law enforcement	\$ 564	17.6%
Prevention	\$ 309	9.7%
Treatment	\$ 228	7.1%
Interdiction	\$ 188	5.9%
Harm Reduction	\$ 40	1.3%
Other	\$ 13	0.4%
Sub total	\$ 1,344	42.0%
Reactive policies (dealing with the consequences)		
Crime related	\$ 1,632	51.0%
Health related	\$ 160	5.0%
Other	\$ 64	2.0%
Sub total	\$ 1,856	58.0%
All Australian Governments	\$ 3,200	100.0%