



Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform (ACT) Inc

committed to preventing tragedy that arises from illicit drug use

NEWSLETTER

November, 2011

PO Box 4736
HIGGINS ACT 2615
Tel: 02 62542961
email: mcconnell@ffdlr.org.au
Web: www.ffdlr.org.au
ISSN 1444-200



End of year BBQ & AGM @McConnell's

Thursday 24 November 2011
6:30pm BBQ--8pm AGM

Our last meeting for 2011 will be an **end of year BBQ followed by our Annual General**

Meeting including election of office bearers and presentation of the President's and Treasurer's annual report.

Marion and Brian will supply meat and salads etc but **could members please bring a sweet and drink.**

Members and their family are most welcome.

For catering purposes please let Marion know if you are coming . If you don't know our address we will give it to you when you contact us.

Looking forward to a pleasant evening together.

RSVP 6254 2961 or

email mcconnell@ffdlr.org.au

Editorial

Leadership & vision

The Global Commission on Drugs Policy, released world wide in June, reported that the war on drugs was not working. Amongst the recommendations it said:

"The United Nations system must provide leadership in the reform of global drug policy. This means promoting an effective approach based on evidence, supporting countries to develop drug policies that suit their context and meet their needs, and ensuring coherence among various UN agencies, policies and conventions."

and

"Act urgently: the war on drugs has failed, and policies need to change now."

Media stories of the report approached a thousand. Only one US story in the top 100 was opposed to it and the Russians said it was just propaganda. The rest reported it factually but included comments from various world leaders disagreeing with the Commission. Despite all the evidence the US Whitehouse said the war on drugs is working.

The authors of the report, ie the Commissioners, were past leaders, some were former presidents of countries most affected by the drug trade and would have known that the war on drugs had failed and had clear ideas why it had.

A cynic could say current leaders apparently do not gain wisdom until they move out of office.

While in office most politicians will say that they are simply responding to their constituents. Sometimes those constituents are the people that voted them in, sometimes they regard the party machine or their advisers as their constituents.

Privately they may say they agree that prohibition has failed to deliver but publicly it is a different story. Very few are prepared to discuss publicly the elephant in the room.

British sociologist Frank Furedi says that leaders are surrounded by advisers and consultants and thus out of touch with the people. He says that they will rarely take a judgement call, using language to hide procrastination sometimes saying now is not the time. Thus he says politics has been denuded of genuine innovation resulting in poorer leadership.

It is hard to disagree with Furedi's view of our leaders. Most lead from the rear, if at all.

For our part we have issued a challenge in the form of a petition calling on the ACT Legislative Assembly to have a public debate on our drug laws and policies based on evidence and research. The public can be excused for their ignorance, such as the man who almost signed our petition because he wanted already banned drugs to be banned. But there is little excuse for our political leaders.

When the debate is held, and possibly it will be the first for any Australian parliament, we will all see who has the courage and vision required for leadership. And we will see those who do not have a vision but, ignoring the evidence, call up fear tactics by claiming for example more drugs will be available if you make any, even minor, changes.

'Tough on drugs' actually means 'no new ideas'

The Canberra Times, 24 October 2011

The government continues its policy that's demonstrably failed, ROSS FITZGERALD writes

One of the interesting side-effects of the Federal Parliament's obsession with immigration and taxation issues this year has been that serious discussion of social policy has been sadly neglected. Especially around drugs. It's been about 40 years since marijuana, LSD and heroin made their way into Australian society and about 30 years for cocaine and ecstasy. Methamphetamine has been with us for a little more than 15 years and in the past couple of years we've started to see the advent of synthetic analogue drugs such as Kronic.

Three inescapable facts arise from the most cursory review of Australian drug policy since the late 1960s. The first is that governments continue to rely almost exclusively on the "tough on drugs" strategy. Secondly, drug use continues to escalate despite the "tough on drugs" strategy – or rather, because of it. Thirdly, while tobacco and alcohol are demonstrably the most dangerous drugs, governments still treat them far more leniently than others.

None of this makes any sense at all. If the road toll continued to rise over 40 years despite new speed limits, more traffic cops and speed cameras, would legislators continue with the strategy? Not likely. But when it comes to drugs, Australian governments cannot look any further than the United States for inspiration. They send people to jail for possessing a box of marijuana or as many ecstasy tablets as would fit in a packet of aspirin. But in effect, "tough on drugs" means "devoid of any new ideas".

In Victoria, new legislation is in the parliament to ban bongos. "We'll show those young kids that we're serious about stopping marihuana smoking," Premier Ted Baillieu said. Yet Baillieu then exempts the traditional Middle-Eastern "hookah" from the ban seemingly because he doesn't want to lose votes in Muslim communities. Apart from being a form of racial discrimination this legislation is going to force tens of thousands of young Caucasian and Chinese dope smokers to make their bong out of half an orange juice container and a piece of stolen garden hose. Inhaling hot plastic vapours will make more young adults sick than the dope will.

All states, and the ACT, have simply bought the AMA's untested and unproven line that synthetic cannabis causes serious health problems and have banned its sale completely. They've even wrapped jail sentences around the synthetic drugs that are higher than for real marihuana. Yet many people were using these drugs to alleviate the symptoms of serious illnesses such as Parkinson's and fibromyalgia, which may explain why this medical lobby group attacked these new compounds with such ferocity.

In Queensland, Anna Bligh's Labor Government has gone so far as to introduce laws that say if a substance is "similar" to synthetic cannabis or "is intended to have a similar effect" then it is taken to be that. This is probably the most misguided piece of drug legislation in Australian history, and will potentially criminalise all sorts of chemical compounds and stymie medical research on anything that vaguely looks like it could alter mood. Because tobacco and alcohol are already legal and have unfortunately been with us since white settlement in Australia, a different approach is needed to help people give up these drugs. Every time I hear federal Health Minister, Nicola Roxon, talking tough on cigarettes, I cringe. It's taken her (and her previous health ministers) 40 years to go from the first health warnings on cigarette packets to legislation aimed at getting rid of brand names on packets. If that's the best they can do to stop the current 15per cent of Australians who smoke, they should give the game away.

Any first year university student knows that, after price, the quickest and most reliable way to stop people from buying a product is to legally narrow the point of sale to the bare minimum, without actually enacting an outright ban. Total bans never work and almost always cause a product to thrive on the black market.

So instead of fiddling around with yet more packaging schemes, which will make no discernible difference to the number of smokers, why doesn't Roxon simply get cigarettes out of supermarkets, out of newsagents, out of service stations and anywhere where children can witness the transaction of tobacco for money? Don't worry about the kids seeing colourful brand names on the packet. Take the packets out of mainstream circulation and allow them to be sold only from age-restricted premises such as clubs, adult shops and tobacconists.

If people have to make a separate and dedicated trip to a location they are not very familiar with instead of just picking up some cigarettes when doing the grocery shopping, then they will have more time to think about the decision. Their children will not see the transaction happening, in the process normalising the sale of cigarettes.

While we're on about it, why do we still have alcohol for sale in supermarkets? It's not as though there is a shortage of outlets selling alcohol that we have to have booze for sale alongside breakfast cereal.

Again, if governments were serious about bringing down drinking levels, they should be focusing on point of sale rather than labelling. Domestic violence and under-age binge drinking are fuelled by the easy availability of alcohol. Inevitably, the supermarket chains will fight to keep both cigarettes and alcohol as part of their mix and argue that without them they cannot be profitable. But look how many different lines the average supermarket carries. If they can't make it with thousands of different products and have to rely on two of them for their profitability, they should give the game away.

Here again, politicians are duplicitous and will argue about why they can't do this. They'll carry the big stick and puff their chest out about being tough on drugs but when the retail and alcohol lobbyists are in the room, their posturing changes. Then they're just tough on drugs which don't have lobbyists.

Emeritus professor of history and politics at Griffith University, Ross Fitzgerald is the author of 35 books, including the co-authored satire Fools' paradise: Life in an altered state and his memoir My name is Ross: An alcoholic's journey.

The war on drugs and the shameful silence of our politicians

Editorial, The Observer, UK, Sunday 13 November 2011

Must we rely on big business, not our leaders, to pave the way when it comes to tackling a narcotics industry that is ravaging Latin America?

In a parliamentary debate in the House of Commons, David Cameron said: "I ask the Labour government not to return to retribution and war on drugs. That has been tried and we all know that it does not work." That was in December 2002. And as a member of the home affairs select committee on drug misuse, Cameron supported the following recommendation: "That the government initiates a discussion within the Commission on Narcotic Drugs of alternative ways – including the possibility of legalisation and regulation – to tackle the global drugs dilemma."

That too was in 2002.

This week a major international summit on drugs will be hosted by Baroness Meacher in the House of Lords. No one from Downing Street will attend. No front line British politicians will be there to listen and learn from international medics, academics, politicians and economists who will reflect on lessons learnt from, and debate new approaches to, the "war on drugs".

Privately, senior politicians have encouraged the hosting of the event and told organisers that they are sympathetic to a new discussion about drugs legislation – but only once public opinion has shifted. They signal privately that there is a need for change, but do nothing to lead that debate.

Cameron and Britain's other leading politicians might do well to read the recent Global Commission on Drug Policy report (written by, among others, former UN secretary-general Kofi Annan, former US secretary of state George Shultz, and former Federal Reserve chairman Paul Volcker).

They made this plea: "Political leaders and public figures have the courage to articulate publicly that... the war on drugs has not, and cannot, be won." They then concluded: "Break the taboo on debate and reform. The time for action is now."

The taboo shows no sign of being broken by Britain's spineless political class, despite this generation of leaders being the first to have widespread, first-hand experience of illegal drugs. They will undoubtedly have come across cannabis, cocaine and ecstasy throughout their university, social and professional lives. Some of their best friends – and colleagues – will have taken them.

But from Messrs Cameron, Clegg, Miliband or even George Osborne – who might take a particular interest in the tax-raising possibilities of a regulated drug market, as we disclose in today's Observer – we hear nothing.

Instead, the leading voices in calling for a new discussion about the war on drugs are coming from Latin America. In today's Observer, Colombia's President Santos speaks eloquently about the price his country has paid as a drug "producing nation" servicing the demand for illicit drugs in "consumer nations", principally in Europe and the US.

He and President Calderón of Mexico are increasingly vocal about the need to look again at a war that is showing no signs of being won – ever. Drug consumption and availability are not abating, they are on the rise. As Santos says: "The world needs to discuss new approaches... we are basically still thinking within the same framework as we have done for the last 40 years."

Santos speaks with some moral authority given the carnage visited on his country over the last 30 years. He has gone further than any incumbent. In today's Observer interview he raises the prospect of a regulated market for marijuana and perhaps even cocaine. But he is insistent that this can only come through international consensus.

Those in the "producing nations" in Latin America are increasingly impatient at having to suffer the bloodiest collateral damage in the service of the consuming nations. President Calderón recently hit out at the US and said: "We are living in the same building. And our neighbour is the largest consumer of drugs in the world and everybody wants to sell him drugs through our doors and windows."

It is unconscionable for the leaders of the largest consuming nations – the US, UK and Spain – to remain silent any longer. The habits of their citizens are not only directly responsible for the wasted lives of many Latin Americans but, as President Santos says, are now culpable in the destruction of the Amazonian rainforests as coca producers move to ever more remote parts of Colombia to harvest the raw material of cocaine.

The war on drugs has failed. When policies fail it is incumbent on our leaders to look for new ones. They show no signs of doing so – even as Latin America's body politic is threatened by the tentacles of the narco gangs who pay off politicians, judges, journalists and policemen – or just kill them, so that they can better transport drugs to us.

Prohibition has failed. As we noted last year: "If the purpose of drug policy is to make toxic substances available to anyone who wants them in a flourishing market economy controlled by murderous criminal gangs, the current arrangements are working well." Milton Friedman was right, 20 years ago, when he said: "If you look at the drug war from a purely economic point of view, the role of the government is to protect the drug cartel. That's literally true".

Plenty of leading British figures and institutions agree that prohibition has failed. The ex-president of the Royal College of Physicians, the ex-chairman of the Bar Council, the Police Foundation, the Royal Society of Arts and numerous others have questioned whether prohibition works. The roll call of international figures who have called time on the drugs war is long and distinguished.

But from leading British politicians? Nothing. They are being left behind by public opinion both here and abroad. A poll commissioned last year by Liberal Democrats for drug policy reform found that 70% were in favour of legalising and regulating cannabis. These views are no longer the preserve of students, stoners and slackers. If none of our political leaders has the courage to speak out independently and engage the debate, maybe they can summon the wherewithal under the cloak of an all-party commission into the regulation of drugs. That would be a start.

But it is looking increasingly unlikely that it will be politicians who spark a debate about a new approach to the failed war on drugs. The winds of change will not likely be driven by politics, health or morality, but by economics. Business will be the prime mover.

Over the course of the last 40 years, America has spent \$2.5tn on the drugs war. As the Global Commission makes clear, "in a time of fiscal austerity, we can no longer afford to maintain multibillion-dollar investments that have largely symbolic value".

In the States, in so far as any debate is taking place, it is being stoked by economists and the business community who see an economic case for ending the drug war on the one hand, and for opening up a lucrative new market for American business on the other. The Economist has argued for the legislation of drugs for more than 20 years.

Six years ago, Forbes – America's business bible – published the names of 500 prominent businessmen and women who favoured a regulated drugs market. In the States people are starting to ask why the market in drugs can't shift from the cartels to the capitalists.

In a free and open market, the legitimate and very real concerns of many Britons can be played out publicly as they have been with alcohol and smoking – to great effect, particularly in the case of smoking.

When the debate changes substantively both here and in the States it will do so because, while politicians may keep their counsel and remain silent, money talks.

How the Plummeting Price of Cocaine Fueled the Nationwide Drop in Violent Crime

Llewellyn Hinkes-Jones, Reuters, Nov 11, 2011

Edited version for full version see <http://www.theatlanticcities.com/jobs-and-economy/2011/11/cocaine-plummeting-price-nationwide-drop-violent-crime/474/>

Starting in the mid-1990s, major American cities began a radical transformation. Years of high violent crime rates, thefts, robberies, and inner-city decay suddenly started to turn around. Crime rates didn't just hold steady, they began falling faster than they went up. This trend appeared in practically every post-industrial American city, simultaneously.

"The drop of crime in the 1990s affected all geographic areas and demographic groups," Steven D. Levitt wrote in his landmark paper on the subject, *Understanding Why Crime Fell in the 1990s*, and elucidated further in the best-selling book *Freakonomics*. "It was so unanticipated that it was widely dismissed as temporary or illusory long after it had begun." He went on to tie the drop to the legalization of abortion 20 years earlier, dismissing police tactics as a cause because they failed to explain the universality and unexpectedness of the change.

Plenty of other theories have been offered to account for the double-digit decrease in violence, from the advent of "broken windows" policies, three strikes laws, changing demographics, gun control laws, and the increasing prevalence of cellphones to an upturn in the economy and cultural shifts in American society. Some of these theories have been disproven outright while others require a healthy dose of assumption to turn correlation into causation. But much less attention has been paid to another likely culprit: the collapse of the U.S. cocaine market.

Cocaine was the driving force behind the majority of drug-related violence throughout the 1980s and into the early 1990s. It was the main target of the federal War on Drugs and was the highest profit drug trade overall. In 1988, the American cocaine market was valued at almost \$140 billion dollars, over 2 percent of U.S. GDP. The violence that surrounded its distribution and sale pushed the murder rate to its highest point in America's history (between 8-10 per 100,000 residents from 1981-1991), turned economically impoverished cities like Baltimore, Detroit, Trenton and Gary, Indiana, into international murder capitals, and made America the most violent industrialized nation in the world.

Then in 1994, the crime rate dropped off a cliff. The number of homicides would plummet drastically, dropping almost 50 percent in less than ten years. The same would go for every garden variety of violent crime on down to petty theft.

Something was wrong. If anything, cocaine prices should have been skyrocketing. One of the DEA's stated objectives for the War on Drugs was to make drugs more expensive and therefore harder to access for the individual user. To get there, the DEA pursued a number of strategies: large drug busts, heavier penalties on importers and producers, and limiting access to the materials used in drug production. Even while many of those tactics produced big successes, cocaine prices still went down, not up, and crime plummeted right alongside.

But despite drug busts and stricter regulations, cocaine prices kept declining. In fact, prices have been declining since before the War on Drugs even began. An Atlantic story from 2007 noted that the price per gram for cocaine had gone from an average of around \$600 in the early 1980s to less than \$200 in the mid 1990s, and was down to as little as \$20 per gram with ever-increasing purity. In some instances, illegal drug prices spiked in the wake of a large drug bust or the dismantling of a cartel, but the larger trend has been markedly downward. That's due in large part to the ingenuity of drug importers, who only got more sophisticated in their ability to bypass border security and avoid arrest following a significant bust, ultimately bringing in more product with time. That growing supply resulted in more competition between dealers who started supplying a higher purity product, at a lower cost, to win over consumers.

But it's not only a growing supply of product that led to the collapse of the cocaine market. Newfound competition in the form of locally-produced methamphetamines and prescription narcotics would continue to drive business away from cocaine and the inner city to the suburbs and exurbs.

More importantly, during this same time period home-grown meth labs appeared all over the country, as the process for cooking meth with over-the-counter allergy medicines was perfected and shared.

The price dropped below that of cocaine and the purity tripled. Yet even in states hit hard by the meth epidemic like Oregon, felonies declined to a rate not seen since the 1960s. Crimes related to methamphetamine may have increased, but overall statewide numbers for everything from property crime, robbery, and assault all decreased.

Meanwhile, pharmaceutical opiates began to see a renaissance. Oxycontin was approved by the FDA in 1995 and quickly became an illicit recreational drug under the colloquialism "hillbilly heroin." Sales of Oxycontin in 2001 hit \$1 billion a year. The market was being flooded from every angle.

All of this competition would most affect the foot soldiers in the cocaine trade, between whom the majority of inner-city violence occurred. Thanks to the work of Sudhir Venkatesh on the underground markets of the Chicago's urban poor, we know that drug gangs are highly organized and stratified. Those at the bottom selling on street corners make very little. Most only sell drugs part-time as a means of supplementing income. Few sellers pull in substantial earnings. In a study of Washington, D.C. dealers, Venkatesh found "25 percent of the

sample sold drugs no more than once a week, and these people reported monthly net earnings from the drug trade of just \$50 a month.” The basic conclusion is that the lack of financial opportunities in the ghetto and the promise of climbing the gang's organizational ladder kept small-time dealers accepting low wages.

And there's the missing piece in the DEA's theory. Once the margin of profit for dealing small amounts of crack cocaine disappeared, being part of the drug trade was no longer worth the persistent threat of violence or the stiff criminal penalties. A 70 percent drop in cocaine prices like the one that occurred in the mid 1990s combined with competition from decentralized sources for methamphetamines and prescription narcotics would completely eliminate the minimum wage drug dealer as a viable profession.

The same goes for turf wars, which Venkatesh saw as the source of the majority of inner-city violence. He saw the life of a drug dealer as relatively violence-free up until territory conflicts with other gangs ensued. Without the high value of cocaine as a commodity, the incentive for protracted gang wars would dwindle as well as eliminate the economy for the illegal weapons, drive-by shootings, and mercenary “warriors” needed to help defend prime dealing locations. Without profit to fight over, Vankatesh thought that “gang violence would likely return to pre-crack levels.”

This also explains why there’s never been a large upswing in crime related to methamphetamine use. As long as production costs stay below that of cocaine's already cut-rate asking price, the demand to be on the business end is low. If the financial incentive is low, the trade-off for entering a life of crime is low. At a certain point the decision matrix for entering a life of drug-related crime collapses for all but those with no other alternate financial sources or for those with a personal interest in the craft.

O
u
r

n
e
x
t

F
F
D
L
R

m
e
e
t
i
n
g

a
n
d

N

e
w
s
l
e
t
t
e
r