



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 Monthly Meeting

Thursday 23 July 2009

at 7.30pm

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

Refreshments will follow

Make a note in your diary August monthly meeting

Thursday 27th August.

Speaker: Vera van de Velde from the ACT
Alcohol and Drugs Program.

Editorial

The war continues in Mexico

On the southern border of the USA a devastating war, created by policies that were initiated 100 years ago, rages - policies initially aiming to prevent the recreational use of opium.

Other drugs were added in the following 100 years and penalties were continually increased in an effort to match the human ingenuity that was used to thwart the laws. Alcohol was added by some countries but was soon discarded when it was realised that the crime, corruption and violence that accompanied this 'cure for addiction' was worse than the addiction itself.

But the lesson has not been learned for other drugs. Recent violent events in Mexico in respect of illicit drug trafficking are not unlike the alcohol prohibition era in the USA.

Cocaine is one of America's favourite prohibited drugs. It is produced in South American countries and largely smuggled through Mexico into the USA. Effectively the USA has exported the production and transport of the drug (as it and other western countries have done for most drugs).

Historically Mexico was already a drug producer and importer to the USA for heroin and cannabis but a deal struck with the Columbian drug traffickers in the 1980s, which gave Mexican cartels a percentage of the goods in payment, made them a much more powerful force in the trade.

Because such trafficking is illegal there is no peaceful recourse to perceived disputes or takeovers as there are with legitimate businesses. Disputes and takeovers can only be settled by intimidation or violence. The violence in Mexico started in earnest in the late 1980s following the arrest of Gallardo who ran the cocaine business.

While drugs are smuggled from, for example Columbia in South America, to the USA, guns and military style weapons – so readily obtained in the USA - are smuggled back to the Mexican drug cartels.

The violence in Mexico worsened in 2000 and surged in 2005, causing that government, which up to that point had taken a somewhat passive stance, to send in federal troops.

Troop numbers have gradually been increased and now number about 45,000. Some 5,000 police have also been sent to the 18 states where the war rages.

The tally so far?

- 11,000 drug-war related deaths since the troops were sent in.
- Only 28 percent of Mexicans think the government is winning the war while over 50 percent think it is losing.
- Mexican cartels make about \$US40 billion each year.
- A leader of one cartel was arrested and in retaliation 12 federal agents were tortured and executed.
- Terror tactics include executions broadcast on YouTube, hand grenades thrown into a crowded plaza, severed heads thrown into crowded nightclubs.
- Cartels have extensive spy networks to track movements of soldiers and federal agents.
- Wholesale price of cocaine in Mexico \$US12,500 per kilo, in USA \$US28,500 per kilo.
- The USA had in 2004 2 million current users of cocaine. Cocaine use is stable.

Mexican politicians and the generals responsible claim that the war is being won; stating that the increasing violence is a sign because the cartels are fighting amongst themselves. The population however does not believe them.

An arrested cartel leader has offered a truce. The government rejected it outright, vowing to continue the war until it had won.

But what will be lost in that battle to win at all costs? The war on drugs in Mexico, as it is elsewhere in the world, is worse than the original problem.

La Familia cartel kills 12 federal agents in Mexico drug war attack

From The Times Online, July 16, 2009, James Bone in New York

A powerful Mexican drug cartel has unleashed a killing spree against the authorities in a challenge to the leadership of the President in his home state.

The bodies of a dozen federal anti-drug agents were found on a mountain highway in Michoacán, the home state of Felipe Calderón, on Monday.

The killing of the agents was the worst loss of life in a single attack since President Calderón took office in 2006, taking the war between the narcotics gangs and the Government into uncharted territory.

Their murders were the boldest of at least ten reprisal attacks since Arnaldo Rueda Medina, nicknamed La Minsa, was arrested on Saturday. He is reputedly the second-in-command of La Familia cartel in Michoacán.

Six federal police officers and two soldiers were also killed in attacks on police stations and hotels where anti-drug agents were staying.

The surge in violence marks a potential shift in Mexico's drug wars, which have claimed 11,000 lives during the presidency of Mr Calderón, who ordered the army to intervene.

Ciro Gomez Leyva, a columnist for the newspaper *Milenio*, described the killings as a Mexican version of the Tet offensive in Vietnam in 1968.

"In the war against the narcos, Saturday, July 11, seems like a kind of Tet offensive, the synchronised action by South Vietnamese guerrillas and the North Vietnamese Army against US troops at the end of January 1968 that, despite being characterised as a military disaster, created the perception that the otherwise invincible US Army would never win in Vietnam," he wrote.

The perception that the war against drugs is being lost is pervasive. A poll published in *Milenio* said that only 28 per cent of Mexicans believed that the Government was winning, and more than half thought that it was losing.

Mr Calderón said: "The criminals will not be able to intimidate the federal Government. In this battle we will not give up, we will not hesitate, because what is at stake is Mexico's peace and safety."

Michoacán, on the Pacific coast, has become a battleground because it controls routes into the United States. It is also one of Mexico's main producers of marijuana, opium poppies and synthetic drugs.

Mr Rueda was arrested in the Michoacán capital, Morelia. He is allegedly the right-hand-man to the reputed boss, Nazario Moreno Gonzalez, known as El Mas Loco, or the Craziest One.

Within hours of the arrest, gunmen from La Familia, armed with rifles and grenades, ambushed federal forces in seven cities.

Some of the attacks took place near tourist sites such as the arts-and-crafts centre of Patzcuaro and Zitacuaro, which is famous for its monarch butterflies.

In the most brutal attack, eleven men and one woman agent were abducted while off duty.

Their bodies were found stacked on the highway with death threats that read: "La Familia, join its ranks or leave" and "Let's see if you try to arrest another one".

La Familia has penetrated the power structure, allegedly obtaining protection from police and politicians.

Seven mayors, one former mayor and a state prosecutor are being held after a federal police sweep of allegedly corrupt politicians in May.

An arrest warrant has been issued for Julio Godoy, the half brother of a state Governor. Mr Godoy was elected to Congress last week as a member of the Democratic Revolution Party.

Analysts said that the killings were not necessarily a sign of the cartel's strength, but were an escalation of the battle to contain them.

"This marks an important change in the drug war in that they are attacking federal forces directly," Jorge Chabat, a drug expert, said.

"It also suggests the capture of this person has affected the operations of the cartel. It was a major blow and this is a reaction out of weakness, not strength."

In separate Mexican drug violence, six gunmen were killed on Tuesday in the northern city of Monterrey. Gunmen killed the mayor of Namiquipa in Coahuila and four police officers were kidnapped in Piedras Negras.

In Tabasco state on the Gulf coast, prosecutors charged five alleged Gulf cartel hitmen with allegedly killing two policemen and eighteen of their relatives in February and May.

A drugs trade worth billions and severed heads on the dance floor

- Every year Mexican cartels smuggle illegal drugs worth about \$40 billion (£24 billion) into the United States, the world's biggest market for narcotics. Mexico is a major source of heroin, methamphetamine and marijuana — and a key transit country for the vast amounts of cocaine that are transported over the border
- In 2008, 6,000 people died in drug violence in Mexico, according to President Calderón — almost double the 3,042 deaths that were recorded in 2007
- About 95 per cent of the killings were carried out using firearms from the US. Most of the drug violence takes place in a few cities near the US border, with drugs and people being trafficked to the north, and weapons to the south
- In December 2006, Mr Calderón announced the deployment of 36,000 troops to work with the federal police to fight the drug trade in nine states. The police are widely accused of corruption
- 53 per cent of Mexicans think the Government is losing the war with the drug cartels, according to a 2008 poll in a Mexican newspaper
- La Familia cartel achieved notoriety in 2006 when a member walked into a bar and threw five severed heads on to the dance floor

Sources: Reuters, Council on Foreign Relations

http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/us_and_americas/article6715478.ece

Heroin seizures and heroin use in Scotland

Authors: N. Mckeganey; J.Casey; J.McGallagly;

G.Hay. Published in: [Journal of Substance Use](#), Volume 14, Issue 3 & 4 June 2009 , pages 240 - 249

Abstract

The seizure of illicit drugs is a key component of the U.K. drug strategy. Whilst information on the quantity of drugs seized and their weight is routinely collected by

enforcement agencies, and released to the media, interpreting the meaning of changes in the amounts recorded is fraught with difficulty as a result of not having access to accurate information on the total amount of illegal drugs available within the UK. This article seeks to compare the quantities of heroin seized by police in Scotland with estimates of the amount of heroin consumed over a 12-month period. The research shows that over the period 2000-2006 heroin seizures within Scotland typically amounted to around 1% of the total amount of heroin consumed. The paper discusses the possible reasons why heroin seizures may represent such a low percentage of heroin consumed and considers the implications of this work with regard to drug enforcement activities.

Brumby weeds out drugged drivers

Paul Millar and David Rood, *The Age*, July 15, 2009

Some drivers face a wake-up call with the State Government launching a hard-hitting campaign targeting cannabis users.

The Transport Accident Commission advertisements, which started last night, are graphic and brutal, depicting a drug-impaired driver stepping from his car into the path of an oncoming vehicle and becoming yet another road victim.

Premier John Brumby made no apologies for the brutality of the ads, which are aimed at cutting the road toll and reducing serious injuries by 30 per cent by 2017.

"It's a very powerful advertisement and it gets the message across," he said. "The message is simple: if you drive on drugs, then you're out of your mind."

The campaign, which will run for three weeks on television, radio, billboards and the internet, targets recreational drug users, especially those aged 30-35.

"We're getting an increasing number of people who are driving under the influence of illegal drugs," Mr Brumby said. "One in 65 people who are being randomly tested have either cannabis or stimulants in their system."

"Of last year's road fatalities, which were just over 300 people, more than 20 per cent of the people who were killed on our roads had illegal drugs in their system, cannabis and or stimulants."

The Opposition backed the drug-driving campaign but branded Mr Brumby "soft on cannabis".

Shadow community services spokeswoman Mary Wooldridge said it was hypocritical to allow the sale of bongs at the same time as warning people of the dangers of smoking cannabis.

"This is a double standard and the Premier should move to ban the sale of bongs across the state," she said. "It's a massive hypocrisy from this Government that it is legal to sell and purchase a bong but it is illegal to smoke cannabis."

Ms Wooldridge said a ban on bongs was practical as the Government had already prohibited the sale of ice pipes and cocaine kits.

Mr Brumby said he was prepared to take advice on banning the sale of bongs and drug paraphernalia.

Family Drug Support Stepping Stones to Success 'CANBERRA'

Dates: Held over 2 weekends

August 29-30 & September 5-6, 2009

Time: 09:30am-4pm

**Venue: Canberra Hospital, Yamba Drive,
Garran, Level 1, Training Room 2, Building 5.**

(Opposite main entrance. Building 5 sign posted
Staff Development Unit & Family & Carers
residence)

**Contact - Theo 0402 604354 or FDS Head
Office 02 47829222**

Cost: \$70 incl. membership & workbook

Cost for current FDS members \$40

A Drug-Free Sweden: By All Means?

sarosip, June 25, 2009

Thanks to our cooperation with the Swedish Drug Users Union in the framework of the European Drug Policy Initiative project, HCLU's video staff traveled to Stockholm in January 2009 to make a documentary about the drug policy of Sweden. We interviewed several people from various ideological and professional backgrounds, visited several organizations and institutions, we read the relevant studies and asked the inconvenient questions.

View the film on the internet here:

<http://drogriporter.hu/en/drugfreesweden>

The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) praised Sweden for its "successful drug policy" that set an example for the rest of the world how to tackle the drug problem. "I am personally convinced that the key to the Swedish success is that the Government has taken the drug problem seriously and has pursued policies adequate to address it," wrote Mr. Costa, head of the UNODC in the preface of the report "[Sweden's Successful Drug Policy: A Review of the Evidence](#)". The statistics are really impressive indeed if we look at the number of young people experimenting with cannabis for example – Sweden has one of the lowest prevalence of cannabis use in Europe. Some people may say that this indicates the effectiveness of harsh criminal laws and uncompromising efforts to pursue a drug-free society.

However, not everybody agrees with this conclusion. Not even in Sweden, where the majority of the population seems to support the "tough on drugs" approach. There are some professionals and activists who point out that the situation is not so nice behind the shiny surface. The Swedish Drug Users Union (Svenska Brukarföreningen) is one of the brave NGOs that flies in the face of the Swedish Talibans – the fundamentalist

Editor's Note: A relationship between blood alcohol level and degree of driving impairment has been determined for alcohol. No such relationship has been determined for cannabis or other illicit drugs.

who believe in the dogma that all drug use is evil and needs to be eliminated. The organization represents the untouchable pariahs of Swedish society: people who use illicit drugs. SDU, in cooperation with IHRA, produced a [shadow-report on the desperate public health and human rights situation of drug users](#) in the country. The report concludes that in its failure to provide comprehensive harm reduction measures such as needle and syringe exchange programmes, the Swedish Government is violating the right to health of people who use drugs, placing them at unnecessary and avoidable risk of HIV and HCV infection. This conclusion was backed by the former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health, Professor Paul Hunt, who visited Sweden in 2006 and submitted his report to the General Assembly of the United Nations in February 2007.

Sweden is the only country in Europe that based its national drug policy on the goal (or as they put it, the vision) of a drug-free society. For many it seems to be an innocent, stimulating dream like "world peace" – but it's not, points out Henrik Tham, Professor of Criminology at the Stockholm University. This zero-vision is dangerous because it implies that total abstinence is a value and goal in itself that transcends other goals like life or health. Indeed, for some Swedes it is more important to be drug-free than to stay alive or avoid HIV infections. That's why Stockholm is the only capital in Europe where there is no official needle and syringe exchange program, that's why so many heroin users have to die before getting into methadone treatment. If a society is trying to get rid of drugs it means that it will soon try to get rid of drug users. That is, the war on drugs is always a war on people.

An industry insider's review of *The Wire*

Dr Alex Wodak, President, Australian Drug Law Reform Foundation, reviews The Wire:

The Wire is a 60 part television series set in Baltimore, Maryland. Originally broadcast in the USA over five seasons on HBO, the series is now available on DVD and will be broadcast in Australia from August on ABC2. *The Wire* is compulsive watching.

The title refers to wiretaps used extensively by the police in this series to gather evidence on drug traffickers. Wiretaps also seem to be used in this series as a metaphor for the discovery of truth by outsiders in complex situations.

David Simon, largely responsible for the project, rightly describes this work as a "visual novel". It is by television standards exceptionally dense and rich. Many consider this series to be one of the finest fictional works ever created for television. *The Wire* is developing an international cult status. President Obama named *The Wire* as his favourite television show and even identified his favourite character.

Each season focuses on a major Baltimore institution: the drug trade, the port, the city government, the school system and the local major newspaper (The Baltimore Sun). The drug trade is represented as the only vibrant economy in the series. There are few other employment

options or methods of exit for the young black people we meet trapped in these depressed ghettos. One of the drug traffickers comments "you play or you is played". This approach seems to be common to all the areas of life we see in Baltimore.

Vast capital accumulated from the drug trade is later recycled through major building developments. This is only possible because of the pervasive corruption which links all the affected institutions: the law, politics and government administration. The deeply compromised nature of the institutions contrasts with the valiant attempts of some individuals in all of these institutions to behave honourably despite the circumstances.

The series is enriched by being set in a particularly local framework of Baltimore. But the distinctiveness of this grim setting also helps to provide a greater universality. Baltimore, one of the twenty largest cities in the USA, is today a faded reminder of its more glorious past. It has one of the highest homicide rates of any US city. Baltimore is a poor, predominantly black city. Unusually for US television, most of the actors are black. As this series shows, Americans pay a very high price for living in such an unequal society.

David Simon was previously a police reporter on the *Baltimore Sun*. His co-writer, Ed Burns, was a former homicide detective in the Baltimore Police Department. This ambitious project required the assistance of a vast number of individuals. A striking feature is the astonishing authenticity of the drug traffickers, union officials, police, city government, school system and the newspaper industry. The creators received a lot of expert advice from diverse sources. The screenplay and acting are outstanding.

Kurt Schmoke, a highly regarded former Mayor of Baltimore for a decade from the late 1980s, was one of the advisors. Schmoke plays a small part in the third season as Health Commissioner advising the mayor to accept drug law reform.

I met Schmoke while he was Mayor soon after he had become the first significant US politician to publicly denounce the War on Drugs as a failed and futile policy. It has taken 20 years for Schmoke's views to gain grudging and more wide-spread acceptance.

Earlier in his career, while a Maryland Attorney, Schmoke was responsible for prosecuting a drug trafficker who had murdered his best friend, a narcotics officer shot to death while raiding the drug trafficker's hide out. Schmoke had to listen again and again to his friend's wire-tap recording of the incident. This prompted him to question whether his best friend had lost his life in vain in an un-winnable war.

In this series, the irresistible force of drug law reform is obstructed by the immovable mountain of political short-term-ism. Just like in real life. Opportunities for improvement in other areas in this series are also cut short. Unlike most drama created for popular audiences, this series is permeated with a rather bleak and angry pessimism. No wonder the American people in 2007 voted in large numbers for "hope" and "change we can believe in".

The series comes highly recommended. But be warned. Watching *The Wire* is highly addictive.