



Drug Policy at the Crossroads

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The Treat of Global Drugs Policy and the Drift Towards Legalisation

The greatest threat that we now face in relation to illegal drugs is not to be found in the drugs themselves but in the dilution of our efforts to tackle this most persistent of social problems.

The Momentum Towards Increasing Liberalisation

The momentum towards drugs legalization has seen a range of claims and policy proposals take root within the public professional and political discourse on drugs. Unless those claims and policy proposals are effectively challenged we will undoubtedly see an accelerating move towards a free market in illegal drugs.

Drug Use is a Health Not a Criminal Justice Issue

Increasingly over the last few years there has been a growing chorus of voices making that case that drug use should be seen as a health rather than a criminal justice issue and that health agencies rather than criminal justice agencies or enforcement agencies should take the lead in shaping drugs policies.

Drug users should be dealt with as patients not criminals.

This proposal is rooted in an entirely false dichotomy between enforcement and treatment.

Treatment and enforcement are at their most effective where they are closely linked rather than where one is emphasised to a greater degree than the other.

The Global War on Drugs Has Failed

The persistence of drugs abuse is offered as an indication that the so called war on drugs has failed.

The war on drugs is a caricature that is used to legitimate legalisation.

Comparing the prevalence of legal and illegal drugs there is no question that the existing legal barriers to certain drugs have resulted in much lower levels of their use.

The Contribution of Criminal Justice Agencies has Led to an Increase in Harm

The claim that some forms of drugs enforcement amounts to a public health hazard.

There is good evidence however that effective drugs enforcement can lead to an increase in the numbers of drug users coming forward for treatment.

Criminalising Drugs Increases their Value

- There is no question that the price at which drugs are being sold on the streets is only a fraction of the total cost of their production and distribution.
- But in other circumstances price is seen as an effective tool for reducing the overall level of consumption.

Criminalising Drug Use Stigmatises Drugs Users and Increases their Marginalisation

- There are negative aspects of the drug using lifestyle that arise from the fact that drug use is illegal -one of which is the stigma often directed at those using illegal drugs.
- But
- Stigmatising the drug using lifestyle may well be one of the most powerful means through which society is able to tackle the potential limitless expansion of illegal drug use. Stigma may be functional for society in reducing drug use.

Criminalising Drug Users Makes Delivering Treatment that Much Harder

- This is a view that is often articulated by those working within drug treatment who often have an antipathy towards enforcement.
- However there has been good recent evidence that some of the most effective treatment and support interventions are those that combine elements of treatment punishment and reward- where treatment default carries a swift certain and proportionate response in contrast to the situation in which concurrent illegal drug use on the part of those in treatment carries no such negative sanction.

Drug Laws and Drugs Enforcement Do Not Work

- Drugs Enforcement has not led to a reduction in price purity or availability.
- Short term high visibility drugs policing is not successful in tackling an entrenched drug market.

Drug Use is a Human Right

There is no human right legitimating the use of illegal drugs.

Legalising Drugs Will Generate Millions in Tax Revenue

The tax gain from legalising illegal drugs may well have been wildly exaggerated by those promoting legalisation.

Legalisation will Not Increase Prevalence of Drug Use

- This is a foundational belief of those arguing for drugs legalisation however we know that one of the most powerful drivers of drug use is drug availability. Increase availability and there is a very real risk that use will increase. On the basis of the precautionary principle why would one risk such an increase and for what possible benefit?

So Where Are We Now?

- The increasing liberalisation of marijuana laws within the US is a pivotal moment in global drugs policy.
- It provides a unique opportunity to assess the effect of such a policy shift.
- Is there evidence of an increase in use
- Is there evidence of an increase in harm
- Are the financial gains less than those promised
- Is there evidence of continuing illicit supply
- Is the age of initiation decreasing
- If the answer to any of these questions is yes then the move towards legalisation could reduce markedly.

INCB and the International Drug Conventions

- Amongst those who criticise the international drug conventions and the INCB there is a wish to see INCB involved in increasingly fractious communication with signatory countries.
- The international conventions are one of the most powerful tools in efforts to tackle the global drugs problem.
- Quiet diplomacy encouragement and support may be more valuable than public exhortation and overt criticism.