

led by business (1% of the nation's population owns 50% of its wealth) allows buyoffs of almost everyone.

Still plaguing our country today is the legal suppression of marijuana. In the early 1930s the machinery to process hemp easily and more economically was perfected. Hemp being a far superior source of fiber than cotton or timber would have quickly dominated the market. Corporations such as Dupont and Hearst would have potentially lost billions. Dupont had invested heavily in producing synthetic fibers and had just patented a process for making paper from wood pulp, while Hearst had huge revenues dependent upon timber for supplying paper to his large newspaper chain. Hearst launched a media assault on marijuana (a natural medicine and narcotic found within the buds of the hemp plant) based on distortions and fabrications that provided the justification for the government to suppress the growth of hemp and eventually eliminate its legal cultivation within the U.S. The illegality of marijuana *has not* succeeded in suppressing its use. There are at least 20 million users of marijuana in the U.S. The illegality of marijuana *has* succeeded in suppressing the cultivation of hemp for fiber, food, fuel, oil and many other products that can be derived from it.

The prohibition of all illegal drugs *has not* been effective in suppressing their use either. It *has* however been effective in creating, increasing and protecting the profits for many of the extremely wealthy. The most ironical people to profit from our anti-drug laws are the members of organized crime, which is largely dependent on profits from drug trafficking. In the '60s the marketing of marijuana and LSD by many small unorganized groups of young people severely damaged organized crime. If all currently illegal drugs were decriminalized organized crime would most likely dwindle to near nothing. As it stands the drug lords have revenues in the trillions.

Fiber, medical and fuel companies have a strong desire to keep hemp illegal because of the many products that can be derived from it. Alcohol and tobacco companies have a marked interest in keeping the competition illegal. (Note: alcohol and cigarettes kill more than 50 times as many people than all illegal drugs combined.) The multibillion dollar industry of imprisoning people (correctional facilities are increasingly private businesses with government contracts) is dependent upon having huge numbers of prisoners to maintain high-profit margins. They are further dependent upon ever larger populations of prisoners to increase their profits. The popular political stand of getting tough on crime (instead of alleviating the conditions that foster it) no doubt serves the interests of those profiting off the American judiciary system.

Without the communist threat of world takeover justifying monstrous defense spending the military/industrial complex has to seek other sources of revenues. A war on drugs (which in reality is a war on the civil liberties of the people) allows the military and supporting defense industries to continue raiding the American wallet. The Justice Department, command center for the war on drugs, is one of the fastest growing agencies in the government. George Bush while President increased prison capacity in the country by 118%. Oregon in the last election voted for longer terms for prisoners, lowered age levels for imprisonment and gave prisons the opportunity to compete on the open labor market. That means a system of indentured slavery more ruthless than chain gangs; younger prisoners in for a longer time forced to work for virtually no wages (and probably little concern for health and safety protections) for the greater profits of private labor contractors who also happen to manage prisons.

Has everyone forgotten we worked hard to get rid of the chain gang idea of justice? Discovering more humane ways of dealing with prisoners extends back to the originators of the concept of imprisonment, the philosophers of the Enlightenment, which includes Voltaire. The early prisons were self sufficient and operated at little expense to the taxpayers. They believed rigid discipline would reform the prisoners and employed forced labor. After the Civil War it appeared to many observers that the function of prison as a place of reform had been forgotten and that the primary preoccupation of the system was to keep prisoners in jail to exploit their labor. The evolution of improvements since then has been reversed by our "get tough on crime" policies. It should be noted that the *per capita* crime rates have been going down for many years with the exception of drug use. Drug use continues to soar despite ever increasing strictness of the laws because we have not addressed societal problems such as poverty, discrimination and mental illness that make drug use epidemic. Drug laws do not destroy the market for them, only drive up the prices and make drug trafficking more prosperous. Escalating drug costs and legal fines however make it difficult for addicts at the poverty level to support their habits without committing crimes. The media's coverage and sensationalizing of crime surpasses its threat and turns the public into a potential lynch mob.

Mandatory minimums and the 3-strikes policy are also ludicrous. Mandatory minimums take the power of sentencing out of the knowledged and experienced hands of judges and places it in the hands of politicians. This upsets the balance of powers and destroys the flexibility of sentencing on a case by case basis. The third strike is at least naive and likely to create explosive violence. Most ex-convicts would rather risk death than surrender to a mandatory lifetime sentence. A person facing life on a third felony is more apt to be extreme in evading police custody. It makes little difference if the third felony is possession of an ounce of marijuana, public endangerment,



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attempted murder, kidnapping or auto theft, it will still be a lifetime sentence. In my childhood I paid the price for cornering a wild animal. What kind of fools are running this country?

The war on drugs also allows the government to practice and exercise military tactics upon the public. How far our government is willing to go to defeat the enemy (at *least* 30 million American drug users) is frightening to contemplate. "We're in a war," former Los Angeles Police Chief Daryl Gates proclaimed. "People who blast some pot on a casual basis are guilty of treason." He said *treason*, not jaywalking. People get shot for treason and no one seemed shocked when he recommended this as punishment for drug users. This is not a war where the enemy is readily identifiable. Drug users do not dress and act alike; they exist within all groups and social classes. Every American may be suspect. Allowing the people's government to consolidate and build military police forces pointed at the people is gross negligence. Yet politicians successfully support tougher crime laws and continue to be supported by those who truly profit from them.

Another infringement upon our rights is the legal enforcement of safety belts and other protective gear. It was not a group of concerned citizens that lobbied for seatbelt laws: insurance companies whose interest was not saving lives but reducing the amount of accident injury claims were the main force. However, few consumers have had the substantial savings created by seatbelt laws passed onto them. Three hundred years and everyone forgets. "No man can be forced to be rich or healthful whither he will or not," wrote John Locke, an English philosopher of the Enlightenment. "Nay God himself will not save their wills." Thomas Jefferson concurred: "That as to the principles of liberty and the rights of man, in nature and in society, the doctrines of Locke in his essay concerning the true original extent and end of civil government and of Sydney in his discourses on government may be considered, as those generally approved by our fellow citizens of Virginia and the United States."

Insurance companies have also successfully lobbied to make it illegal to operate an automobile without insurance and to have limitations placed upon the amount a person can sue for injuries (*i.e.*, a leg is at most worth x amount of dollars, an arm slightly less, etc.). Right to die laws also save insurance companies millions and therefore are bound to succeed. A national health care system will no doubt benefit the insurance business as well by forcing every American to pay for insuring all Americans. Once it is worked out among business how the profits are to be secured and divided we will have a national health care system.

(Note: I am not against a national health care system or the right to die issues but I am suspect of any laws of any kind that are motivated by greed and promote special interests. I am not so naive to believe our government at this time is capable of implementing a national health care system that would not suffer from bureaucracy, corruption and fraud on a very large scale. It is supposedly a free country and those who feel everyone should be covered are not being prevented from forming groups to do so but to have the government do it only forces a parochial sense of morality upon everyone else. This will only further polarize the nation. Freedom is also the right to not do what is right. Take that away and we will undoubtedly soon come under an intolerable system of punitive morality)

Many of our politicians espouse the good of lowering tariffs. Lowering tariffs may benefit the upper classes but it certainly will not benefit the middle or lower class workers. Tariffs are ideally designed to protect working people. Tariffs are supposed to raise the price of imported goods to match the price of domestic products. This protects not only American workers but workers of all nations. However, international megacorporations have realized the financial benefits of producing goods in countries with cheap labor forces and fewer legal restrictions (such as strong environmental laws). Of the few forces slowing companies down from transplanting to foreign countries are tariffs and other trade laws.

American industry is unable to completely exploit its workers because of labor laws and unions that remain powerful despite a decade of union busting. If the doors of international trade are thrown wide open it will be easy to bypass the unions and more than 200 years of effort and sacrifice by working people to be ensured fair pay, fair hours, safe working conditions and many other labor rights. We live in a country quickly moving its industry overseas, and ironically downsized Americans spend their welfare checks on overseas products. Once again the politicians and members of the media seem to have lost their minds and we seem to have lost our wallets.

Hypocrisy generated by greed influences every level of government and media and touches the lives of all Americans. Our economic system, to which we are bound and nearly gagged, serves the interests of the wealthy few as do countless laws, treaties and even wars. The people are always shocked when the media routinely exposes corruption within a corrupt system but even our tough crime policy doesn't seem able to put these criminals away. When it does they will not be doing forced labor but playing tennis in a country club prison.

We are in dire need of real change. The influence of business on government and the other problems we face will only grow more severe by the day. These are problems that affect the people and only the people can solve them. "Every government degenerates when entrusted to the rulers of the people alone," Jefferson said, adding that "The people themselves are the only safe depositories." Government, industry and the media are perpetrators of hypocrisy and will not change their nature. Hope lies where it always has and where it will always lay, with the common citizen. One day we will reclaim our inherent birthright, true freedom and equality. Remember what Voltaire said: "Man is free the moment he wants to be."

A final note: I am uncertain about everything I believe and say, but I would rather be ruled by the uncertainties of the people than by the rigid 'truths' of a few. Cattle will always be led to the slaughterhouse.

Michael Miller (*aka* Sasha) wrote *Marijuana Manifesto*, which appeared in the OctoNovo 1994 issue of the NCTE, and *nom de plumed* Voltaire's 300th birthday on the opposite page with his grandfather's name. He lives in Seaside.



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