

TO THE WAR ON DRUGS

pervades the society. Born into despair with little chance of breaking the intolerable cycle, black and Hispanic youth form into gangs that until recently engaged primarily in petty crime and turf wars. With the immense growth of the drug trade — particularly the invasion of crack cocaine — they have violently grabbed a share of the big money that provides an escape of being nobody going nowhere.

The poor and racially persecuted do not disappear when their supports are abandoned. Instead they eventually strike back with violence and hatred, which should not surprise anyone. They are at war against a society that refuses to admit them. Their war is conducted with drugs and death and gang members will risk their own lives for a few months of power, money and drugs, which is much preferred to a longer life of poverty and despair.

The flip side is that the major drug addiction is among the poor who can least afford the trap and must themselves become outlaws while their health and hope deteriorate. "If they don't have jobs they get into dope," said a woman whose brother was wounded in a drug gang drive-by shooting. The spread of Aids through drug inoculation is primarily among the poor, many of whom support their addictions with prostitution and expand the epidemic among the general population. A black minister said it all: "After years of slavery, job discrimination, lynchings and beatings, none of which broke the spirit of the black man, a little white powder comes along that has done more damage to the black community than any span of history."

Poverty in the drug business is at both bottoms: the impoverished addicted drug user and the third world subsistence farmers who grow opium, coca and cannabis. As in most commerce the money is in the supply side. Central and South American countries in particular have been controlled for generations by plantation aristocracies — many of whom are drug lords — who have turned millions of acres of arable land into specialized crops like coffee and bananas for the U.S. market instead of growing food for their own populations. Poor farmers are compelled to grow another inedible cash crop in order to survive; coca or cannabis. The irony is that by encouraging economic medievalism in South America the United States has virtually forced subsistence farmers into cultivating the raw drugs that infect and disrupt our society. Overlordship of our great southern plantation is seeding our own decline.

The United States has spent \$50+ billion on the war against drugs the past several years. 60% of the nation's prison population are drug offenders. Yet drug use has increased dramatically and its effects have spilled over into the general population through crime and the government's attempts to suspend civil rights and enact repressive laws to combat the drug trade, including mandatory drug testing and strip searches.

The War On Drugs is being lost in the cities where drug gangs and users outnumber police and at the nation's borders where only a fraction of drugs, which come in by air, land and sea, are being intercepted. There is much talk about using the military to seal off the borders and reinforce police in the cities and also be sent abroad to drug producing countries to halt cultivation and manufacture of drugs destined for the U.S. The 1878 *Posse Comitatus* law prohibits using the military in criminal law enforcement but there is much pressure to change or side-step the law. There is concern, however, that U.S. military personnel working alongside corrupt police officials at home and abroad might succumb to the temptation of drug profits. And as an example of the contradictions of drug policy, the Coast Guard reduced its search and rescue capacities in favor of drug interdiction but was forced to conduct fewer patrols as a result of budget cuts.

The three-quarter century effort to stop Americans from using heroin, cocaine and marijuana has failed. Millions have used one or more substances and have broken the law in the same manner that Prohibition in the 1920s not only did not stop people from ingesting alcohol but encouraged their support of criminals who supplied them with contraband liquor (usually 'rotgut') and the corrupt officials who were bribed to allow it. As it was during Prohibition the real danger in preserving unpopular and unjust laws is the corruption of society and its loss of respect for law in general.

The War On Drugs so blithely heralded is little more than a cynical assault on our civil liberties by a government that would increase its power by dissolving the bonds that hold us together. Public hysteria is whipped up against a few euphoric chemicals that like food or sex are dangerous only when gluttony overcomes moderation. The society is infected with fear, in particular its vulnerability to crime which is associated with drug use instead of wretched social conditions that produce both the obsessive consumption of drugs and the lucrative market for them. The trade is kept profitable through legal oppression. The big money is the real addiction; it has made bribe junkies of the nation's lawmakers and many of its enforcers. Spacing out once in awhile is not what is enervating our society: Corruption and the crazy compulsive pursuit of cash and power regardless of source and heedless of cost are the historical indices of societal decline. The pursuit of wealth by any means fair or foul which leaves greater numbers of people impoverished and wrecks the productivity of a society is the true sign of decay and degeneration. It is usually then, when every-



HORACIO FIDEL CARDO

thing starts falling apart, that large masses search for opiates to escape their crumbling lives.

Overuse of anything is dangerous. Coffee, hamburgers, butter and sugar are known killers. Alcohol not only addicts millions, it is a direct cause of the automobile deaths of hundreds of thousands more; alcohol is also responsible for violent behavior that results in thousands of beatings and deaths of wives, children, friends and strangers. Cigarettes kill more slowly, more certainly, but we have yet to hear the tobacco industry acknowledge any form of responsibility for the lingering often agonizing deaths of the very people (about 400,000 every year, which is about 1 of every 6 persons who die annually) who provide its wealth. On the other hand, heroin, cocaine and marijuana account for less than 4,000 deaths a year even though one in five people aged 20 to 40, about 23 million Americans, use drugs regularly. Drug prohibition might actually increase their use, not only in numbers of people but also the levels of ingestion as happened when alcohol was outlawed.

Moderation is the genius of Shangri La; moderation and restraint in all things pleasurable, philosophical and political. American culture is instead founded on excess and instant gratification. The United States, aside from its passionate addiction to money and shopping, is also the world's largest consumer of addictive chemical substances. The usual blame is placed upon a malaise of spirit infecting the seekers of chemically induced nirvana, not the persistent values of rapacity and greed of the society itself. Money, sex and drugs have been the American corporate hallucination since the advent of hucksterism. For the weavers of the dream to absolve responsibility by transferring guilt and shame on consumers of their mesmerizing visions is pure mendacity.

This nation consumes more drugs of infinite variety and purpose on a daily basis than the rest of the world combined. Our real problem is not the drugs we ingest but our capacity for acquiescing to zealots who corrupt the public tolerance with hysterical exaggerations, proclamations and demands that we deny our pleasures of flesh and flora. We permit puritanical simpletons to trample on our civil rights and intrude their gross appetites for power and authority upon our forms of relaxation and bliss. As a result we are separated not only by class, sex and race but also by our choices of pleasure. We are separated by intimidation and edict. Instead of rallying to our friends and neighbors who are assaulted by improper police invasions of their homes and selves, we shun them in fear our own vices

might come under scrutiny if we demonstrate support or solidarity. The War on Drugs is balkanizing us.

And though it has used up a lot of money, talent and time, the War On Drugs has not worked nor is it likely to. It is a failure because its real intent is to whip up hysteria against drugs as a smokescreen to suspend civil liberties; the tactics and results are reminiscent of Vietnam. It probably seems too simple and certainly contrary to policy, but if a real War On Drugs is to be successful it would remove the big money from the drug trade by decriminalizing drug laws.

If currently illegal drugs were made legal the artificially inflated prices created by their illegality would collapse and the crime cartels with them. (The Brady gun control law, which seems to be driving up the prices for street guns, is an example of profiting in illegal trade — but gun addicts are not quite as lucrative or dependent a market as drugs.) Eliminating the profits from illegal drugs will considerably decrease the crime rate, in particular murders that occur during robberies for drug money and in drug wars. Legalizing drugs will also cause their content and quality to be strictly regulated in the same manner as alcohol, standardize prices according to real market values and more importantly, transfer their sale and use from a criminal activity to a retail process closely resembling over the counter sale of nonprescription drugs or purchase of alcohol beverages in liquor stores. A probable effect of decriminalization and lowering the price of drugs is that unscrupulous drug pushers will be obsolete and soon disappear from the nation's streets and schoolyards. Perhaps most consequential, legalization of narcotics will decrease the corruption that pervades every level of society.

Many other major problems of drug use will not be resolved by legalization. Lives will continue to be wasted by drugs but perhaps the loss should be confined to drug abusers and halt the stark spread of their virulent effects throughout the entire society. Drugs are dangerous, especially narcotics, and like alcohol can cause violent behavior and result in sickness and death of users. Addiction as with alcoholism kills spirit and productivity: alcoholics and drug addicts deplete society's resources (although prior to addiction they might have added to them) and if they remain addicted are dependent upon its care. Legalization would remove at the start the avaricious parasites whose profits depend upon destroying victims they have hopelessly addicted. Legalization will also free billions of dollars spent on the losing war to curb drugs to fund rehabilitation clinics and drug education programs in much the manner alcohol programs and clinics have been established. (Public money also provides medical care for tobacco related problems.) In the meantime a significant decrease in drug abuse can be accomplished by removing the despair and hopelessness of the poor and racially oppressed. Perhaps money for the ghetto might be raised by taxing the newly legalized drugs.

Reversing the trend of repressive drug laws will be difficult, particularly in this period of frustrated overreaction. Before drugs can be decriminalized a few smaller local initiatives should be taken so that it becomes a respectable instead of a radical solution. The Oregon Cannabis Tax Act of 1997 is an example. Though objections by several groups delayed signature gathering, the measure has been given a ballot title. The proposal would license commercial growers to produce cannabis for sale through the state liquor store system, also in taverns and bars, and to pharmacies for use under doctors' prescription. Individuals would be allowed to cultivate cannabis for personal use without fee or license. Profits would go to education (96%) and to drug abuse programs (4%). Oregon is a major grower of cannabis and thousands of Oregonians regularly use marijuana which under current law makes them criminals, probably the only crime most of them have ever committed. The repressive atmosphere surrounding the right to choose one's own poison has sent scurrying out of view the very people who could preserve their liberties and freedom from harassment and jail by openly insisting that the electoral process fairly represent their point of view (though it has so far failed them because they are too optimistic about public awareness to effectively combat the drug lords of alcohol and tobacco who oppose legalization). Dr. Frederick Oerther, long a strong voice for legalization of marijuana and Libertarian candidate for Governor of Oregon, said when arrested for growing cannabis for his own taste, "I see a light at the end of the tunnel, and it is the Bill of Rights burning."

The fact that a majority (though probably not a large one) disapproves of the use of illegal drugs is not the issue. The issue is that as long as the people who use them are considered criminals and the supply of those drugs is the principle purpose of crime cartels that thrive as long as they remain illegal, the entire society is hostage to them. "Today it is our children who are committing suicide in record numbers and who are inheriting the drug consumption patterns we started," Phillip Moffitt wrote in an article about a rock star who died from drug abuse. "There are voices in this country crying out for more useless laws that only restrict cherished freedoms. Where is the voice crying out against the senseless indulgence of abuse, a voice crying not for institutional morality but for individual pride and commitment?"

Drug Free America? How absurd! No more pharmaceutical compounds for medical problems? No psychotropics? Valium banned? Defoliation of grape vineyards and hops fields? Arrest and conviction of tobacco farmers and their lobbyists?

You've got to be kidding!



SHARE THE PAIN
CALL
CLATSOP COUNTY WOMEN'S CRISIS SERVICE
325-5735
ANYTIME



LAZY SUSAN CAFE
COASTER SQUARE, CANNON BEACH
436-2816