

NEWS Mark Easton's UK

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How Portugal treats drug addicts

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Mark Easton | 18:33 PM, Wednesday, 1 July 2009

At "The End of the World" I met Maria. Beneath a tent of blankets on a steep bank, surrounded by discarded syringes and blood, she unfolded her foil and proceeded to smoke heroin.



The district in which she lives near Lisbon gained its name and reputation from illegal drugs. But as I sat on a rock and watched her daily ritual, I was aware that Maria is part of an extraordinary and controversial experiment. In almost every other place in the world, what she is doing is crime. Here, though, she can be confident her drug use will not end in prison.

Exactly eight years ago today, on July 1st 2001, Portugal decreed that the purchase, possession and use of any previously-illegal substance would no longer be considered a criminal offence. So, instead of police arresting users, at The End of the World, health and social workers now dispense the paraphernalia of heroin use.

Paula Vale de Andrade told me how her "street teams" have been able dramatically to cut HIV infections and drug deaths since the new law.

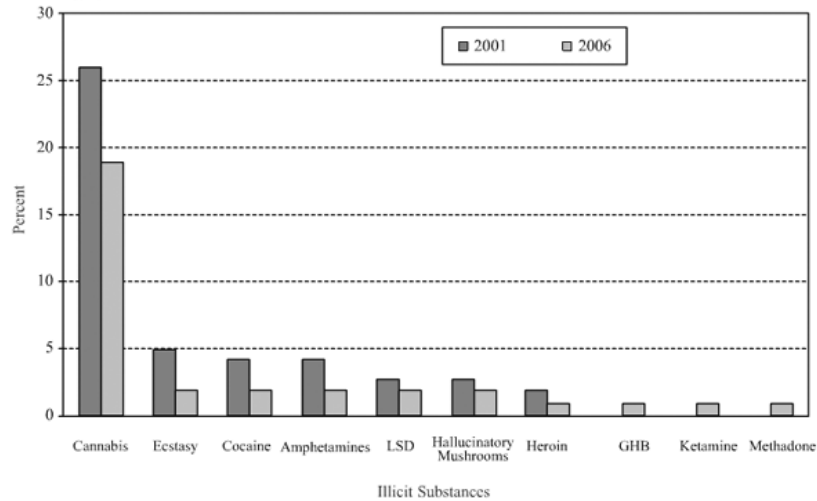
"When drug use was a crime, people were afraid to engage with the teams. But since decriminalisation, they know the police won't be involved and they come forward. It has been a great improvement."

Many had predicted disaster - that plane loads of "drug tourists" would descend on Portugal knowing that they couldn't end up in court. But what one politician called "the promise of sun, beaches and any drug you like" simply hasn't materialised.

In fact, overall drug consumption appears stable or down - government statistics suggest a 10% fall.

Among teenagers, the statistics suggest that the use of every illicit substance has fallen. The table below is from the Cato Institute's white paper [Drug Decriminalization in Portugal: Lessons for Creating Fair and Successful Drug Policies](#).

Figure 5
National Investigation in School Environment, 2001 and 2006, Secondary (10th, 11th, and 12th years), Portugal, Prevalence Over Entire Life



Source: Instituto da Droga e da Toxicodependência de Portugal, Draft 2007 Annual Report, slide 14.

I know there is some doubt over the methodology used in compiling some of these data, but what strikes me is that there is absolutely no evidence that drug use has risen.

Drug trafficking remains a serious criminal offence: Portugal hasn't legalised drugs. But people caught with a quantity of drugs deemed for their personal use (roughly ten days' supply) are sent to a local dissuasion commission panel.

The one I attended consisted of a social worker and a legal expert and they were looking at the case of Joanna, a heroin addict. The commission has the power to issue fines - while no longer a criminal offence, possession is still prohibited in Portugal - but the user here is addicted to drugs, so a fine is ruled inapplicable. The commission encourages her to go into treatment by offering to suspend other sanctions.



Some remain unconvinced that the new philosophy is working. The police officers I met on patrol in one of Lisbon's more "notorious" districts question the statistics, particularly the suggestion that decriminalising drugs has caused drug use to fall. There is clearly frustration that people who were villains yesterday are victims today. But there's also annoyance that in roughly a third of cases, drug users fail to attend the commission hearings when police send them there.

In the eight years since Portugal shocked the world with its drug policy, the idea that users need care not punishment has swept across Europe. In 10 EU countries, possession of some, if not all illegal substances is not generally pursued as a crime. In Britain, while

officially the use of banned drugs is a criminal offence, Ministry of Justice figures (cited in UK Focal Point report [908kb PDF]) show that 80% of people dealt with for possession are given a warning or a caution. Less than 1% - around 1,000 people a year - go to jail.

Table 11.3: Number of offenders receiving each disposal for drug possession offences by individual drug in England and Wales, 2006

Drug	Caution	Fine	Community Sentence	Immediate custody	Suspended sentence	Discharge	Other	Total
Cannabis*	20,370	6,368	2,527	141	66	3,069	281	32,822
Heroin	1,631	1,159	1,208	370	98	978	126	5,570
Cocaine powder	5,159	2,055	984	187	93	578	84	9,140
Crack cocaine	458	392	292	86	32	156	15	1,431
Amphetamines	1,899	940	429	85	38	601	66	4,058
Ecstasy	1,957	672	478	62	38	256	18	3,481
LSD	43	22	15	2	3	5	1	91
Other drugs**	3,109	1,024	763	157	68	748	99	5,968
All drugs	34,626	12,632	6,696	1,090	436	6,391	690	62,561

*excludes 80,500 formal warnings issued for cannabis possession

**all other drugs classified under the *Misuse of Drugs Act 1971*

Source: Ministry of Justice

Portugal's government is proud of its drugs policy. The prime minister stresses his personal role in its introduction, claiming the results are conclusive and the philosophy is popular.

Some question aspects of the system, but what Portugal's controversial experiment has demonstrated is that, if you take the crime out of drug use, the sky doesn't fall in.

PS: Interested readers might also look at some of the briefing papers issued by The Beckley Foundation, including [The Effects of Decriminalization of Drug Use in Portugal](#) [529kb PDF].

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1. At 8:07pm on 01 Jul 2009, [Jaknet](#) wrote:

Thank you Mark.

It's so rare to see an unbiased look at illegal drug use....What a surprise more proof that drug use does go down.

Still our government will just ignore this along with all the rest of the reports that say the same thing. That most people are able to take drugs and live a normal life the same as drinking.

The USA has multiple states that have legalised cannabis use either medically or generally use and one of them only a week or so ago made it legal to grow hemp for industrial uses, textile and bio-fuel to name a couple.

Both the labour & conservatives are shouting at each other about who will have to cut the most in spending. Here they have the excellent opportunity to not only cut back on the billions that are wasted in the "War on Drugs" (but alcohol, tobacco & caffeine are fine), but to also make vast amounts in tax revenues from taxing the drugs as well as stopping the cash going to fund criminals, allowing cultivation for industrial uses, etc, etc. Why convert food to bio-fuel when hemp which grows naturally like a weed in UK can be used instead.

With both of them also ignoring that vast amount of police time, money, officers and equipment that will be freed up to concentrate on serious crime instead of is someone peacefully smoking a spliff and needs arresting

Really makes you wonder where the government is getting the support(cash) to keep

ignoring the vast financial benefits of removing this prohibition. Is it the pressure from the owners of the prisons less easy criminals - less profit, pressure from drinks manufactures worried about profit loss, the drug gangs themselves lobbying to keep it illegal as they are the ones who really win while it's illegal ?

How many British MPs, American presidents etc have admitted that they have all taken drugs in the past? but it's ok for them and what about the millions who already take drugs and are living a normal life and not causing any harm to anyone?

How many more years will we have to put up with the blind ignorance of what happened during prohibition, criminals making vast amounts of money from alcohol, government spending vast amounts to try to police it, people suffering from badly produced down to almost poisonous drinks due to no controls. An entire cross section of society from the richest to the poorest criminalised for a drink.

Compared to now after prohibition. No criminals on street corners offering a dodgy 6-pack, Government and business making vast profits and taxes from the sale of alcohol. The only people criminalised due to drink are those who abuse instead of using drink. All the drinks are tested and produced to a safe standard.

Humans as a race have been taking drugs for excess of 5,000 years and it's not going to stop. Queen Victoria used and recommended cannabis for menstrual pains and she was as far removed from the "drugged out wastrel" which is commonly associated with any form of drug use these days as it is possible to get.

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2. At 9:27pm on 01 Jul 2009, [Secretariat](#) wrote:

Jaknet, that's possibly the most intelligent & well thought out post I've ever read on any website. I agree with you entirely.

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3. At 10:08pm on 01 Jul 2009, [mickety2001](#) wrote:

Have to agree with Jaknet.....there are surely unknown forces at work pressuring governments into continuing this hopeless 'war on drugs'. Are there any other policies that have been proved to have failed so completely and utterly and yet are continued decade after decade almost without question? Billions upon billions of dollars are spent almost with a religious fervour in the belief that the final salvation of a drug free society lies just around the corner.

'Spend more cash, it'll work this time, spend more cash, it'll work this time' seems to be the mantra of the prohibitionists and I have to say that it doesn't fill me with confidence. May I suggest that they use a little bit of lateral thinking on this one?.....come to think of it any thinking at all would be good.

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4. At 10:18pm on 01 Jul 2009, [WELLHELLO111](#) wrote:

"but alcohol, tobacco & caffeine are fine),"

Have you not been paying attention to the Government's war on Alcohol and Tobacco?

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5. At 10:38pm on 01 Jul 2009, [AlKarrub](#) wrote:

I am portuguese!

I saw these article about the policy on drugs in Portugal.

As matter of fact Portugal do not "decreed that the purchase, possession and use of any

previously illegal substance would no longer be considered a criminal offence..."! That regulation (approved in 2001) is only applied on light drugs (marijuana and other□s).
The

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6. At 11:01pm on 01 Jul 2009, [AlKarrub](#) wrote:
(continuing previous comment send accidentally and prematurely)

idea created can be that Portugal became a paradise for everyone who want□s to consume drugs with no criminal concerns. But the purchase, possession and consumption of any drug (except light drugs) is still a criminal action .

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7. At 00:02am on 02 Jul 2009, [jr4412](#) wrote:
mickety2001 #3.

"..there are surely unknown forces at work pressuring governments into continuing this hopeless 'war on drugs'."

yes, it would be very interesting to read who the lobbyists behind the scenes are. perhaps Mark Easton could provide some insights in a future post?

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8. At 03:52am on 02 Jul 2009, [hawk_is_howling](#) wrote:
I would love to read a report on how big business influences government in this regard.

Tobacco and alcohol companies obviously have their influece, if only because of the amount of tax the government receives from their sales, but do they hold any greater sway than that? Obviously the decriminalisation of drugs is a major threat to them, how much revenue would they lose if cannabis - which has already been admitted by the government as being safer than either - became decriminalised fully?

Perhaps the lobby group with the most influece is the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI), as pharmaceuticals are the UK's biggest export earner after North Sea oil, they enjoy avery cosy relationship with the government. Do they see cannabis as a threat to their profits, with it's huge number of medicinal uses and the ability to easily be cultivated at home?

And what about the police? With our human rights eroded more and more people are sniffed in public places by dogs, and stopped and searched on the street. It is a well known fact that this is used as an easy way for police to get their stats up, searching suspected "stoners" so they can be cautioned on the spot and sent on their way, with a fine and another boxed ticked for plod. Are they really so much against having to do real work that they would oppose decriminalisation regardless of the facts?

The question of decriminalisation, and creating a sensible drug policy is not as simple as some might think. Does the government actually care about listening to the facts, reducing drug use, reducing deaths, reducing harms and taking money away from the drug gangs that thrive in this country, or are they more interested in keeping the various lobby groups happy?

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9. At 09:00am on 02 Jul 2009, [jon112uk](#) wrote:
Your coverage of this was a bit predictable. Three points....

1) It would have been interesting to see comments from the people in Portugal who don't agree with this. When the police decriminalised drugs in south London the BBC told us everything was great - later on we found out SOME locals were up in arms about it. I find the idea that everything in Portugal is fine and everyone is happy difficult to believe.

2) In reality how is this different to here? Users get sent to a commission who try to treat but can also fine. Dealers may be arrested and may go to jail. Isn't that the same mixed message policy we have here? Only difference I can see is calling it a commission not a magistrate court, most first offences don't even get to a court in the UK.

3) Two 'innovations' seem to be getting mixed up here - mixed message decriminalisation and treatment/maintenance programmes. Given that the decriminalisation isn't actually that radical, isn't it more likely that any improvements in the situation are due to all the money being spent on treatment/maintenance programmes?

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10. At 09:07am on 02 Jul 2009, [jon112uk](#) wrote:

8. At 03:52am on 02 Jul 2009, [hawk_is_howling](#) wrote:

I would love to read a report on how big business influences government in this regard.

Tobacco and alcohol companies obviously have their influence, if only because of the amount of tax the government receives from their sales, but do they hold any greater sway than that? Obviously the decriminalisation of drugs is a major threat to them, how much revenue would they lose if cannabis - which has already been admitted by the government as being safer than either - became decriminalised fully?

=====

Surely tobacco companies would be the biggest beneficiaries if cannabis was fully legalised - wouldn't their global agriculture/processing/shipping/marketing networks put them at the forefront in selling a new legal product range???

Just in time to make up for falling sales of their previous product range.

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11. At 09:40am on 02 Jul 2009, [forgottenukcitizen](#) wrote:

3. [mickety2001](#) wrote:

Have to agree with Jaknet.....there are surely unknown forces at work pressuring governments into continuing this hopeless 'war on drugs'.

The forces you speak of are the affiliation with the UN & the list of illegal narcotics that we, the UK, signed up to years ago.

Im afraid its not as easy as you may think to go it alone.

A few years ago, Jamaica attempted to fully legalise Marijuana use (lets face it, you might as well in Jamaica), & the USA threatened to remove aid payments etc if they did.

Jaknet As far as im aware, there are no states in the USA that have fully decriminalised Marijuana use.

As you point out, some have legalised for medical use & experimental hemp production purposes, but this does not constitute full legalisation, & therefore it is acceptable under the UN mandate, which is rather flimsy to say the least.

Theres also the matter of vested interests to consider.

The drinks industry, tobacco industry, Narcotics divisions & even the armed forces would see a reduction in work if illegal drugs were made legal.

The biggest losers would be the criminals, & these people have no interest in legislation either.

Ive written about the effects of the 1920s USA prohibition on alcohol in previous threads, but to cut a long story short the following resulted.

1. Alcohol consumption increased.
2. All revenue went to organised crime instead of the US Government.
3. Law enforcement costs rocketed to make good the legislation.
4. Corruption, murder & racketeering flourished.
5. Organized criminal gangs used their, now established, networks to start dealing in

Narcotics as well.

I finish by asking the question, who are the UK Government really working for & whose interests are they looking after by continuing to follow such failed legislation & philosophy.

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12. At 09:54am on 02 Jul 2009, [bansis](#) wrote:

yet more PROOF prohibition doesn't work. Yet we in the UK have to pay the 10's of billions it costs the Gov to fight drug crime, and our children still have access to any drug they want. When will people listen, when will people accept THEIR moral righteousness is incriminating people and killing people. PROHIBITION ISN'T WORKING.

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13. At 10:19am on 02 Jul 2009, [Isenhorn](#) wrote:

Mark,

In my opinion this time your article does not conform to your usual standards. I appreciate your efforts to keep the discussion about legalisation of drugs in the public domain, however the topic should be treated fairly. Your post although written with good intentions actually can lead to some very serious misconceptions.

Compare for example the post by Jacknet, who suggest that the Government can 'earn cash' from selling drugs to drug addicts- where exactly in your post is mention that? Are we to believe that indeed the Portugese Government has fallen so low as to (in order to earn cash) sells drugs to drug-addicts, who sleep 'Beneath a tent of blankets on a steep bank, surrounded by discarded syringes and blood'? What the Portugese government has done is to minimise the risk of HIV transmission and drug-related deaths for iv drug addicts, and coupled it with a half-hearted effort to 'turn them around'- users are 'sent to a local dissuasion commission panel' which 'roughly a third of cases' fail to attend. The result- people are no longer contracting HIV or dying from poor quality drugs but are still left on the street with the blessing of the government.

I am not suggesting that this is not an improvement, but we need to be very clear as to what we are giving as an example for the cause of legalising drugs. The example of Portugal which does not prosecute drug users is taken as evidence that Britain should completely legalise all drugs, start manufacturing and selling them to users in order to make money. This apart from being morally bankrupt is also something that has no chance of ever happening in Britain. A sort of system where hardcore drug addicts have access to legal supply to drugs is one thing and it should eb carefully considered, however actually selling them drugs for profit is quite another. A legalisation as envisaged by alot of people, whre hardcore drugs are sold in shops for everybody to use while not offering them any real help to get rid of the habit is something I cannot quite agree to.

I am even more unhappy with your choice of examples in your topic- posting a single slide (#14) of a presentation which shows a drop in drug use to support your argument is hardly convincing. This slide only refers to use of drugs in teenagers (school environment?). How about the use in adults, the use in people who have previously used injectable drugs- where are the slides for that? And are we to disregard the fact that with the overall drop in use of most drugs, the use of GHB, methadone and kethamine has actually risen (I am refering to the slide which does not show what the levels in 2001 were for those drugs- may be there was no data?)? I have personal experince with GHB and methadone- during my time as an ambulance medic I have treated a lot of overdoses with both drugs and can tell you that a drop in use of weed coupled with increase in use of GHB and kethamine is nothing to be complacent about. Those are very dangerous drugs, easy to overdose and in the case of kethamine and GBL (the precursor of GHB and a drug in its own right) readily available for other purposes (veterinary medicine and paint removing).

As a conclusion to my rant I would say that indeed we need a discussion about what to do

with drugs, but for everybody's sake let us present the facts as they are.

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14. At 10:25am on 02 Jul 2009, [Secretariat](#) wrote:
jon112uk

The problem with the experiment in South London was that it was limited to a small area, therefore every drug user from the surrounding areas converged on the one place they wouldn't be arrested.

If done on a national level this would not happen as all of the drug users would not need to move to any one place so you wouldn't get the same effect.

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15. At 10:42am on 02 Jul 2009, [Isenhorn](#) wrote:
Further to my post #13

It is exactly as I thought- according to the CATO report the life-time prevalence of drug use in Portugal for the ages 15-24 has actually risen after the 'legalisation'. Yet the slide showing that is not shown in your post, Mark.

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16. At 11:04am on 02 Jul 2009, [Cracovian](#) wrote:
Why do some people think that "the sky would fall in" if drug use was decriminalised / legalised? What facts or opinion do they use to justify that position?

To me, it's quite obvious that anyone who currently wants to take a drug doesn't have to look far to get hold of it. Do the doom-mongers out there seriously think that there are vast swathes of people awaiting the legalisation of heroin just so they can go and score themselves a heroin addiction? Those doom-mongers seem totally out of touch with the reality of human life. Humans don't make decisions about what substances they consume on the basis of an arbitrary law. We're far more complex and irrational. That's why drug users (including the so-called legal drug users of alcohol and tobacco) consume something they "know" is harmful.

What bothers me about lauding decriminalisation is that it's an unsustainable and undesirable halfway house. If possession is to hold less than 10 days worth of supply, does that make everyone who has 11 days worth, a dealer? What if a user decided to reduce their costs by buying in bulk? So, through decriminalisation, the drug market dynamic is for more regular contact with the criminal gangs who still control drug distribution. That can't be a good thing.

Drug related violence is not effectively dealt with through decriminalisation. The police and justice system are put in an untenable position of either supporting someone caught with a drug or charging them with dealing and throwing the book at them. No wonder some police don't like the policy... but I'd add to that - the police are certainly not the best ones to make reasoned judgements on drug laws.

Whilst I don't know of any examples, I would guess that decriminalisation increases the possibility of state corruption or collusion between officials and drug gangs. I wonder if anyone has done any work on this?

So, whilst it's pleasing to see a growing awareness of alternatives to outright drug prohibition, I think we've got some way to go to develop effective drug policies which tackle the negative effects of the drug market from production through to distribution and consumption.

Full legalisation is our only hope.

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17. At 11:20am on 02 Jul 2009, [maddatalk](#) wrote:

I agree with the comments of #1. The further add to the Hemp debate, Henry Ford exhibited a car in the late '20s early 30's which with the exception of engine and suspension was built entirely out of Hemp, it was half the weight and he used to hit it with a sledgehammer to show how strong it was. A large contributor to CO2 emissions is the cement/concrete industry, but Hemcrete (a commercially available product) actually cancels out the CO2 from the production and also captures and stores it. It also enables houses to exceed current Building regulations insulation values (by 2x) without increasing wall thickness and doubles up as sound and fire insulation as well. It is made from chopped up stalks. Pyrolisation of the leaves produces Methanol (an extremely potent fuel). The seeds are a food source (marzipan was originally hemp seed + almond). The hurds (centre of the stalk) makes excellent paper and the roots are excellent for ground stabilisation and prevention of erosion. The plant needs no fertiliser or pesticides. Second only to Bamboo in its rate of growth and the ability to have 4 crops per year, the US and others need to seriously consider separating the industrial uses for hemp from cultivation for recreational use if they are to tackle the crises of diminishing energy supply and pollution/CO2 levels.

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18. At 11:53am on 02 Jul 2009, [jon112uk](#) wrote:

14. At 10:25am on 02 Jul 2009, [Secratariat](#)

".....The problem with the experiment in South London was that it was limited to a small area, therefore every drug user from the surrounding areas converged on the one place"

=====

Hi, yes I understand your point, but I was looking more at Mark's coverage from Portugal. The South London thing was reported as a big success for a time. Then later on we found out SOME of the local people were saying it was not a success, but we had never heard from those people in the media.

I'd just like Mark to tell us all of the story from Portugal - is it really true that everyone in Portugal thinks this working, or is there another side to we have not been told about?

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19. At 11:59am on 02 Jul 2009, [domcleo](#) wrote:

Dear Mark, I've been living in Portugal for 7 years now. And even I didn't realize that the consumption of drugs was not illegal, including in public. I thought it was tolerated, but not completely.

That explains why you don't really hear about the drugs policy in Portugal. It's as if the government doesn't want everybody to know that you could shoot heroin in the park or on the beach or on the church steps at high noon and the cops can't arrest you. Which I have seen, by the way. People shooting heroin in a neighbourhood park in broad daylight. I admit it was somewhat shocking to see. Smoking dope is one thing, but heroin?

When you walk around Lisboa, especially in the evening and at night, you will often see kids and full grown adults, burning hash in their hands, rolling joints and then smoking them without a care in the world. In places like Bairro Alto, it's the custom. It's as much a part of the culture as is Fado, Caldo Verde and Sagres. And during the Festas de Santo Ant nio, the streets are choked with smoke from churrasco, sardines and hashixe. Quite the aroma.

Recently I travelled to Amsterdam, Paris, London and Toronto. I was surprised at how little drug use I saw. Amsterdam being the exception of course, but they only smoke it in the coffee shops, never outdoors in public. Not that it doesn't happen, but the Dutch are pretty respectful of the law.

Personally, I think it's the right way to go, although I still think the goofy Dutch have a better system.

Not only have they decriminalized drug use, they've legalized and regulated the sale as well. And they make money off the taxes, which means the citizens of Holland make money from selling drugs. The Dutch are all drug dealers. Now that's a civilized country.

dom cleo

"o estrangeiro"

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20. At 12:32pm on 02 Jul 2009, [Gothnet](#) wrote:
- jon112uk

Some people get up in arms about pretty much anything :)

It doesn't mean that what they are up in arms about is necessarily valid. For instance did the figures show a rise in use and a rise in problems affecting them, or were they just angry that "evil junkies" didn't have to fear the police any more?

People's perceptions and reality don't always align, especially where there is a perceived moral point at issue.

One would hope that with a reasoned debate that a consensus could be reached. But that may be to hope too much given the lack of reasoned debate at a political level and the fearmongering that has occurred in the British educational system for the last few decades.

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21. At 12:34pm on 02 Jul 2009, [junai139](#) wrote:
#10

I can see the logic in your point but i don't think it would work like that. Growing tobacco and growing marijuana are very different processes. Most marijuana is grown indoors using hydroponics whereas tobacco is grown outdoors using soil as the medium. I think it's more likely that fruit growers (tomatoes, chillis, etc.) would be more likely to have the expertise needed to grow marijuana. The tobacco companies could decide at some point that there is profit to be made from weed but the initial outlay is too great when there are food growers out there who already have the technology and expertise.

As for shipping/distribution/marketing - well any company can do that - if there's a demand they will get the product out there.

However, i don't think the tobacco companies need to see cannabis as a threat to their business. In Europe (it's different in USA) most people smoke weed with tobacco - the two have an almost symbiotic relationship. If anything the legalisation of cannabis could save the tobacco companies.

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22. At 12:44pm on 02 Jul 2009, [junai139](#) wrote:
#13

"The example of Portugal which does not prosecute drug users is taken as evidence that Britain should completely legalise all drugs, start manufacturing and selling them to users in order to make money. This apart from being morally bankrupt is also something that has no chance of ever happening in Britain."

Err . . . no-one said that. The point was made that if drugs were legalised the government could make money via taxation. That's not the same as directly selling drugs themselves. In fact it's exactly the same as the situation that currently exists with regards to alcohol and tobacco. The government tells us they are harmful but takes the tax cheque all the same. Surely this is also a 'morally bankrupt' position?

I agree with you - i don't foresee a time when the government will be selling drugs directly to the public but then i also don't foresee a time when the government will be selling any product direct to the public, harmful or otherwise. It's a government not a business (or at least so we're led to believe).

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23. At 1:00pm on 02 Jul 2009, [ADKelly](#) wrote:
I have just come back from Albufeira on the Algarve. I was not aware of the Portuguese drug laws, so I was somewhat shocked when on my first walk down "The Strip" I was

approached 3 times in front of families with kids, with the question "Crack, Charlie, Smoke?", quite openly and with Police vaguely in the area.

Whilst I lean towards the state supply and general decriminalisation of most drug use, I don't think drug dealers should be untouched by the law.

It seems to me that although Portugal has taken an important first step, they have also allowed drug dealing to become quite open (The 10 days supply rule, makes dealing easy and possible), and this means that criminals are still involved in the trade.

If however they completed the logical circle of the argument, they would provide the drugs at low prices in street kiosks etc, thus providing the state with revenue, kiosks owners with a replacement for cigarette sales, and most importantly of all taking the smuggler and traffickers out of the money loop, thus removing crime from the equation.

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24. At 1:19pm on 02 Jul 2009, [LippyLippo](#) wrote:

I'm sorry, I simply don't buy the implied argument that, once legalised, people will magically stop taking drugs. I just doesn't make any sense. Portugal is also different from the UK in that, on the whole, young people do not drink excessively, the drink-related violence is not as ubiquitous as it is in the UK, and their teenage pregnancy rate is extremely low. Put bluntly, their young people are nicer than ours! Ditto Holland. I can understand some legalisation under these circumstances, but to roll this out in Britain, with its history of drunken violence and plunging morality, is like throwing petrol on a burning house.

The pro-legals miss the point that we don't WANT any people to take these illegal drugs, so making it easier to get them makes no sense at all. Drugs still have the ability to cause misery, addiction and death whether they're legalised or not. All legalisation means is that the police can wash their hands of the issue. The misery and problems stay the same, except now they are transferred to the legal arena - to drug workers, social workers, hospitals, doctors etc. The reduction in the policing workload will be massively outweighed by the additional needs that will arise from legalisation - the report implies as much.

The majority of the pro-legalisers take the selfish view that they want to be free to indulge in marijuana or cocaine or whatever, whenever they like. They just want to be free to get off their heads a couple of times a week. They don't care about the problems that their recreational use causes now. They don't care that the drugs they take put money in the hands of criminal gangs and dealers. So you can't expect them to care about the additional costs, both social and monetary, that will arise from legalisation. It is a nasty trait of a society so hell-bent on personal satisfaction that it will happily junk any thought of morality or anything else that might stand in their way.

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25. At 1:53pm on 02 Jul 2009, [bansis](#) wrote:

after reading several of the posts especially dom cleo's I don't think decriminalisation is really an option. My main concern is children, i dont care what adults do aslong as they dont affect others then they should be free to do what they want, but we as a society have a responsibility too protect our children. The current prohibition laws are doing the total opposite instead of protecting children it is protecting dealers incomes, and incriminating children its all wrong. Access to drugs, as all are aware is very easy and probably easier for children, so i believe the only workable option is legalisation, all drugs need to be controlled not just called a controlled drug, when they are obviously not controlled well maybe by the dealers, they need to be controlled and restricted to ADULTS, which includes alcohol, currently the restrictions on alcohol are failing so the system needs to be changed or properly enforced, if an adult supplies a child with ANY form of drug which is restricted then they should pay heavily, prison maybe and with the legalisation of drugs we could quite easily afford to lock up these people, treat more addicts and protect children. I just wonder why our Gov past and present are so keen to protect the dealers income.

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26. At 2:03pm on 02 Jul 2009, [jon112uk](#) wrote:

21. At 12:34pm on 02 Jul 2009, [junai139](#) wrote:

"...i don't think it would work like that. Growing tobacco and growing marijuana are very

different processes. Most marijuana is grown indoors using hydroponics whereas tobacco is grown outdoors using soil as the medium...."

=====

I agree the illicit stuff is grown like that in Europe, but not the large scale production elsewhere. South America, Mexico, and many others (even isolated rural areas in the USA) grow it by the ton in fields.

If it was lawful then the tobacco companies would pretty soon have mass production on commercial farms and processed in large factories. They would need tons, not kilos. No different than when they ended prohibition in the US: the big companies started up their distilleries and breweries days later.

I would have thought tobacco companies would be rubbing their hands in glee if cannabis was fully legalised. Don't forget their last product range is starting a decline in western countries - they need a replacement.

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27. At 2:04pm on 02 Jul 2009, [Jaknet](#) wrote:
Secratariat

Thank you...I'm stunned, thank you seems such an inadequate reply.

forgottenukcitizen

As far as I'm aware, there are no states in the USA that have fully decriminalised Marijuana use.

I was not fully sure about this myself either which is why I left it a bit vague.

Isenhorn

Compare for example the post by Jacknet, who suggest that the Government can 'earn cash' from selling drugs to drug addicts- where exactly in your post is mention that? Are we to believe that indeed the Portugese Government has fallen so low as to (in order to earn cash) sells drugs to drug-addicts, who sleep 'Beneath a tent of blankets on a steep bank, surrounded by discarded syringes and blood'?

You are fully correct I did not intend to imply that the Portuguese government was selling drugs, so many apologies for not being more precise.

Though given that people are going to continue to take drugs, then I would have thought that it is far better for the money to go to the government via tax than to the criminal drug gangs which is where it goes now. Surely supporting the continuing "War on Drugs" is just supporting the criminal drug gangs and their cash flow.

Cracovian

Why do some people think that "the sky would fall in" if drug use was decriminalised / legalised? What facts or opinion do they use to justify that position?

This is something that I cannot understand either as just for example looking back into recent UK history we have the Victorian era.

This is generally looked on as a time of mass invention, amazing engineering feats, family values, the rise of numerous charities and welfare organisations (Salvation Army, the RSPCA and the NSPCC to name a few) and yet at the same time it was fully legal and socially accepted to go down to the local corner shop/tobacconist/chemist and buy whatever drugs you fancied. mariiuaana cigaretttes made by the main tobacco companies.

opium, cocaine and possibly heroin (not sure) and not only were these all sold, but also used in various "health" tonics, medical health and prescriptions etc and the world did not collapse then, if anything it ran quite well. Yes there was vast problems with The Workhouse, child labour and homelessness but we now have a working functioning welfare state.

The other thing is we are told "Drugs are Bad" and yet almost everyone, even in just the UK alone, willingly, knowingly and quite happily takes "Drugs" every day and this Drug is a psychoactive substance and central nervous system (CNS) stimulant which if taken in overdose can include the following side effects :-

Restlessness, nervousness, excitement, insomnia, flushing of the face, increased urination, gastrointestinal disturbance, muscle twitching, a rambling flow of thought and speech, irritability, irregular or rapid heart beat, and psychomotor agitation.

In cases of much larger overdoses, mania, depression, lapses in judgement, disorientation, dis-inhibition, delusions, hallucinations, and psychosis may occur, and rhabdomyolysis (breakdown of skeletal muscle tissue) can be provoked. (according to the lazy use of Wikipedia)

Yet because this drug is so intertwined with society and we are so aware and educated to the effects of using this drug it does not even occur to most people that it is actually a drug they are taking.

We use this drug to help us get going in the morning, help us through the day and conversely it's also used to help us relax and unwind, we even have set breaks during work hours to stop and take this drug.

People take this drug because they enjoy the effect, the flavour and it's a social thing as well. We also are aware of the withdrawal pangs of this drug. How many times has anyone reading this thought "I really fancy a cup of coffee/tea to relax/unwind/get me started for the day/etc/etc". Caffeine... It is a drug, we take it and we happily self regulate the amount we take to not cause ourselves any major harm. Paracetamol is a drug, there are loads of drugs we take on a daily basis.

Yet because some are labelled "Drugs" this automatically attaches a stigma and the "I'm not a drug user" thoughts come to the front whilst having a cup of coffee and then maybe a glass of wine or beer with the meal later. All are "drugs" and all capable of being addictive and abused, but the vast majority of people are able to enjoy and use (not abuse) these and still hold down a normal lifestyle.

Yes there are some people how have problems controlling their use and it becomes abuse, but then this is true of every single substance/activity I can think of (chocolate, food, alcohol, exercise, work, sports, browsing the internet hmmm)

Those people who do have problems controlling themselves are helped while the rest of the population carries on using not abusing. We don't ban chocolate or food because some people cannot stop eating and cause themselves serious life threatening health problems. So why the "drug" ban.

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28. At 2:08pm on 02 Jul 2009, [Jaknet](#) wrote:

I hope my previous comment a few minutes ago comes out clear as I was in the middle of editing it and clicked post instead of preview... ooppsss

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29. At 2:20pm on 02 Jul 2009, [Isenhorn](#) wrote:

junai139,

The argument that the Government will not be selling drugs for money but merely taxing other people selling them is akin to the argument that it was not the American government but the Blackwater employees shooting people in Iraq. Of course the Government will not

be selling drugs directly- the Government prefers to let other people do the dirty work and get their money as taxes. The net result in both cases is the same- Britain earning money from human misery to spend them on 'worthy' causes such as wars and new Trident missiles.

Regarding the moral bankruptcy of taxing alcohol and cigarettes- yes, it is morally bankrupt. As long as money is made from selling booze and cigarettes the Government will continue with the half-measures of discouraging their use but tolerating some poor souls poisoning themselves, but bringing tax revenue.

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30. At 2:28pm on 02 Jul 2009, [Jaknet](#) wrote:
LippyLippo

I'm sorry, I simply don't buy the implied argument that, once legalised, people will magically stop taking drugs.

No-one is saying this. What is being said and has been shown before is that once all drugs become commonplace and accepted then the numbers of users drop because you lose the people who are taking it for the rebellious side and the cool factor of just stepping outside the law. They all become common place and nothing to get excited about.

LippyLippo

They just want to be free to get off their heads a couple of times a week. They don't care about the problems that their recreational use causes now. They don't care that the drugs they take put money in the hands of criminal gangs and dealers. So you can't expect them to care about the additional costs, both social and monetary, that will arise from legalisation.

I'm sorry but we DO CARE about the money going to criminal gangs which is why to legalise it is the only way to stop the vast profits the criminals are making (this was proved conclusively in the USA during and after prohibition). So by supporting the continuing illegal state of drugs you are directly increasing and supporting the money going to the criminal drug gangs, NOT stopping it.

The problems with recreational drug use is mainly caused by it being illegal with no controls on the age of the buyer or the quality of the product and no education/awareness on what is a safe amount to take. It's like knowing nothing about alcohol and being offered 2 pint glasses. One full of a std beer/lager and the other full of vodka. With no awareness or education it is impossible to make a sensible decision on which will be too much to drink.

Any additional costs (if any) will be more than covered by us not having to pay out of our own tax money the billions every year in the War on Drugs plus all the additional tax income and jobs from the sale, production, shipping and marketing this would produce.

Finally people are going to keep taking these drugs as they have been for thousands of years. It's not going to be stopped.

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31. At 2:33pm on 02 Jul 2009, [Gothnet](#) wrote:
#24 LippyLippo

"I can understand some legalisation under these circumstances, but to roll this out in Britain, with its history of drunken violence and plunging morality, is like throwing petrol on a burning house."

Because people don't know how to get drugs now? Right?
Because Prohibition works so well that this isn't already the case?

Nonsense.

"The pro-legals miss the point that we don't WANT any people to take these illegal drugs"

No. YOU don't want people to take drugs because YOU have preconceived notions about their effects on people and the level of harm they cause.

"The misery and problems stay the same, except now they are transferred to the legal arena - to drug workers, social workers, hospitals, doctors etc. The reduction in the policing workload will be massively outweighed by the additional needs that will arise from legalisation - the report implies as much."

1. Who says the Portuguese method is perfect? This report shows that from a pure harm-reduction viewpoint it is an improvement on what we have now.

2. That's why you tax them.

"The majority of the pro-legalisers take the selfish view that they want to be free to indulge in marijuana or cocaine or whatever, whenever they like. They just want to be free to get off their heads a couple of times a week. They don't care about the problems that their recreational use causes now."

They take the view that it's your puritan attitude and the resulting laws that cause this. Or don't care, true, either or. You can't change this though, and keeping drugs illegal won't magically make the effects go away.

How long have we been trying this method? And how much longer do you think we should go on beating our heads against this particular brick wall in the insane hope that maybe, just maybe, this year everyone will see it your way and stop taking drugs?

"So you can't expect them to care about the additional costs, both social and monetary, that will arise from legalisation."

There need not be any. Your assertions to the contrary are not based on anything but your own ranting.

"It is a nasty trait of a society so hell-bent on personal satisfaction that it will happily junk any thought of morality or anything else that might stand in their way."

What is immoral about taking drugs? And don't say "funneling money to gangs", because that is one of the things what legalisation can stop, and you are arguing against it.

YOU are the immoral one, YOU continue to argue that we should criminalise people for activity that harms only themselves, YOU are the one arguing for a continuing and highly profitable black market because YOU have decided that these things need to be illegal regardless of the facts and regardless of the detriment to your own society and your own life.

[Complain about this comment](#)

32. At 2:40pm on 02 Jul 2009, [bdyke04](#) wrote:

The defence industry imo is the biggest gainer in keeping drugs illegal. They supply both the drug cartels and governments the weapons and technology they use. This is why most war mongering nations cannot do the right thing by decriminalising such drugs. They see the 'drug' industry as a weapons testing ground to illegally harm people with a legal cover up in their laws

Where 'drugs' are sold freely without any law enforcement officers present, one could see relative peace, but by the time these officers get involved the sellers start getting desperate as well as the users which then leads to chaos and inevitably harm. When governments realise that illicit drug dealers do need their customers relatively healthy and financially stable to make a profit, that it's only when they intervene with force that dealers

and consumers are pushed to desperate measures, which is when we hear about smuggling and killings and even more dangerous substances as quality of the drugs is depreciate.

The Portuguese model is welcoming news to rest of the world, that the hype and gangster life of drug barons can be defeated without excessive expenses and loss to human life through the barrel of a gun

[Complain about this comment](#)

33. At 3:39pm on 02 Jul 2009, [bansis](#) wrote:

lippyippo, 'The pro-legals miss the point that we don't WANT any people to take these illegal drugs', firstly you speak on your own behalf so its 'I don't WANT any people to take these illegal drugs' not we so then we see your argument for what it really is, your moral righteousness you want to force on others... secondly i can't see many of you on this debate actually saying we don't want drugs legalised, i see more comments leaning towards changing the current legislation.

Isenhorn, the largest group of drug users (cannabis) will argue that they lives are far from miserable, no more miserable than a none smoker. It is only a small minority that use the drugs you are probably referring too ie heroin, which if abused can cause a variety of social issues, but anyway who are you and how are you qualified to judge the happiness of the rest of society? It makes me angry to see children use drugs, and under prohibition they are. No one has been able to put forwards a positive argument for prohibition on the anti legalise side yet, so as far as im concerned making money off drugs is no different as making money off alcohol as long as kids aren't involved in the process and btw i think the trident renewal programme along with prohibition is a total waste of money maybe use the extra money for education, nhs or policing, would seem more sensible than building a nuke we will never use.

[Complain about this comment](#)

34. At 3:56pm on 02 Jul 2009, [SHLA2UK](#)

This comment has been referred to the moderators. [Explain](#).

35. At 3:58pm on 02 Jul 2009, [hawk_is_howling](#) wrote:

Many of the nay sayers are still nay saying it seems. The whole point of this article is not to make a rediction or judgement or speculate on any of the reasons as to why exactly we see these reduction in harms and addiction.

The point of the article is to say - all the doom peddlers who predicted an explosion of drug use and a situation out of hand were WRONG.

The point is not that decriminalisation will work in the UK - the point is that decriminalisation as a policy CAN work, and is a viable alternative to the "War on Drugs", which has been proven time and time again to be a failed policy that won't quit.

The fact that Portugal has had such success means that we should at least entertain the possibility that decriminalisation can work, and try to figure out how we could apply it to our society. I think it is a safe bet that, just like in Portugal, the nay sayers will be proven wrong.

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36. At 4:03pm on 02 Jul 2009, [junai139](#) wrote:

#26

True Jon - marijauna can be and is grown outdoors but this is an inefficient way of producing the crop. It takes much longer to grow outdoors,(months as opposed to around six weeks indoors, is harder to protect from pests and produces a product with less THC in it.

The reason it is grown indoors using hydroponics is not only because of the illicit nature of cannabis production but also because it is a better way of producing it.

For example tomatoes, chillis, peppers can be grown outdoors and in the past were but now they are generally grown indoors because you get a higher yield per acre.

Besides the most popular forms of cannabis are the indica and indica/sativa strains (skunk to me and you) and these cannot be grown outdoors as they need very specific conditions in order to flower (they are essentially man-made strains).

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37. At 4:22pm on 02 Jul 2009, [jayfurneaux](#) wrote:

I'm interested in how Maria, Joanna (and others) fund their habit? Prostitution, theft, burglary and robbery?

I think I prefer the Swiss model whereby the Govt does supply heroin to long-term addicts; recognising that for these abstinence or methadone maintenance are unlikely to work (probably been tried and failed several times) and supplying heroin to them both cuts crime (which harms others) and reduces the chances of addicts encountering impure heroin (a health measure).

The Swiss public voted in favour of this measure in a single issue referendum.

[Complain about this comment](#)

38. At 4:39pm on 02 Jul 2009, [junai139](#) wrote:

#29

"The argument that the Government will not be selling drugs for money but merely taxing other people selling them is akin to the argument that it was not the American government but the Blackwater employess shooting people in Iraq. Of course the Government will not be selling drugs directly- the Government prefers to let other people do the dirty work and get their money as taxes. The net result in both cases is the same- Britain earning money from human misery to spend them on 'worthy' causes such as wars and new Trident missiles."

Quite. However i'd rather we make money from 'human misery' than spend money on it, which is what we are doing now. Spending billions of pounds on a futile exercise, that criminalises otherwise law abiding people, causes far more misery than letting them live their lives the way they see fit (which is what people do anyway).

I just don't understand the argument that legalising will suddenly make everyone want to take drugs. It simply wont. No-one is stopped from taking drugs because they are illegal. It's exactly the same with the whole 'lock up criminals and throw away the key' argument. Deterrents don't work for the simple reason that no-one thinks they'll get caught. The US government kills certain criminals. Has this had any effect on their crime rates? If the deterrent argument were true nations with the death penalty would have lower crime rates than those which don't and this is patently not the case. Deterrents don't work because everyone thinks they'll get away with it - that they're too clever to be caught.

The same is true of taking drugs - very few people are put off by the possibility of being caught. For a start they see people around them taking drugs and not getting caught and secondly they know that if they do get caught, as long as they only have a small amount on them, they'll just get a slap on the wrist.

So criminalising doesn't work. How about the health aspect? Surely drugs are illegal because they're really bad for us? Well yes they are bad for us but so is: alcohol, tobacco, caffeine, paracetamol, aspirin, chocolate, cream-cakes, crisps, bacon, car exhaust fumes (i could go on but i thin you've got the point).

Not only that but we have scientific evidence that suggests that our legal drugs, alcohol and tabacco are mor damaging than many of our illegal drugs such as marijuana, ecstasy, speed etc. So on one hand we're told these substances are really bad for your health but we'll let you consume whereas these are less harmful but we're not going to let you have them. We'd rather you take the more harmful ones.

So the legal aspect makes no sense. The health aspect makes no sense. Is it any wonder people just don't care and take whatever they want? How can the argument for keeping certain drugs illegal and others legal have any credibility when that status is arbitrarily decided upon based on no scientific evidence whatsoever? In fact their status decided upon contrary to the scientific evidence. Oh, but of course i forgot . . . drugs are 'wrong'.

[Complain about this comment](#)

39. At 4:46pm on 02 Jul 2009, [Secretariat](#) wrote:
LippyLippo, if Heroin were legalised tomorrow, would you start using it ?

[Complain about this comment](#)

40. At 4:53pm on 02 Jul 2009, [Makeze](#)
This comment was removed because the moderators found it broke the [House Rules](#).

41. At 5:28pm on 02 Jul 2009, [SHLA2UK](#) wrote:
I think the moderators are on a caffeine or nicotine break - bad people - look how they make us wait :-)

Maybe therein lies an argument to make coffee and smoke breaks illegal.

[Complain about this comment](#)

42. At 5:53pm on 02 Jul 2009, [jr4412](#) wrote:
bansis #25.

"My main concern is children, i dont care what adults do aslong as they dont affect others then they should be free to do what they want, but we as a society have a responsibility too protect our children."

exactly, and IF the government were to control/regulate/tax the sale of (currently) proscribed substances, at least they'd be able to guarantee that the drugs aren't adulterated by unscrupulous dealers.

bdyke04 #32.

"The defence industry imo is the biggest gainer in keeping drugs illegal. They supply both the drug cartels and governments the weapons and technology they use."

perhaps that's why cannabis had to be made illegal? remember that in the late 60s the slogan was 'Make Love Not War' and the establishment struggled to contain the anti-Vietnam protests.

[Complain about this comment](#)

43. At 6:11pm on 02 Jul 2009, [Jaknet](#) wrote:
I thought the UK was supposed to be a democracy?

I'm 42 and no-one has ever asked whether I agree these drugs should be illegal whilst more dangerous drugs are legal or not. It's always "The Government knows best" even when they ignore the recommendations of their own medical advisers.

Ask the public what they want!

Bring it to a vote!

[Complain about this comment](#)

44. At 6:59pm on 02 Jul 2009, [Secretariat](#)
This comment is awaiting moderation. [Explain](#).

45. At 7:15pm on 02 Jul 2009, [Jaknet](#)

This comment is awaiting moderation. [Explain.](#)

46. At 7:34pm on 02 Jul 2009, [jon112uk](#)

This comment is awaiting moderation. [Explain.](#)

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