

SHADOW SCRUTINY PANEL INQUIRY

A REVIEW OF THE DRUG SERVICE IN JERSEY

I have no detailed knowledge of the Study referred to in your terms of reference.

I write to you on the basis that the study builds on Jersey's established policy of harm reduction. I presume that the study concerns itself inter alia, with containing or even reducing the spread of drug use, and with containing or reducing crime arising from drug use.

So, no detail in this submission. I take the trouble to write, just to enter a plea for the "drugs problem" to be treated like any other health problem, i.e. rationally.

Some people get addicted - it is an unfortunate fact of life. Addicted to . . . what? Coffee? alcohol? gardening? work (cf. "workaholic")? heroin?

So, first line of defence is strong individuals, self-aware individuals emerging from their upbringing of home, school, and environment. As far as public policy on drugs is concerned, this points to, I feel, education or influence based on accurate appraisal of risk, factual approach as opposed to approaches rooted in the kind of censorious morality encapsulated in the phrase "demon drink", and the use of imagination in appreciating the good and bad sides of all addiction, and in particular drug addiction. But more important than any content is the kind of people we are producing - are they fodder or are they independent? Fewer addicted people = more happier people.

Second, the great need to reduce the harm inflicted by addicted people on others. Alcohol-induced violence is the most obvious example. The second is crimes of theft to "feed the drug habit" and crimes of violence related to the supplying of drugs.

The first can be reduced by policy measures aimed at licensed premises. and no doubt other measures - that is as far as I wish to say. The second is entirely caused by the high price of drugs and the fact that they are illegal.

The obvious response is decriminalisation. I can actually hear the anxiety, the intake of breath - how can you make something "so bad" legal? But the present position is hopelessly illogical and seen to be hypocritical by the young especially, as alcohol, which is illegal, does more harm than any of the illegal drugs. Tobacco, which is also legal also does more harm than any of the illegal drugs. The policy of holding that certain drugs are illegal is also utterly counterproductive, with so many really harmful side-effects that it must be held in place for some unconscious reason, perhaps by the censorious morality that I mentioned earlier.

Under decriminalisation, what are currently "illegal drugs" would be available, manufactured to exact specifications, at chemists, say. All the harm from "bad batches" would go. All the harm from inflated prices would go. There would be no incentive to import drugs and no need to rob to "feed the habit" so drug-related crime would go.

Nobody gets threatened in the alcohol industry - at least I think not! Nobody gets invited / cajoled / pushed into couriering alcohol into Jersey. The whole sorry trade depends entirely on the fact that illegal drugs are illegal. All the burglaries, all the muggings, all the shop thefts which are caused by the need to get money to pay the high prices for drugs would all vanish.

That is a huge benefit - I want you to weigh up and quantify that benefit properly in your deliberations.

The benefit is (at least):

- a) quality of life - reduction in crime
- b) accommodation at the prison - huge savings
- c) savings in time at customs and excise
- d) savings in police time
- e) savings in hospital time

The downside of decriminalisation is said to be that making drugs "easier" to obtain will lead to a rise in drug use. Please can we have a sound and reasoned examination of experience elsewhere. Including the effect of prohibition of alcohol and then the effect of removing prohibition.

So, two recommendations, which I hope will be taken on board:

- 1) that your Panel weigh up and quantify the benefit which would accrue if the harmful side-effects of criminalising certain drugs were removed.
- 2) that your Panel carry out a sound and reasoned examination of experience elsewhere with decriminalisation or similar measures, including the effect of prohibition of alcohol and then the effect of removing prohibition.

I look forward to your response, in the spirit of cooperation between citizens and States.

Daniel Wimberley