

Opinions vary when the question is asked: "are we winning this war against drugs?"

Many will argue the sense in spending so much, to achieve so little.

Watching many modern documentaries throws new light on the situation as it stands today. There are several documentaries now being screened on DSTV's Crime & Investigation and National Geographic channels.

Series that we have taken quotes from include

- Anatomy of Crime (episode titles- Forbidden Cargo and The Drug War - 2000)
- America's Prison Nation - 2007
- Locked Up Abroad - 2006 to date
- Lockdown - 2004 to date

In 2000, almost 10 years ago, this is what the USA Authorities had to say;

Anatomy Of Crime- episode: Forbidden Cargo

The United States of America spends two billion Dollars annually on the War on Drugs. With 7000 inspectors at ports of entry and 900 sniffer dogs.

On a typical day, border agents seize approximately two tonnes of narcotics and this is only a fraction of what is coming through. Some question the wisdom of spending so much to gain so little.

Comr Raymond W Kelly - US Customs Services

Q: Will USA ever stop the importation of drugs?

A: "No. There are just too many ways they get it in and staffing this would be an impossible task. In my judgement, the answer lies in greatly reduced demand"

Short of extreme measures like using the military to close all borders or legalising recreational drugs, law enforcement needs more resources to battle the smugglers. Where there is a demand, there will be a supply. In developing countries, if the demand is wealthy, they will find a way.

In the late 1990's the White House announced it's goal to cut narcotics smuggling in half by 2007. Hundreds of agents were sent into Central and South America, the heart of cocaine

producing regions but in 1999 new figures indicated that the output of the major Columbian cartels had surpassed 100 metric tonnes of cocaine each month - triple the previous estimates!

In Canada, the penalties for marijuana are lenient and many people have sophisticated hydroponics systems in their yards.

Joseph Bendig - Deputy Director, Domestic Air Intradiction

"We have to think a step ahead of them but mostly they are a step ahead of us.

Officer Kent J Wager - K-9 Enforcement, US Customs Services - Mexico/USA Border

"The war on drugs is a never-ending battle down here. You use every possible tool that you have but it never ends."

Anatomy Of Crime- episode: The Drug War

In 1971 Richard Nixon declared a War on Drugs. This 3-decade 'war' is not a war on chemicals, it's a war on people!

"DRUGS WILL NEVER CAUSE THE DAMAGE THAT THE CORRUPTION, VIOLENCE AND GOVERNMENT POLICIES ARE CAUSING. THE SOLUTION IS MUCH WORSE THAN THE PROBLEM." Joseph McNamara - Retired Police Chief, San Jose, California.

Prisons are overflowing yet illegal substances are more available than ever! Is the answer more enforcement or is it time we admit we're losing the war on drugs?

1971 Richard Nixon declares a War on Drugs and allocates a Budget of \$101 Million

1973 Richard Nixon forms the D.E.A. (Drug Enforcement Agency)

Jimmy Carter increased the budget - \$1,5 Billion

1979 The worst year 14% of USA uses drugs regularly

1981 Ronald Reagan increases the budget to \$5 Billion and includes Military Operations

Anti-Drug pressure drives prices UP ! Then came a cheaper, highly addictive substance - CRACK!

1986 Minimum Sentences are imposed for offenders. This leads to children being heavily recruited as

Early 1990s The DEA tripples in size

George Bush increases the budget to \$12 Billion

Bill Clinton - \$18 Billion - Under the Clinton Administration cocaine and heroin fell out of fashion but

1998 Officers sent to Mexico cultivated Marijuana plants in the USA 5 times as many as in 1990. O

1999 Despite the intense enforcement operations, drugs flowed in.

1000 tonnes of Cocaine, 1000 tonnes of Marijuana, 50 tonnes of Heroin.

Another excellent TV Series to look out for is a National Geographic Production, called

"LOCKED UP ABROAD - The Worlds Hardest Prisons!"

There are several countries featured in this series but one of the most sobering episodes was about two young British men who were arrested in Venezuela. Look for it on YouTube for Banged Up Abroad. The episode has been broken into 5 segments, labled as follows: 1x2 p1, 1x2 p2, 1x2 p3, 1x2 p4 and 1x2 p5

"Rambling thoughts on decriminalization ... "

Information to be confirmed: A recent blog article stated that on Oct 3rd 2008, the President of Mexico rejected any further involvement in America's War on Drugs and decriminalized cocaine, heroin and hashish. While decriminalization does not necessarily mean 'legalized' these will now be controlled substances in Mexico. (I'm sure the drug barons are not happy about this!)

Several European countries have decriminalized, but control some substances and prostitution. Like cigarettes and alcohol, the use of narcotics has been around forever and will be around forever. The minute you lable something as 'illegal' the worms crawl out of the woodwork, smuggling begins, a price war ensues and people die. In European countries where prostitution is legal, Amsterdam's Red Light District for example, it's controlled. Sex workers are required to be registered and undergo regular health checks. Illicit substances, being uncontrolled are prone to being 'cut' with all kinds of harmful junk. Tests have often revealed the presence of rat poison, pool chemicals and other 'bulklers' that are potentially far more harmful than the drug itself. Under decriminalization, Narcotics could then be manufactured according to clinical conditions. This would require intense education for users but might be a healthier alternative. It would certainly be a cheaper alternative as opposed to the Billions of Dollars currently being spent on law enforcement, not to mention the number of lives saved during the transportation of presently illegal drugs.

Imagine what would happen if mainstream drugs were decriminalized worldwide but strictly controlled. The drug business would be massively affected and would most likely implode in on itself, gang warfare would be greatly reduced, organised crime would have less involvement and people like our own citizens would not be rotting in these inhumane and barbaric prisons!

Just a thought.