

Tuesday, January 16, 2007

Marijuana not a gateway drug; and more from Amsterdam and Vancouver.

Image from public domain. In my ongoing support for marijuana legalization, here are some more information and insights:

1. The Marijuana Policy Project's Bruce Mirken, cites to two recent studies further debunking the claim that marijuana use in and of itself leads to the use of more harmful drugs than marijuana. One of the reports is available for purchase online: "Predictors of Marijuana Use in Adolescents Before and After Licit Drug Use: Examination of the Gateway Hypothesis." The other report I could not find online.
2. Amsterdam has long been a marijuana-smoking haven. However, this Alternet article reports that the number of marijuana-serving coffee shops in the Netherlands is significantly decreasing as licenses for such shops have become harder than ever to obtain. This points out that the fight for marijuana legalization is never-ending on a worldwide basis.
3. Closer to home is Vancouver's mix of marijuana reform and retrenchment, and efforts towards various drug decriminalization measures. Vancouver provides a model for electing politicians who will focus away from law enforcement in the fight for drug harm reduction, and for pursuing such policies now from the halls of government and outside those halls, rather than just talking about them at conferences or in policy papers. A good start to reviewing Vancouver's drug decriminalization approach is this December 2005 article from the Drug Reform Coordination Network. The Vancouver government is pursuing a "Four Pillars Drug Strategy" that addresses drug prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and law enforcement. Vancouver's drug policy program is addressed further here. On my only visit to Vancouver (where I saw Roger Daltrey in a hotel lobby, which by itself made my whole trip worthwhile), just one month before September 11, I learned that a bar I visited had a glass-enclosed room for buying, selling, and smoking small amounts of marijuana; (not firsthand) that sex-selling off-street escorts were legal or at least not prosecuted (which appears to be the norm throughout Canada); and that junkies injected themselves in broad daylight on the edge of Chinatown (which I learned on following the wrong path to a Buddhist temple, seeing a crazed junkie stab a syringe into his palm, and getting as far away as I could, lest he try to stab me).
4. Claiming not to be Canada's southern Big Brother, in 2003, the U.S. drug czar's special assistant David Murray reacted to a Canadian plan to decriminalize marijuana by invoking -- according to the CBC -- "images of tie-ups at border crossings and intense bureaucracy." It appears from here and here that drug decriminalization legislation still has not passed since that time. Hopefully this delay has nothing to do with the United States, and I have no indication that it does. Jon Katz.

Posted by Jon Katz in Drugs at 00:00