



Marijuana hasn't always been illegal, but now the Australian Greens Party are pushing for the legalisation of recreation...

Miranda Devine: Wake up and smell the reality — drugs kill people



Miranda Devine

September 10, 2019 9:39pm

 Subscriber only



Did Miranda Devine lose the war on drugs” ran a headline that couldn’t fail to catch my eye. Huh?

This absurd claim is in a new book by freelance writer Antony Loewenstein, with the headline appearing over an extract in the Crikey newsletter this week.

“Devine has been one of Australia’s most vociferous opponents of drug reform for decades,” writes Loewenstein in “Pills, Powder, and Smoke: Inside the Bloody War

on Drugs”.

“There’s arguably no public commentator who has been more vocal and at times influential in delaying or stopping drug reforms due to her closeness to the Liberal Party and ability to dominate the news cycle.”

Stop right there.

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Closeness to the Liberal Party, hardly.

Drug “reform” is no such thing. It is legalisation and decriminalisation. It means more people take more illegal drugs and from an earlier age, with all the associated problems, including mental and physical illness, loss of ambition and social dysfunction.



📷 A woman smokes cannabis during a "smoke out" in Toronto after Canada legalised marijuana use last year. Picture: Ian Willms/Getty Images/AFP

So, of course, I oppose it. Anyone who isn’t off their face would do the same.

In any case the “war on drugs” is a straw man and the drug liberalisers always claim it’s lost.

There’s never been a “war on drugs”.

The closest we've come was the short period during John Howard's prime ministership when he launched the successful Tough on Drugs strategy in 1997 under retired Salvation Army major Brian Watters.

This was a tough love approach which combined tougher law enforcement and interception of drugs at the borders with better rehabilitation options for addicts.



📷 Legalising drugs won't work in Australia, warns Miranda Devine. Artwork: Terry Pontikos

Drug use fell for the first time in three decades, fewer young people experimented with drugs and those who did were older than previously was the case.

The disruption of heroin imports, jailing of drug kingpins, and policing of drug crime in the heroin ground zero of Cabramatta, led to a heroin drought at the end of 2000 which was regarded as unique in the world.

Fewer people died of heroin overdoses and crime rates dropped.



📷 Former prime minister John Howard at the launch of his Tough on Drugs initiative. Picture: Kerris Berrington

Dr Don Weatherburn, head of the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, told me at the time: “The credit for the drop in heroin consumption belongs in the first instance to federal customs and the Australian Federal Police,”

Thus, the success of Howard’s strategy was a real-world rebuke to the drug-liberalisers and criminologists and Greens politicians who claimed that law enforcement attempts to control drug supply are doomed to fail.

The sly abandonment of that strategy by successive governments under pressure from drug liberalisers has been a tragedy. It’s led to a steady rise in drug use, mental health problems, child abuse and neglect, family breakdown and strains on health and emergency services.

[MORE FROM MIRANDA DEVINE: Greens MP deserves the boot for boasting about drugs](#)

Dr Alex Wodak has probably been the most influential drugs activist in Australia, thanks to his long-term association with prestigious St Vincent’s Hospital, his leadership of the Australian Drug Law Reform Foundation and collaboration with Ethan Nadelmann, the founder of the New York-based, George Soros-funded Drug Policy Alliance. Wodak was laughed at a few years ago when he advocated selling marijuana in little packets at the post office.

But Soros and Nadelmann have achieved all that and more in the US today. In

many American states now under way is a real-world experiment in marijuana legalisation, driven by the profit-seekers of Big Weed.



📷 A man high on K2 or 'Spice', a synthetic marijuana drug, in East Harlem, New York City. Picture: Spencer Platt/Getty Images

The smell of weed now wafts through the streets of New York and Los Angeles, but already health authorities are sounding alarm bells.

The multi-billion dollar marijuana industry is reportedly bracing for the backlash, after at least five deaths suspected to be linked to marijuana vaping devices.

Dozens of other people have been hospitalised with lung damage.

US Surgeon General Dr Jerome Adams last month also issued an urgent warning for teenagers and pregnant women that “no amount of marijuana use during pregnancy or adolescence is safe ... use during adolescence is associated with changes in areas of the brain involved in attention, memory, decision-making and motivation”.

Adams pointed out that today’s marijuana is three- to five- times more potent than in decades past. “This ain’t your mother’s marijuana,” he said.

He also made the startling announcement that marijuana is now the most commonly used illicit drug for pregnant women, and the third most commonly used drug by adolescents, after alcohol and e-cigarettes.

[MORE FROM MIRANDA DEVINE: Stop pushing false hope of pill testing](#)

In a nation where the sale of alcohol is strictly controlled, it is astonishing to see how quickly marijuana has been normalised.

And yet the evidence of its harms is incontrovertible.

One of many damning long-term studies comes from Sweden where 50,465 Army conscripts were found to have 2.4 times the risk of schizophrenia which, if they tried marijuana by age 18, than those who had never used the drug. Heavy users were 6.7 times more likely to be admitted to hospital for schizophrenia.



 US Surgeon General Dr Jerome Adams has warned today's marijuana is far more potent than in decades past. Picture: Getty Images

Marijuana is not a harmless drug, especially for the developing brain.

This is just some of the evidence I have cited in columns opposing drug “reform” and which I provided to Lowenstein when I did him the courtesy of responding to questions for his book, in which I get 33 mentions. I should get royalties.

He says he wants a “healthy, safe, and legal recreational drug market”. But evidence and observation show that illegal drugs are neither healthy nor safe, and a lot of people will get hurt in the legalisation experiment.

The only way Lowenstein could think of to win the argument was to shoot the

messenger, dismissing my evidence as the ravings of a “puritanical Catholic who loathed the changes in modern society”.

I won't return the insult, despite ample ammunition.

All it does is show the threadbare nature of his case.

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POST COMMENT

Paul • 3 hours ago

Heroin supply was reduced because of an asian drought and sellers turned to Europe. Its been replaced by crystal meth in far more destructive terms. Millions of people take illegal drugs in Australia. Most with out any health consequences. Instead of wasting billions of dollars in a decades long failed war on drugs spend less on treatment for those who need it. The only winners of the current policy is the \$8 billion market going to criminals. Portugal succeeded in decriminalising drugs and is supported by former Fed Pol Commr Mick Palmer. No greater expert.

👍 2 • ➦ Reply

Daryl • 3 hours ago

All recreational drugs cause harm. However to be pragmatic we really can't control them by policing. The rise in ice use proves that. Kids with no money start chroming or petrol sniffing. Education and support are the only damage minimisation tactics that work.

👍 2 • ➦ Reply

Stuart • 3 hours ago

Prohibition has never worked and never will.

👍 6 • ➦ Reply

Stuart • 3 hours ago

You're inventing 'facts'. When did drugs ever 'dry up"!? Never.

👍 5 • ➦ Reply

Peter • 4 hours ago

Excellent article, Miranda. My best friend and four of my students started on marijuana and ultimately died of overdoses from more addictive drugs. To my knowledge, at least three of them only experienced schizophrenia after starting to use marijuana. Any drug that has no medically supervised health benefits and that is manufactured purely for a massive profit by untrained amateurs who couldn't care less whether the user lives or dies should be criminalised. Our society doesn't need the health risks, the associated criminal activities of both the addicts and the dealers, nor the gung ho "We need to be mature and I can take it" mentality of those who try to legitimise it.

Jack • 4 hours ago

No such thing as "healthy recreational drug use".

13 • Reply

Ken • 4 hours ago

"There are two kinds of fool. One says, "This is old, and therefore good." And one says, " This is new, and therefore better." John Brunner.

2 • Reply

Paul • 4 hours ago

There's only one kind of fool actually Ken.

Thats the person that tells you drugs are OK !

7 • Reply

John • 4 hours ago (*Edited*)

I guess Miranda, seeing that alcohol is the biggest killer drug in this country you would firstly ban its production, sale and use. And that nicotine and tobacco should also be banned as they do so much damage.

16 • Reply

James • 3 hours ago

@John ah that old chestnut. Sorry John, it's no excuse to justify illegal gutter drugs.

9 • Reply

Stewart • 3 hours ago

@John per capita of users illegal drugs kill many more than alcohol. look at what happens to

meths users they look old well before their time and eventually die early. Tobacco is a different story as many people smoked well before the education programs started. My father included.

 4 •  Reply

Scott • 3 hours ago

Thats a factor of its wide-spread availability actually... if other drugs were just as widely available, you'd be seeing dead people all over the place, car crashes every day because drugs are many times worse and unlike alcohol, there is no safe level of use for illegal drugs..

 7 •  Reply

Mark • 4 hours ago

Miranda, rather than tell us Aussies what you'd like us to do, perhaps you'd care to explain why so many US States have decriminalise the growth and personal use of marijuana in the last year?

Seems like it's a tide that just keeps growing, don't ya think?

 8 •  Reply

Andrew • 4 hours ago *(Edited)*

Mark

i have first hand experience with trying to help heavy Marijuana users who most have got schizophrenic issues which have lead to home assaults etc etc.

The US has form on OxyContin so they aren't really a good example of why we should have a drug that impacts society as badly as it does because people want to ignore the issues it causes.

PS we can not control drink drivers and you want another issue out there

 5 •  Reply

Dean • 4 hours ago

@Mark US is a great example, OxyContin, fentanyl, crack cocaine, flakka, where does it stop?

 4 •  Reply

James • 3 hours ago

@Mark because they have weak as governments infiltrated by left wing politicians.

 6 •  Reply

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