

Written evidence submitted by Peter Hitchens, Columnist at The Mail on Sunday and author of ‘the War We Never Fought’, the British Establishment’s Surrender to Drugs (DRU0041)

Submissions on selected questions noted by the Committee:

- **Does the current framework, or a particular aspect of the framework, need to be reformed?**

- **If so, how?**

1. The unilateral decision by the Magistrates and Police forces of England and Wales to severely reduce enforcement of the provisions of the 1971 Act against marijuana possession should be challenged by Parliament. Parliament, not magistrates or the police, makes the law and has not repealed it. Nor should it do so. Marijuana represents a far more serious danger than was recognised at the time of 1971 Act. Evidence exists, especially the work of Professor Sir Robin Murray, of a strong correlation between the use of this drug and mental illness, unknown at the time of the Wootton and Runciman reports which influenced this court police behaviour. A worrying correlation between marijuana-linked mental illness and violent crime has also been identified by the extensive study of criminal cases across the country by Ross Grainger, in his book *Attacker Smoked Cannabis: Suicide and Psychopathic Violence in the UK & Ireland* and his regularly updated website ‘Attacker Smoked Cannabis’ . Measures to deter drug abuse by interdicting supply cannot possible be effective if no steps, or very feeble steps are taken to interdict demand.

- **What is the impact of drug use? In particular, on:**

- **drug users and their loved ones;**
- **local communities and wider society;**
- **the economy.**

2. The committee should seek the views on this of Patrick Cockburn, the distinguished foreign correspondent, currently writing for the ‘I’ newspaper, whose book ‘Henry’s Demons’ recounts the devastating effect on his family of the mental illness suffered by his son Henry. Patrick Cockburn believes this illness could be connected by Henry’s use of marijuana in his school years. Since he wrote his book he has been amazed and appalled by the numbers of friends and colleagues who have told him of their children undergoing similar experiences after the use of marijuana.

- **Are there laws, policies or approaches adopted in other countries that have been effective in reducing:**
 - **drug use,**
 - **drug related deaths, and/or**
 - **drug related offending?**
- **If so, could they reasonably be expected to work in the UK?**

3. Yes, both Japan and South Korea, law-governed advanced countries quite comparable to the UK and in many ways more advanced, continue to enforce laws against marijuana possession. These laws sustain public disapproval of the use of the drug, and are accompanied by significantly lower use of it than can be found here. This is not 'cultural'. Japan's drug laws are in response to very serious drug problems which erupted there in the 1950s. And they are 'culturally' similar to the state of affairs in this country before the Wootton Report of 1968-9, when social disapproval and legal sanctions were accompanied by a far lower use of marijuana than we now suffer.

4. My submissions concentrate on marijuana because its *de facto* decriminalisation has been the single greatest change in UK drug policy in the last 50 years. There is also a highly active campaign for *de jure* legalisation of this drug, which has succeeded in several jurisdictions. In those jurisdictions, claims that legalisation would remove criminals from the trade have proved false, as have claims that it would enable effective regulation of strength. Yet these claims are still made. May I urge the committee to make a critical examination of those places, including California, Colorado and Canada, where this process is advanced? May I also urge a sceptical examination of repeated claims that Portugal is some sort of drug paradise following its depenalisation of drugs? Claims of this kind are often accepted without study. In fact the matter is far more complicated than is often assumed. For example, use of some drugs has increased in Portugal since this policy was introduced, and claims made for it should be examined in the light of the fact that the change merely formalised an informal non-enforcement policy which had already existed for some years. I am willing to give evidence to the Committee, if requested, on all of the issues mentioned above.

March 2022