

How to avoid criminalisation of Euro Cannabis, learning from the Dutch Experience.

<http://www.cedro-uva.org/lib/bruining.how.html>

A plea for depenalizing, yet controlling production of Cannabis for private use in Europe, by Wernard Bruining, Amsterdam, 11 September 2003.

Three assumptions:

1.The war against Cannabis is lost.

Cannabis is a accepted drug to our youth, and they determine the future. The number of consumers has never been so high and has constantly risen in the past 70 years of prohibition . It is time to think about peace. Governments have to accept a the reality of the multi-drug using society and adept to it.

2.Somewhere in future Cannabis will be legal.

History has seen a scala of social prohibitive law's, none of them lasted longer than a 100 years. Europe's youth has accepted Cannabis as a pretty innocent drug and do not understand why governments maintain prohibition. Prohibition reduces the credibility of Governments, and authorities in the eyes of the Europeans of tomorrow.

3.If the war on Cannabis is lost, and production and consumption will be legal in future, we live now in a intermediate period.

The challenge Europe faces is to get through this intermediate period with at least damage for our society as possible.

So we have three assumptions.

1.The War against Cannabis is lost.

2.Somewhere in the future, Cannabis will be legal.

3.We live in an intermediate period that ends with legalisation

The Cannabis Avalanche

The metaphor of the Cannabis avalanche was invented by Ds. Adriaan Jansen: Social changes are comparable to avalanches. You can't stop them, only try to prevent societies to be completely overflowed and destroyed.

You can't fight avalanches by just planting as many trees as possible in defence, you have to remove trees on other spots, offering the avalanche an attractive alternative route. A smart technique is to deliberately create manmade, relatively small, and therefore controllable avalanches, to avoid build up of snow and pressure.

If legalisation of Cannabis will come inevitably, we live in the intermediate time. If Europe is smart, it will maintain certain restrictive laws, but allow enough small scale production and consumption to avoid a build up of pressure in the Cannabis market and at the same time control the avalanche.

Dutch Growshop wholesalers export an estimated 100 Million Euro per year. Each Euro invested is multiplied many times a year by European growers. If we multiply the Dutch Export of 100 million Euro with a factor 5-10 we get an idea how big Euro cannabis is at the moment, about 500 to a billion Euro. Export of Dutch wholesalers is growing about 20-30% per year. The green avalanche of Eurocannabis is about to overrun European society!

New improved techniques enable growing on a very small scale such as Cannabis closets. This small scale growing is hard, if not impossible to detect and to prevent. Soon millions, and millions of Europeans will grow Cannabis.

Usually the number of cannabis smokers is expressed in a percentage of the total population. In the Netherlands that figure is 5-6%. These are quite misleading figures, because a total population includes babies, children and senior citizens. Most smokers are found in the age-group between 18 and 50, a third of the population, so the true figure should be multiplied at least three times.

And all of these millions of growers and smokers to ignore the law. This is the probably the biggest negative effect of prohibition, it creates citizens that learn to disobey the law. European governments structurally do not respect a considerable, expanding group of citizens, who in return do not respect the government and their laws..

Prohibition is probably one of the key elements at the base of the constant decline of moral standards of citizens and governments. In the Netherlands a policeman can not patrol the streets alone anymore, and in England bobby's have to bear arms. A policeman is not considered a citizens best friend anymore.

Criminalisation of Dutch Cannabis.

The Netherlands have a long history of tolerance towards the growing of cannabis since 1970. Ten thousands of Dutchmen were growing Cannabis in their gardens and on their balcony's. It was regarded as an innocent hobby and it supplied a lot of people who did not have to go to and spent money on illegal import from third world countries.

In 1980 the first Sinsemilla (seedless marihuana) of commercial quality came on the market and found its way to the Dutch consumers.

Gradually Dutch Home-grown diminished illegal import from third world countries.

In 1985 the first indoor grown (skunk) was introduced and the consumers loved it. That same year the first growshop opened up in Amsterdam, selling lights, fertilisers, clones and seeds. Indoor grown, in greenhouses and under lights took a important part of the market and constantly lowered the kilo price.

In 1995 80% of Dutch Cannabis consumption was home-grown, making it the best medicine against illegal import.

But publicity stimulated more and more people to get involved who were non smokers, just interested in the money aspect. The quality produced by these "moneygrowers" was mediocre, but for the rest of Europe their product was good enough. Gradually more and more Cannabis produced in the Netherlands was just grown for export.

In 1997 new stricter laws towards growing were applied. Growing more than a 100 plants was now regarded as a crime with the possibility of serious fines or even jailtime. Electricity companies started to report bigger than usual customers to the police, thus stimulating the theft of electricity. Most hobbyist growers slowed down or even stopped. Outdoor Cannabis almost disappeared from the market and the price of indoor grown rose to an attractive high level stimulating professional illegal growers even more.

Today 50% of Dutch growers are large scale and semi-criminal and 60-70% of production is grown for export.

The Dutch Cannabis policy actually created the situation it feared.

Europe should learn from this Dutch experience and try to avoid criminalisation of EuroCannabis.

How to avoid criminalisation of EuroCannabis

We can visualise criminalisation of EuroCannabis as a sound panel with movable slides. Criminalisation of Cannabis is influenced with at least three slides: the Kilo Price, the Tools and the Law.

1. The Kilo price, *the higher the price, the more attractive abuse.*
2. The Tools, *the availability of equipment, knowledge and genetics.*
3. The law, *strict prohibition works as a selective filter, people willing and capable of disobeying the law mostly got involved in commercial growing.*

Conclusion:

If the kiloprice is high, tools to grow are accessible, the law is strict, conditions are optimal for criminalisation.

This the case in most European countries today , al three slides are up!

The first two slides, price and tools can not easily directly be manipulated by governments. But the third slide, the law concerning growing cannabis for private use can easily be changed to more or less strict.

The law concerning Cannabis cultivation is controlled on a panel with at least four slides:

1. Possession and fines
2. Sales and fines
3. Export/import and fines
4. Production and fines

The easiest and most effective tool Governments have to manipulate Kiloprice of EuroCannabis is production and fines.

If growing of just 1 plant is allowed, prices would remain very high.

If growing of a 100 plants would be allowed, production would be huge and prices would soon drop to a minimum. Marihuana would overflow our society and it is a bit to early for that.

The global political situation will not tolerate the end of prohibition right now.

My first recommendation is to allow 10 plants for private use to achieve a comfortably low price and have Marihuana accessible for those who really seek its comfort. Most Cannabis seed packs contain 10 seeds, so it is a logical and practical rule. Growing of more than 10 plants should remain prohibited. This enables police oppression of large scale growing to be more effective, and it is sensible regarding present international circumstances.

Decriminalisation of growing 10 plants lowers THC level

One of the first effects of decriminalisation of growing 10 plants will be that people start to grow outdoors. Outdoor growing technique is cheap, easy and environmental friendly. Outdoor Cannabis reduces the need to grow indoors under lights, reducing the use and stealing of environmental unfriendly electricity.

Outdoor grown Cannabis has a lower percentage of THC and a lower price.

So, if outdoor grown Cannabis is available in sufficient amounts it has a lowering tendency on THC levels. It is easier to grow volume with a low percentage of THC, than to invest time, money and effort in production of expensive and high quality Cannabis with a high THC level.

High repression level stimulates production of Cannabis with a high THC level. A low level of repression has the opposite effect.

High level of THC is a relative factor, strong, expensive Cannabis does not mean that more THC is consumed, it just means that smokers can afford to put less of the expensive Cannabis in a joint to obtain the desired effect.

Experienced smokers do not consume more THC than to reach a certain level of high. Today nobody in the Netherlands tries to smoke as much as possible and get wasted as was the style in the old Hippie days.

The consumers sub-culture has changed.

Today people just want a nice buzz, some relaxation, and keep on swinging.

Last but not least, the availability of low priced Cannabis reduces illegal import. It does not make sense or is economical viable to produce and export expensive high quality Cannabis to a country that has enough low priced product.

Résumé:

Decriminalisation of growing 10 plants for private use lowers the price, diminishes criminal involvement, reduces the THC level, and reduces illegal import.

If growing of 10 plants is decriminalised it still leaves Growshops vulnerable to temptation of getting involved with large scale growers. A system of tolerating 10 plants should preferably be combined as a finishing touch with practical ruling towards sales of 10 plants/clones per customer by growshops.

The challenge is to create a system that enables growshops to sell plants/clones, yet to keep them controlled, and make them partners in maintaining the system.

How to Control Growshops and the sales of clones

My second recommendation is to issue permits to growshops to produce and sell clones. This gives growshops a serious income of hundreds to a thousand plants/clones per week at a selling price of 2-3 Euro's. It makes growshops controllable and partners in maintaining the system of small scale growing.

The permit can be issued by an independent "Cannabis committee" under a few strict rules:

1. Production only in the shop and on a known and registered surface.

A square meter of motherplants yields about 100 clones per week. It takes clones 2-3 weeks to root, so production on the premises is easily controllable and comparable to registered weekly sales.

2. Maximum sale of 10 clones/plants per customer.

3. Sales of clones/plants should be registered on a special numbered form issued by the Cannabis comity. *Customers know they get a legal deal and indirectly control the growshop.*

4. Shop owner should pay a Euro or so per clone sold to the Cannabis committee to finance the control system. *The committee is depending for its income on clones sales, so it will put in a lot of effort in controlling growshops.*

5. No sales of hardware for large scale growing.

No more than one or two lamps sold per customer. No sales of large systems for air cleaning, cleaning and drying of buds etc. in the shop available.

Growshops that make a lot of money selling clones, can and will reject business with large scale growers or loose their permit.

Shops that do not have a permit, obviously sell to large scale growers and can easily be dealt with by means of some extra police attention.

It is easy to register license plates of cars visiting unwanted growshops, check and scare away customers.

Within weeks such a growshop would be out of business.

This recommended system could get us through the intermediate time, until complete and inevitable legalisation, without risking criminalisation of Eurocannabis and upsetting the international Community.

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