

Legalization Works

Written by unknown.

I was presented with an incredible opportunity to stay with some friends who were studying abroad in Paris a few weeks ago. While Paris is an amazing city, the city that interested me the most was the one I only spent two days in; Amsterdam. Most people know a little bit about Amsterdam, mostly that you can buy weed, and women, in shops on every corner, but the city is more than just a place to fulfill vices legally. Amsterdam is the Mecca of Libertarian ideology in regards to drugs and prostitution.

Libertarians, though that term encompasses a very large range of ideas these days, seem to agree on one basic principle; do what you want as long as it does not affect me. That is why one of the core principles of Libertarian ideology is that individuals have the freedom to do what they want with their own bodies. Be it the intake of drugs, or a half hour on a mattress in the red light district, consenting adults should be able to do as they please.

I got off the train at Amsterdam Central Station with my friend, who was so graciously letting me crash on the couch at his apartment in Paris, and the smell of marijuana was instantaneous once we left the station. Two blocks from the station we stopped at the first store that had the infamous words “coffee shop” hung above it. As someone who has lived his entire life in Texas, where possession of concentrated marijuana, hash oil, is an equivalent charge to assault by choking, I was floored to see a legitimate business that sold marijuana over the counter, legally.

The coffee shop was just like a normal bar, except for the fog of smoke emanating from the other patrons. Customers sat at the bar, ordering drinks, rolling joints, and talking. It was just like the bars I had been to in the states, except everyone was noticeably more mellow.

We left the coffee shop, and a few blocks later found the other establishment I had been so eager to see while I was in Amsterdam. The stores known as ‘Smartshops’ sell a variety of substances banned in the United States, including the one I was looking for, Psilocybin truffles, also known as ‘Philosopher’s Stones’.

Later that evening we went out for a bar crawl in the Red Light District. For those who have never been, it is quite a surreal experience. Lined up in windows, with advertised pricing, prostitutes wave and attempt to flag down potential customers for a 15 or 30 minute session in what appears to be a 1 bedroom ground level apartment. My girlfriend wasn’t exactly ecstatic to hear where I was, but as someone who has deep seeded beliefs about the freedom of adults to do what they want with their own bodies I had to witness such a system with my own eyes.

My takeaway from this trip was that the laws in the United States, as well as the majority of the rest of the world, are completely backwards in regards to these two subjects.

Prostitution is the oldest profession in the world. People pay for sex, and they are always going to pay for sex. By providing women who work in the sex industry a legal, and regulated space to carry out their work these women can operate in a much safer capacity. Making prostitution illegal doesn't stop prostitution, it just forces consenting adults to hide from the law, and puts the women who engage in this profession in a very dangerous position.

In 2008, the Dutch government raked in around \$600 million in taxes just off of marijuana sales. What could be a booming industry in all of the United States, as it is in Colorado, Washington, and soon to be California, is stifled due to antiquated drug laws which seek to protect people from themselves. Citizens who would be law abiding tax payers are turned into criminals for using one of the safest drugs on the planet.

People use drugs, and people are always going to use drugs, to turn what is primarily a health issue into a criminal issue does nothing to solve the problem. If anything, it just makes things worse.

A friend of mine has had to drop out of college due to a pending felony charge for possession of hash oil. This oil, which is nothing more than concentrated marijuana, to the state of Texas is the same as assault by choking, as mentioned earlier. My friend, while he maybe wasn't making the best lifestyle choices, is a non-violent, regular person who decided that he would rather vaporize hash oil as his drug of choice to wind down than drink a beer. Because of this he has lost his financial aide, he has been suspended from our University until the case is finished, and he may now forever have a felony on his record that will follow him to every job application he fills out for the rest of his life.

Who are these laws helping? My friend was an otherwise law abiding citizen who is now being lumped together with thieves, rapists, and murderers in the eyes of the law. Women who would otherwise be providing a legal service are forced to have 'pimps' protect them and not the police. It is baffling to me to see the success Amsterdam has had with the legalization of soft drugs and prostitution, and then to see how terribly harmful the laws are back in my home state.

These laws help no one, and until we recognize that government's job is to protect life, liberty, and property, instead of legislating morality, we will turn otherwise law abiding citizens into criminals.