

Chicago 1930, Montreal 1995: Forgotten history lesson

It is not surprising that Canadians are starting to see a horrible parallel between the prohibition-inspired carnage of mob controlled Chicago in the 1930's, and Montreal in the 1990's.

OPINION

Every week bombs are going off in the streets of Montreal and people are being gunned down in broad daylight. In both cities, the prohibition of a popular recreational substance created an lucrative, illegal black market that attracted people willing to kill for a share of the profits. In Montreal, these modern day "gangsters", the Hell's Angels & the Rock Machine, are regularly committing PREMEDITATED MURDERS to gain control of the drug trade. Does anyone really think passing tougher drug laws will have ANY effect on them?

The people of Chicago did not see any serious decrease in the amount of crime caused by alcohol prohibition until AFTER PROHIBITION ENDED. Yet the rocket scientists at the police and mayors offices of Montreal are calling for TOUGHER laws prohibiting marijuana. Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it. The death of a five year-old boy from a bombing in the streets of Montreal last month will be a meaningless death unless politicians and police take REAL ACTION to end the crime created by marijuana prohibition. By decriminalizing marijuana possession, the profits from trafficking will be so severely reduced that the organized crime created by prohibition will melt into the woodwork. How many years will they rack up profits before they are stopped by a government with the guts to adopt sane, European-style approaches to *soft drugs*?

Those who call for stricter laws should take a closer look at the United States! South of the border they are letting hardened, violent criminals out of jail to make room for non-violent pot offenders because of draconian mandatory minimum sentencing laws. Compare that to enlightened governments in Switzerland, Germany, Holland, Italy, Greece, and Belgium, where many politicians are decriminalizing possession of small to medium amounts of marijuana and hash, eliminating the crime associated with prohibition, and making their cities safe for their own citizens.

The following places in Europe have taken serious action to end marijuana prohibition, with the stated intent of eliminating the illegal activity associated with it, by decriminalizing possession.

In Switzerland: Zurich, Basel, Bern, and Luzern. In Germany: Frankfurt, Hamburg, Dortmund, and Hannover. In Holland: Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Venlo, and Arnhem. In Italy: Provinces of ROME, Terramo, and Forli Catania. In Greece: Kallithea. In Belgium: Charleroi.

When was the last time a little boy was killed in a drug turf war in Zurich, or Frankfurt, or Amsterdam? Now ask the same question about the United States, whose failed drug policies the mayor and police of Montreal

would have us emulate.

Ironically, it is the German people, considered some of the most rule-conscious and law-abiding in the world, who are taking the lead away from the Dutch as the most progressive in their marijuana decriminalizing policies. Possession of small amounts of marijuana and hash is decriminalized to a degree for many Germans. Last

year, a court in Lubeck, Germany, ruled that "hashish is safer than alcohol or cigarettes, [and it] has sharply raised the limit for possession without creating a crime... The court put the limit for a "minor quantity" at 200 grams of THC, which is the equivalent of 2 to 4 KILOS of hashish." (Globe and Mail, Oct. 20, 1994).

Calls for "tougher laws" might

appeal to misinformed public sentiment, but appear to be cynical, political ploys in light of the historical reality of prohibition in Twentieth Century North America. How many innocent bystanders were killed in Chicago in the 1930's because of crime created by prohibition? How many will have to die in Montreal and other Canadian cities before

politicians stop pandering for votes and take real action to deal with the root of the problem?

Ironically, the latest studies out of Holland show that the current consumption of marijuana and hash by the Dutch population is the same now as it was two decades ago, before these non-physically addictive substances were decriminalized. This study supports findings by In Health Magazine that were published in the GLOBE and MAIL over three years ago (Jan 22, '92), namely that THC is one of the least addictive substances commonly consumed for recreational purposes in North America and Western Europe. According to the article, a panel of experts on addiction were asked to rate various substances for their ability to get people hooked, and the difficulty they cause when people try to quit them (on a scale from 1 to 100):

Nicotine	100
Crack	97.66
Valium	85.68
Alcohol	81.85
Cocaine	73.13
Caffeine	72.01
Marijuana	21.16

Though lobby groups in the U.S., many of whom receive millions in funding from alcohol, tobacco, and pharmaceutical companies, have been fear-mongering with quickly debunked, badly designed studies for decades now, the reality that has been found in Europe is that ending prohibition WORKS. The Dutch have found, and the rest of western Europe is finding, that the only effect of decriminalizing marijuana is that crime goes down, and fewer productive lives are ruined by unjust laws.

Unlike alcohol, tobacco, and caffeine, all of which are many times more addictive than pot, marijuana actually has certified medical benefits and is used in cancer therapy and other medical procedures across Canada. As well, this year there are 11 government research licenses granted to farmers in four Canadian provinces to grow low-THC hemp for commercial uses.

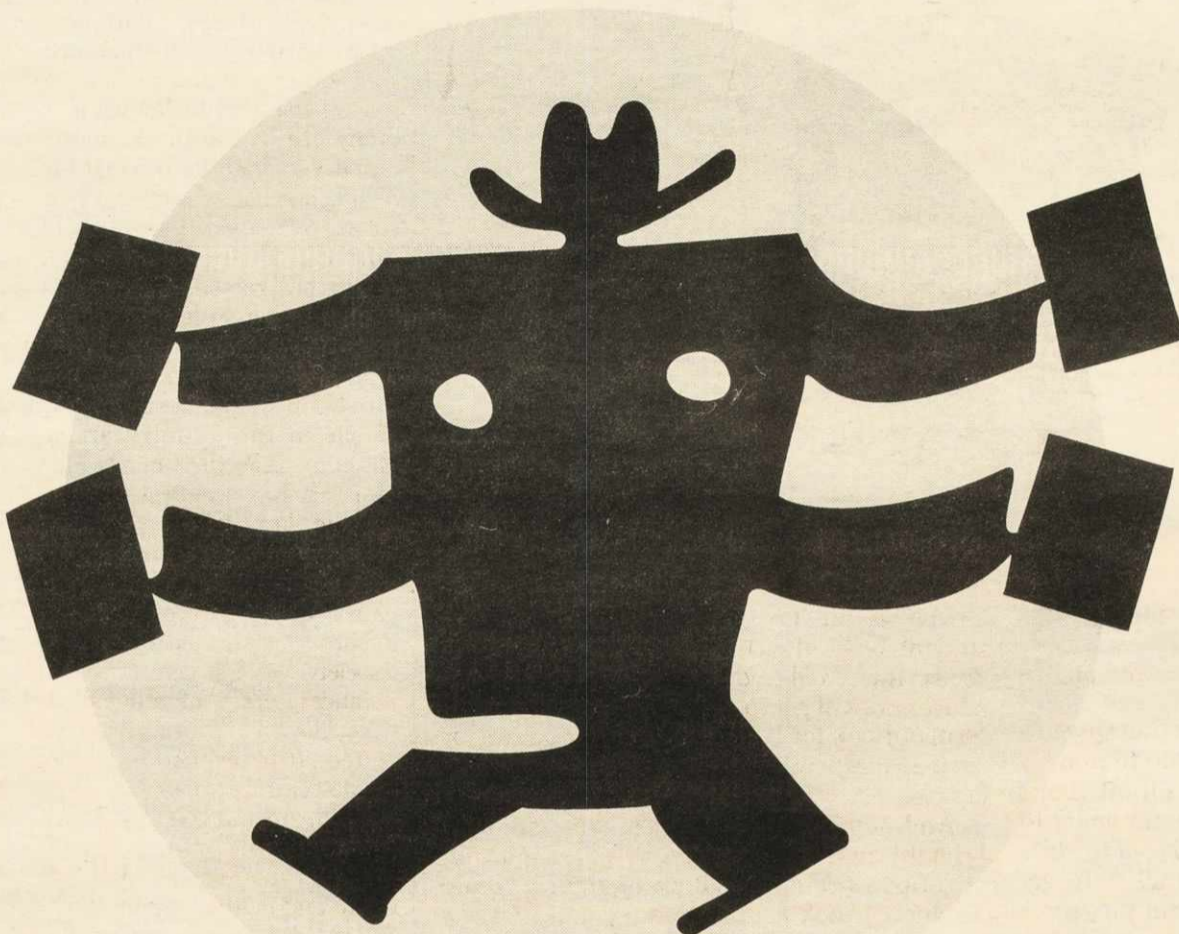
In Canada, there is one bright spot for decriminalization: Vancouver. The federal prosecutors office that is responsible for prosecuting drug possession charges has informed the city police that they WILL NOT prosecute citizens for marijuana possession. This seems like a step in the right direction, but the fact that this action was motivated by the overload of drug related cases only underscores the ineffectiveness of our country's drug policies.

Canadians have a choice. We can follow the United States down the road to hell, build more jails, and see if we can pass Uncle Sam for having the highest incarceration rate of our own citizens in the entire world. Or, we can look to Europe, decriminalize, do extensive medical and commercial research on the most evolved plant on the planet, and enter the next millennium without having to worry about our children being blown away in the street because of a drug turf war.

If you want more information, some of the best journalism on cannabis/hemp issues in Canada is on-line at: "<http://www.hempbc.com/hempmain.html>"

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At U of T, you're just a number

While Dalhousie may not be the largest university in the country, it certainly stands up to its much larger cousin institutions. Dalhousie can pride itself on both its student services and on its commitment to a high standard of education.

This summer I had the dubious pleasure of attending summer school at the illustrious University of Toronto. While I was pleased by the idea of saving some money while living at home during the summer months, I had some reservations about attending the University of Toronto due to previous experience.

Before arriving at Dalhousie for the 92/93 academic year, I was a student in the Faculty of Music at the University of Toronto. As an undergraduate student, I can say that the university does not promote an environment that is conducive to learning. Overall, the professors make it quite clear that they have no time for their students, preferring instead to carry out research in the sanctity of their ivory towers.

While some have referred to the University of Toronto as the Harvard of the North, I would definitely beg to differ. When an institution becomes lazy as a result of its *infallible reputation*, it is the students who suffer in the short-run and the institution that suffers in the long-run.

God it feels good to get that off my chest!

Now, getting back to this past summer, I decided that I would look into attending the University of Toronto as a visiting student on a "Letter of Permission" from Dalhousie. Upon receiving their information package, I learned that I would have to enroll by a certain date and do this in person upon paying my fees. When I called to let them know that I would not be able to arrive in Toronto until after their official date to register, I was told that there was nothing they could do and that subsequently, my enrollment would be nullified. Thinking that surely such an absurd policy was in fact incorrect, I began to make my way up the bureaucratic phone-ladder. I was eventually informed that since I was a visiting student from

out of province, an exception would be made and my application would be processed.

This I found out only after spending ridiculous amounts of money on long-distance phone calls. The fun was just beginning.

While my course was not among those taught in Convocation Hall (with 600 plus students) by professors with microphones and electronic pointers, it did involve a lot more people than I had originally been expecting. Due to the fact that the course was being offered in the summer session, I had

assumed it would be a relatively small class. I was somewhat shocked to find out that a relatively small class consisted of 250 students. Dalhousie may have some larger first-year classes, but personally I have never been enrolled in a class, particularly in the summer session, that came close to 300 students.

While fifty-thousand students may seem impressive to some, I can assure you that most students (myself included) resent the fact that they are merely seen as a number during their time at U of T. This not only reflects the attitude of the university's administration, but by in large, it reflects that of its faculty as well.

As a Dalhousie student, I can proudly say that every one of my professors knows my name. This is a phenomenon which is unheard of at the University of Toronto, especially if one is an undergraduate student. So remember, the next time you're in line at the registrar's office and you have the urge to give Gudrun Curri a good shaking, stop and count your blessings. At Dalhousie your professors know you exist, the registrar's office serves you with a smile (*usually*), and your classes are of a reasonable (and in some cases *very* favourable) size. The bottom line: while a certain degree of bureaucracy definitely exists, it doesn't require a Ph.D to learn to survive the system.

Unlike some institutions, Dalhousie's commitment to its students does not require a magnifying glass to detect. So, in other words, DON'T WORRY, BE HAPPY. It could be a lot worse!