The ‘War on Drugs’ is a Success

By Fred Gardner

The leader of the Drug Policy Alliance, Ethan Nadelmann purposefully refers to the U.S. War on Drugs as a “failure.” It’s his #1 soundbite, and it’s very misleading. It implies that the stated goals of the War on Drugs — reducing availability, teenage use, addiction, etc. — are its real goals. They aren’t, and never were, as the Nixon White House tapes revealed.

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The federal Controlled Substances Act was designed to justify ever-bigger police budgets and staffing levels, to entice and infiltrate the ghettos, and to make sure that the rebellions of the 1960s were permanently snuffed out. The War on Drugs is a great success for the prison-industrial complex, the pharmaceutical industry, the armaments makers, etc... Attorney General John Mitchell, the CSA’s mainstream, said at the time, “This country is going to go so far right you won’t be able to recognize it.” Indeed.

When Nixon and Mitchell came into office in 1969, millions of Americans identified with and supported “the movement” — which was not, at the time, divided into the kind of single-issue enterprises that exist today. People demanding peace and people demanding equality on all fronts — racial, economic, sexual — overlapped and intermingled, and many saw their seemingly diverse demands as one big demand for a democratic society.

The corporate elites were shaken and responded with widespread reforms. They hastened the return of U.S. troops from Vietnam and ended the draft — a shrewd response to the “problem” of anti-war GLs. They implemented affirmative action programs in the corporate world and Title IX funding for women’s sports in the schools. In response to millions of people smoking marijuana — mass civil disobedience — the U.S. War on Drugs as a “failure,” the DEA, Corporate elites escalated the War on Drugs (which was being conducted long before Nixon gave it a catchy name), which was dangerous because it implies that we live in a functioning democracy. We live in a corporate state. The Supreme Court decision allowing unlimited, concealed corporate funding in elections made it official.

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To whom does Barack Obama defer on drug policy? That is the question.

But, as Jack Cole, who spent 26 years in policing narcotics in New Jersey and is now the executive director of Law Enforcement Against Drug Prohibition, stressed, “When you train your police to go to war, they’ve got to have an enemy.”

Cole considers the War on Drugs a “terrible metaphor” for “policing in a democratic society.” Terrible, alas, but substitute “neoliberal” for “democratic,” and it is nothing if not apt. Predictably, Obama and Kerlikowske have dropped the nomenclature, but the policies remain intact.

— Forrest Hylton in Counterpunch

Who Loses if the Drug War Ends?

As President Obama’s drug czar, Gil Kerlikowske, put it in July 2009, “Legalization is not in my vocabulary nor is it in the president’s.”

To understand why, it is helpful to ask who wins and who loses from legalization. The losers, not necessarily in order of importance, would include U.S. immigration and Customs Enforcement, the DEA, U.S. Border Patrol, the FBI, the ATF, the IRS, state and local police forces, the U.S. Coast Guard, the U.S. armed forces, to name only some of the agencies whose budgets depend on the drug war for funding, as well as their counterparts in U.S. client states throughout the Americas; arms manufacturers like Sikorsky Helicopters; large pharmaceutical companies like Pfizer; suppliers of chemicals for fumigation like Monsanto; the banking sector as well as offshore tax havens; the Republican Party; the growing warlords, gangs and gangsters.

The clearest winners would be consumers, direct producers, and societies that would be less militarized, less carceral, less moralizing, and would have stronger public health and education systems.

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PRESIDENT RICHARD NIXON gives ELVIS PRESLEY CUSTUPINS IN THE OVAL OFFICE AS EGIL “Bud” KROGH looks on. Presley had written Nixon a six-page letter volunteering to serve as a “Federal Agent-at-Large” in the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, the predecessor to the DEA. Krogh, a young lawyer on the White House staff, played a key role in drafting the Controlled Substances Act. He subsequently did time for his role in the Watergate cover-up, expressed contrition, and had a long, respectable career practicing law in Washington state.

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Linenaeus on Sinsemilla

“It is the month of April, I sowed the seeds of hemp (Cannabis) in two different pots. The young plants came up plentifully. I placed each by the window, but then I turned to remote compartments. In one of them I permitted the male and female plants to remain together, to flower and bear fruit, which ripened in July. From the other, however, I removed all the male plants, as soon as they were old enough for me to distinguish them from the females. The remaining females grew very well, and presented their large pistilla in great abundance, these flowers continuing a very long time, as if in expectation of their mates... It was certainly a beautiful and truly admirable spectacle to see the unopened flowerettes and the females preserve their pistilla so long green and flourishing, not permitting them to fade, till they had been for a very considerable time exploded in vain, to accede the male pollen...”

— From “A Dissertation on the Sexes of Plants.”