

ROYAL COMMISSION? A CHRISTMAS PRESENT FOR LIBERALISERS.

by Peter Stoker – Director, National Drug Prevention Alliance – December 2012

The Home Affairs Select Committee (HASC) has spoken – and has called for a review of drug policy – which is somewhat strange, as it had been thought that this what they themselves had been commissioned to produce. They suggest passing the ball to a Royal Commission, and this has been greeted with acclamation by the libertarian side of the house, together with those who are by nature easy prey for such talk. One facet of this clarion call is the seemingly staggering degree of background finagling that has brought it about. A simple analysis of the HASC enquiry and those involved shows beyond doubt that:

- The enquiry (started in 2010) is freely acknowledged by HASC as coming from solicitation by the Global Commission on Drug Policy.
- GCDP is not a ‘Commission’; OED and others define a commission as something established by an authority or government to conduct a study in accordance with its stated guidelines. GCDP established itself, selected who was invited to belong, what the terms of reference were, and in effect (taking their earlier policy statements on board) what the conclusion should be.
- GCDP comprises the ‘Usual Suspects’ from decades of liberalisation campaigns, not a few of whom have been funded by George Soros, who in an interview by Time magazine (1997) gave his own estimate of having spent ‘...in excess of \$90 million to weaken drug laws’. The cumulative total of his largesse today can only be guessed, but it is massively greater than any charity of opposing persuasion can muster. George has described himself as “... a sort of *deus ex machina* – I am something unnatural”.
- HASC terms of reference and selection of witnesses was heavily numerically weighted in favour of liberalisation lobbies. Chairman Vaz may protest that he is the champion of open thinking, but it would seem more open to some thinking than to others. Written evidence could not be impeded or controlled by HASC but it could certainly be highlighted – or not, as required. The conclusion was - in effect - stolen.
- This felony was compounded by HASC when they mounted a conference in Portcullis House on 10th September ... the agenda and the array of attendees was shockingly biased towards the liberalisers, with prevention workers feeling as if they had strayed by mistake into a pro-legalisation conference. Speakers were almost wholly in favour of changing drug laws.
- Thankful for significant mercies, we note that both Prime Minister David Cameron and Home Secretary Theresa May have rejected the idea of a Royal Commission, and have stated that the current policy is working, witness the sustained fall in drug over recent years. Cameron was himself a member of a previous incarnation of HASC, and was at that time an example of how ‘running with ducks can make one appear like a duck’.
- Sadly, Liberal leader Nick Clegg – perhaps fishing for votes - has joined in the Royal Commission song. Drug policy always used to be politics-free, and rightly so, but no longer, regrettably. Clegg is sold on the notion that weakening drug laws is somehow akin to liberalism, when in fact it is the opposite ... enabling people to become partially or wholly dependent on drugs weakens their social independence, their intellectual powers and their vitality; surely this is a betrayal of liberal philosophy?
- Liberals are fond of quoting John Stuart Mill, leaning heavily on his statement that “...*the individual is sovereign*”, but conveniently overlooking that Mill qualified this by saying that if behaviour damages others or society, then it must fall into “... *the province of morality or law.*” (The relevant quotes are given at the foot of this article).
- Portugal has been cited frequently in this current HASC period, and cited erroneously as an example of drug law liberalisation which is “successful”. This flies in the face of the facts, which are that conditions in Portugal have become worse since the law changed. Liberalisers and Liberals alike seem to be fond of emulating Nelson, whenever it seems necessary, by putting their telescope to their blind eye.

A Commission is hardly a new idea... every few years we get another media announcement that ‘*Now is the time to review drug laws*’. One of the more prominent pushes was mounted by Rosie Boycott under the

Independent newspaper banner in late 1997, climaxing with a conference at the Queen Elizabeth Centre in December 1997 (at which I was one of the speakers). *'Now is the time to review ...'* Says who? Authority doesn't and the public certainly don't. The only people who say 'now' is 'the time' are those who have been frustrated by previous reviews, so they demand that we look at it again until they get the answer they want. Like kids pressing Daddy for an ice cream ... they speculate that if they bang on about it for long enough, Daddy will give in.

Consider for a moment a parallel hypothesis e.g. *A cohort of social activists are mobilised by the conditions around burglary in the nation. We have laws against it, but they don't stop it, indeed it seems to be increasing. The imprisonment of burglars is no disincentive, and prison is distasteful anyway. Burglars will not come forward to be helped to stop because it is against the law. But if we were to legalise it all these negatives would disappear, so let's do that.* How many MPs would be ready to go to the polls with this approach in their manifesto? And yet, when it comes to drug policy, they have been sold the idea that it makes sense. Bless them.

The influence of the media – print and broadcast – on drug policy debates must not be overlooked in all this. It has long been observed that the amount of coverage at the liberalising end is far in excess of that at the prevention end. This undoubtedly influences the culture in which decisions about drugs are made ... decisions based on the cultures obtaining amongst e.g. young people, parents, teachers, health, enforcement/justice and – not least – politicians. And meanwhile the media itself is shifting, from a neutral recording of events into an active pressure group for change; the historical motto of newspapers *"All the news that's fit to print"* was changed long ago by Rolling Stone magazine, to read *"All the news that fits"*. A confessional definition of moral decay.

We live in a millennium in which organised lobby groups hold sway over much of our environment – the minority manipulating the majority, principally because there is a sizeable imbalance of funding, resources, and media support in favour of those who seek to liberalise. Pro-drug lobbies have learnt lobbying techniques from watching other arenas, whilst anti-drug lobbies are too often preoccupied with the business of survival.

In the midst of all this it is perhaps unsurprising that Prevention, meaning encouragement of lifestyles without drug misuse, is a primary casualty. It would be hard enough to advance Prevention anyway, even if one could achieve unity of purpose, because at present there is no unity of understanding as to what Prevention is, and even less as to how it might be achieved. The lessons to be learned from the reduction in tobacco smoking in Britain in recent years, involving as it did action across the whole of society and a major change in culture, has yet to be recognised for the potential it has. The situation perhaps a couple of decades back was that liberals and preventionists alike agreed that, with the best interests of society at large, prevention of use had a valid and honourable part to play in national strategy. But since then the dialogue has become more politicised, a dirty tricks battle field, in which the liberalisers mutter under their breath 'Well, if we're serious about allowing free use of drugs, why should we support something which gets in the way?'

In future, the core goal worthy of effort by all across the drugs professional field (with the exception of hard line libertarians) must be to define, resource and achieve the full potential of Prevention. The goal would be to so diminish society's overall drugs problem that flirtation with extraneous and defeatist notions such as legalisation would be seen for what they are – a complete waste of time.

Quotations from 'On Liberty' by John Stuart Mill

- ***"Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign."***
- ***"fully admit that the mischief which a person does to himself may seriously affect, both through their sympathies and their interests, those nearly connected with him and, in a minor degree, society at large."***
- ***"Whenever, in short, there is a definite damage, or a definite risk of damage, either to an individual or to the public, the case is taken out of the province of liberty, and placed in that of morality or law."***