

The Iron Law of Prohibition

Since the early 20th century, the Federal government has attempted to ban the use of addictive drugs. In spite of these efforts, or perhaps *because* of them, drugs continue to be widely available. The “drug trade” is now a billion-dollar, multi-national industry. Why, in spite of spending a fortune on law enforcement, interdiction efforts, prisons and addict treatment, does the “War on Drugs” continue to be waged? One explanation is a *sociological theory* known as the **Iron Law of Prohibition**. It is explained below.



Ban It All! - The “Iron Law of Prohibition” starts with, of course, something being *prohibited*. But it’s not just *anything*...it has to be an addictive, pleasure-inducing substance. Today, the Federal Government has banned many addictive drugs for “recreational use.” Some of these are marijuana, cocaine, crack (a cocaine derivative), narcotics, LSD and Crystal Methamphetamine. Critics charge that such bans are useless because they obviously don’t work, and in fact create problems that are far more severe than those they were intended to resolve.



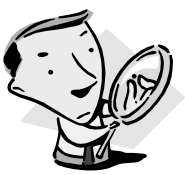
Supply and Demand “Kicks In” - Once government bans an addictive substance, demand for it *dramatically increases*. This is because addicts and those seeking the unique kind of destructive pleasure found in mind-altering drugs still want them - *desperately*. Their desperation allows drug dealers to set outrageously high prices for their products. And as dealers continue to market and sell their products, they produce new legions of addicted souls and thus, “eager customers.”



A Cash Cow for Organized Crime - Drug manufacturing, marketing and selling is a complex business. For example, coca is grown in Colombia, processed and refined in Peruvian labs and smuggled through overseas carriers to dealers throughout North America. This kind of complexity demands *organization*. Enter the “crime syndicates.” These huge organizations, as complex as any multinational corporation, thrive off the constant demand and riches that only an all-cash, tax-free business can provide.



Violence Galore - Legal drugs, such as nicotine and alcohol, are recognized, regulated and protected by the government. When disputes arise between companies over supplies, contracts and the like, they can turn to courts of law. Those involved in the illegal drug trade cannot. Instead, they act as if they are a law unto themselves. The strong punish the weak. Unpaid creditors murder impoverished debtors. Competition between rival drug dealers for the same “turf” frequently escalates towards wholesale slaughter. Innocents are caught in the crossfire. Neighborhoods, cities, even nations are hurled into an abyss of never-ending violence.



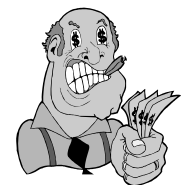
Smaller, Purer, Deadlier - To keep costs down, profits up and to avoid detection, drug dealers *condense* their products. The results: more portable and addictive drugs. We’ve seen this in the past, when gangsters during the Prohibition Era of the 1920’s gave up on bulky, weak beer and wine in favor of “hard liquors,” like whiskey and moonshine. Today’s urban drug dealers have done the same, abandoning the cumbersome powdery bags of cocaine (for the most part) for tiny, ultra-addictive crack pellets.



The Lure of Forbidden Fruit - People, particularly teenagers and young adults, have long been tempted by “the forbidden.” Drug dealers know this, as they aggressively market to this portion of the population. This is why much of the hard liquor consumed during the 1920’s was sold in *speakeasies*, which were illegal, rowdy nightclubs. Today, some of the most common settings teens and young adults buy and use addictive drugs are private parties, rock concerts and “raves,” all of which amount to *contemporary* speakeasies.



Marketing What’s Banned - The location and sale of drugs like alcohol and nicotine is strictly regulated today. In exchange for the immense profits they earn, corporations that sell these substances accept the limitations that the law places upon them. Dealers of illegal substances are bound to no such deal. Instead, they aggressively market their wares wherever their most consistent customers can be found, which is just about *anywhere*. Unfortunately, in many of our nation’s school cafeterias, beer is nowhere to be found, but illegal drugs such as chemically-laced marijuana and crack can be bought in abundance.



The Flowering of Corruption - Criminal syndicates operate outside of the law, but they still cope with its agents every day in their efforts to manufacture, transport and sell their drugs. To cope with the day-to-day challenges from law enforcement, syndicates frequently turn to bribery and blackmail. During the 1920’s, the scope of bribery in the Chicago area was immense. Al Capone’s organization bribed members of the Chicago City Council, the police department - even entire juries. Practices like these continue today, though to varying degrees depending on the nations, money and people involved.



The Challenges of Legalization - Promoters of the “Iron Law of Prohibition” see only one answer in the “Drug War”: *Legalization*. Legalizing drugs, they claim, will end the violence. Government would be able to tax drugs and regulate their purity and marketing, much like it does with alcohol and nicotine products today. Disputes between those in the “drug industry” would be settled peacefully in the courts. Hardcore users might remain, but the immense number of non-violent drug offenders would be released from the nation’s jails, making room for violent criminals. Taxes from drug sales could help pay for addict treatment programs. *Is this the solution?*

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