

Writing Folio

Level: Higher

Genre: Discursive

“Alcohol Poses As Much Danger As Any Other Abused Drug and Should Be Banned”

In the UK, 24% of people are considered to be “hazardous drinkers”. How can we let such a large percentage of people devastate their health, their society and ruin the lives of others? It is widely recognised that there is a massive issue with alcohol in Scotland at the moment. Underage drinking is rife and causes many social problems. One only has to wander the night-time streets of any Scottish town or city to see the waste and hassle alcohol causes. Young people will inevitably be rolling around on pavements - vomiting, crying and screeching. People of all ages seem to enjoy a good fight after a few “bevvies”. Teenagers create disturbances in the street and intimidate law-abiding passers-by. Drinking-related illnesses cost the NHS millions of pounds each year. In almost all countries in the world, adults are allowed to buy and drink alcohol with very little restriction. This is in direct contrast to the legal situation with regard to other mind-altering drugs such as cannabis, cocaine, ecstasy, acid, and heroin. It seems bizarre that we let such a situation continue. Alcohol is an extremely dangerous drug which ruins countless lives. The sale and consumption of alcohol has to be made illegal to overcome the social problems using it causes.

Many would argue that, for most, alcohol is just a harmless pastime – a swift half often takes the sting out of a bruising day. The King of Spain argued no less in the 1970's when lobbying his government to ensure that alcohol was lightly taxed, so that the working man could enjoy his drink of an evening. Many friends of mine find his an admirable sentiment - so much better than the high taxes we place on wine and beer here. They also point to the fact that the Spanish seem to enjoy a healthy relationship with their booze, unlike us irresponsible Brits. Could it be that, in fact, it is the price of alcohol that is driving us to drink?

Not so!

According to a survey undertaken last year by the European Commission, Spain is among the worst countries in Europe for alcohol abuse. 34% of people in Spain drink heavily, as opposed to 29% across Europe as a whole. Spain even beats the UK in this matter! It would appear that cheap, readily available alcohol is likely to be abused. The Scottish Government is presently in the process of re-introducing a Minimum Pricing Bill for Alcohol. It would make those drinks that are presently strong and cheap much more expensive to buy and dissuade people from drinking them. This estimable policy has been based on robust research carried out by Sheffield University which strongly suggests that if the price was set at a high enough level it could reduce the impact and cost of alcohol to society.

Surely then, if slews of studies and mountains of research consistently point out that the higher the price of alcohol, the less people drink and the less social impact it has, then just think of the tremendous benefits of banning it all together.

Social attitudes have to be changed too. Just imagine if the Spanish monarch had lobbied for cannabis

to be legalised, so the workers could enjoy a “toke” at siesta! Or for heroin to be made readily and freely available, so that the lumpen populace could get their daily hit! Well, one can only imagine the apoplexy that might have been induced at the Daily Mail, or its Spanish equivalent. We only accept alcohol as a recreational drug because it has been socially acceptable for such a long time. Just because an idea has sticking power and longevity doesn't necessarily make it a good one. Look at religion, for instance.

If cocaine had been the drug of choice of our ancestors, we might all be popping down the “Offy” for a wrap, or to the Public Snorthouse for a chat and a line or two. The fact that we accept alcohol at all is simply an accident of history. Many other societies, most notably Muslim ones, have done without alcohol for centuries. Attitudes towards drugs change all the time: opium (heroin) was the standard recreational drug of choice of the middle and upper classes right up until the middle of the twentieth century. It was only then that, with a drop in the price of the drug and increasing social inequality, it became associated with the Scheme and deprivation. It would only take a generation to change attitudes to alcohol as well.

What we have to understand is alcohol is just as addictive as other drugs. It isn't special or different. Heroin, cocaine and cannabis have all been shown to have very similar effects to alcohol. Why would we continue to keep alcohol legal, when it has the same mind-altering effects as many illegal drugs? Just like heroin, alcohol triggers the release of dopamine - a chemical which produces feelings of satisfaction. It also increases the production of the brain's natural painkiller - endorphins - which scientists think could be the means by which the brain becomes trained to crave the drug. These are very similar to the effects of otherwise illegal drugs. They also make it highly addictive. It seems absurd that anyone in their right mind would want to keep a mind-altering drug, which endangers the user and others, legal.

Moreover, alcohol significantly increases the chances of a violent crime being committed. Alcohol is a contributory factor in 65-70% of violent crimes, such as child abuse and murder. Statistics from the U.S. show that alcohol is a factor in around a quarter of domestic abuse cases. How many children turn up at school each day unable to concentrate on the task at hand because of the alcohol-induced fist awaiting them once they walk through the front door? It is clear that if we want a more peaceful, more ordered society that it is essential that alcohol has to be removed from it.

Furthermore, isn't it about time that we achieved some consistency with our laws on drugs? We recognise the damage heroin does to society by banning it. Cocaine, just like alcohol, is also used recreationally, yet is still illegal. Cannabis causes almost no social problems and is not addictive, yet is still banned. Alcohol, on the other hand, was directly involved in 6,541 deaths in England alone in 2007. This means that if we continue to allow people to drink alcohol, that we are nothing but hypocrites. We can't ban one “bad” drug and not another. By not banning alcohol we risk great damage to society and show mammoth inconsistency.

For these reasons, it is important that we take action to make alcohol illegal now. It is just as harmful and addictive as illegal drugs, such as heroin. If it was banned, it would mean that we would be more consistent in our approach to mind-altering drugs. Finally, it contributes to all manner of crimes, which otherwise might be prevented. We must stop staring dolefully into our pints, wondering what to do about a myriad of social ills. Alcohol is the corrosive substance which we daily drip onto the already threadbare fabric of our society. If we make alcohol illegal, attitudes towards it will change. Once something becomes illicit, it quickly becomes taboo for most people. Yes, the determined and the desperate will seek it out on the black market, or through their neighbourhood “Alcky-Pusher”, but the majority will speedily learn to live without alcohol and will appreciate the more ordered, cohesive, less

hypocritical society that will inevitably emerge.

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Sources:

debatabase.org
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www.kyero.com