

Traffickers: Drug Markets and Law Enforcement, by **Nicholas Dorn, Karim Murji, and Nigel South**. London: Routledge, 1992. 253 pp. \$69.50 cloth. ISBN: 0-415-03536-8. \$18.95 paper. ISBN: 0-415-03537-6.

Drug Control Policy: Essays in Historical and Comparative Perspective, edited by **William O. Walker III**. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992. 176 pp. \$13.95 paper. ISBN: 0-271-00843-1.

The Search for Rational Drug Control, by **Franklin E. Zimring and Gordon Hawkins**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. 219 pp. \$24.95 cloth. ISBN: 0-521-41668-X.

The Politics of Drug Policy: Déjà Vu All Over Again

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As in other wars, truth is among the first casualties in drug wars. Drug control policies have never been merely rational responses to drug problems. As Zimring and Hawkins point out in *The Search for Rational Drug Control*, the latest drug war was launched precisely when the use and acceptance of drugs were lower than they had been in a decade. They suggest that Reagan, Bush, and the drug warriors of the Right seized this decline as an opportunity to impose an authoritarian agenda on the nation and to take revenge on all those who participated in the permissiveness of the 1960s and 1970s. Despite the war rhetoric, current drug policy is demonstrably not about addiction, public health, social welfare, or even crime. Like its predecessors, this drug war is about what dominant groups define as good and evil. It is being waged against the many millions of Murphy Browns whose private behaviors symbolize a public threat to the "traditional family values" moral ideology.

Zimring and Hawkins carefully deconstruct the Bush administration's *National Drug Control Strategy*, according to which our drug problem consists of *any* use of *any* illicit substance. Casual marijuana use is as bad as heroin addiction, because the real evil in drug use is not the threat to users' health but their "defiance of lawful authority" (p. 9). Thus, it is national policy to imprison casual, nonaddicted users because they are, in Joseph Gusfield's terms, unrepentent, enemy deviants. This helps explain why the document

says nothing about the much more costly consequences of legal drugs.

Zimring and Hawkins show that because the *Strategy* is rooted in moral ideology rather than policy analysis, it is a conceptual catastrophe. Neither "drug" nor "drug problem" is ever defined; the myth of the inevitability of addiction is simply assumed; no solid estimates of the number of addicts exist; cost effectiveness has never even been assessed. They also show that this drug war manifesto is not really intended to reduce harm. Reducing marijuana production is one of its nine quantified goals, but reducing drug-related AIDS and overdose deaths is not.

In a fair-minded review of the lessons of four episodes of drug prohibition, Zimring and Hawkins show the pervasive "immunity to historical evidence" (p. 45) that allows each generation of drug warriors to repeat the rhetoric and the unexamined failures of their predecessors. They note a "metaphysics of uniqueness" (p. 50) in which each new "drug du jour" is the most dangerous ever known. They found little evidence that prohibitions have ever cost-effectively reduced drug problems.

As devastating as this critique is, the comparative-historical essays collected by William O. Walker in *Drug Control Policy* suggest that Zimring and Hawkins understate matters. Historian John C. McWilliams shows that soon after the first federal narcotics law passed in 1914, drug-law enforcement offi-

cials knew their task was impossible. Instead of reconsidering their assumptions, they pushed ahead, aided by self-serving politicians who manipulated and politicized drug issues such that a drug-enforcement bureaucracy became entrenched.

Douglas Clark Kinder's chapter provides powerful evidence that nativism and racism (rather than scientific knowledge) were used to justify each of the five drug wars of the twentieth century. Indeed, nativism and racism were the main reasons that a repressive law enforcement approach won the day. The Reagan administration rediscovered the value of politicizing drug problems in the 1980s; once underclass blacks were linked to a new "most dangerous drug ever known," war was again declared and prisons again began to bulge. The fact that no previous war had ever worked was not a deterrent, in part because of a cultivated historical amnesia and in part because repression of "dangerous" groups has always been central to U.S. drug policy. As McWilliams puts it, our leaders seem repeatedly to insist that "if the cure doesn't work, give more of the same medicine" (p. 31).

Jonathan Marshall's essay suggests that political manipulation and racism aren't the half of it. He presents fascinating data on how the United States has systematically subverted the goals of international drug control in favor of containing communism, making high-level traffickers covert allies in the bargain. This "government-gang symbiosis" (p. 89) was brokered by the CIA, which aided opium smuggling in order to smuggle the tungsten needed in World War II. (Nixon's notorious Watergate "plumbers" first emerged from the CIA underworld to develop assassination plans as a means of drug supply reduction.) Under the banner of "national security," the CIA has made the same shady deals in Afghanistan, Nicaragua, Cuba, and Panama, leaving in their wake powerful criminal syndicates that continue to affect domestic politics in a dozen nations.

In light of such history, Zimring and Hawkins's book seems almost wistful in assuming that drug control ever was or can be "rational." They are right that a range of policies is possible under the prohibition umbrella, and they wisely note that however much prohibitions may deter some crimes, they always create others. Yet their dismissal

of decriminalization seems too simple, too wedded to pharmacological determinism and speculations about deterrence, and overreliant on too few sources. Zimring and Hawkins do offer a very useful discussion of the most basic rationale for all forms of drug control, protection of the young. They note the contradiction between justifying drug laws in terms of protecting youth because they are vulnerable and the harsh punishments these very youth receive for violating such laws. Despite their many insights about the weakness of the current drug-war paradigm, however, their desire to speak to policymakers leaves them squarely within it (e.g., sometimes assuming that mere use constitutes abuse, that the goal of policy should be to get young people who use drugs "back to nonimpaired adolescent development" [p. 132], that sales of marijuana by minors to minors is ipso facto "harm to another" [p. 130], justifying harsher punishment, and that young users require treatment). While most of this chapter is erudite and tightly reasoned, such assumptions are not empirically warranted.

Like drug warriors, Zimring and Hawkins tend not to discuss the many nondrug-related socioeconomic conditions that leave so many young people vulnerable. In *Traffickers: Drug Markets and Law Enforcement*, Nicholas Dorn, Karim Murji, and Nigel South show clearly that in Britain, both drug trafficking and drug use make sense only in the context of high unemployment and a stagnant opportunity structure. Abstract policy analyses like Zimring and Hawkins's tend to sever drug problems from other social problems. This false separation has been one important cause of drug-policy failure throughout the twentieth century.

In their interesting review of the literature on drugs and crime, Zimring and Hawkins find no unidirectional causal link. Policy effectiveness remains an empirical question. Against decriminalization, they argue that the question is not *whether* to use criminal law to reduce drug problems, but rather *how* best to do so. Yet they note the inevitable trade-off in criminal law-based prohibitions: While such a policy can reduce some kinds of drug-related crime, it increases others. Dorn et al. illustrate this point again and again with rich case studies of a range of dealers.

Zimring and Hawkins conclude that the

evidence to date argues against devoting substantial crime control resources to the arrest and incarceration of drug users except for specific settings where illicit drug use and high street crime clearly coincide. This wise suggestion would be a marked improvement over current policies, but it is not without risks. In *Traffickers*, Dorn et al. carefully tracked a variety of dealers as they responded to new law-enforcement strategies and found both "displacement" and "replacement" effects. Indeed, perhaps the most compelling theme in this book is that because most drug trafficking is *not* organized in large cartels—it is typically "fragmentary and fluid," a form of "disorganized crime" (p. 42)—each new enforcement strategy breeds new adaptations by dealers. And thanks to the handsome profits made possible by prohibition, traffickers can afford almost any new tool or technique that helps them evade the law.

In tracing the recent history of trafficking in Britain, for example, Dorn, Murji, and South show how repressive prohibitory policies pushed out the "trading charities" of the 1960s, in which drugs were exchanged among friends mostly for enjoyment. In their stead came more hardened, profit-oriented, and criminal traffickers willing to risk longer prison sentences for higher profits. Thus, another irony of drug wars: Under escalating law-enforcement pressure, relatively nonmalevolent forms of dealing based on use value were replaced by more violent forms based on exchange value.

Similarly, after police began to tap phones, dealers bought beepers and cellular phones. When massive imprisonment and longer sentences failed to stop new dealers from filling the gap, British law enforcement, like that in the United States, went to asset forfeiture. This led traffickers to offshore

banking, money laundering, and new forms of corruption. Even "buy and bust" operations against neighborhood retail sales led to adaptations in trafficking organizations and the formation of copping communities. Dorn et al. use joint ethnographies of traffickers and narcs to show that as law enforcement increases risks, traffickers move to larger quantities or harder drugs, or both. As Dorn, Murji, and South put it, "You may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb" (p. 187). They conclude that the end results of this interactive escalation in Britain are a national police force along the lines of a domestic CIA, less democratic accountability, an ever-widening net of social control, and no real reduction in drug-related harm.

For all the fine work of Zimring and Hawkins in pushing drug policy away from impossibly utopian principles such as a "drug-free America" and "zero tolerance," the deeper political-economic history found in Walker's volume and the concrete case studies of Dorn et al. suggest that while "rational drug control" is not an oxymoron, the search for it in the United States may be a long one. In different ways, all three sets of authors show that drug warriors have chosen ideological zeal over effective policy. Yet all three in one way or another make the important point that drug use is not about to go away. If these books help get only that point across, the public will be better able to see, as Zimring and Hawkins say, that the next set of moral entrepreneurs claiming they can "cure" our drug problems are fraudulent quacks offering the equivalent of copper bracelets. It remains to be seen whether a new administration will embrace a shift of governmental attention in which drug users are human and public health is taken seriously.