

## Ganja decriminalization T&T style.

The Dangerous Drugs (Amendment) Bill 2019 is laid in the Parliament of T&T and its clauses reveal the politics of decriminalization from the perspective of the present government. Already on the local government 2019 campaign trail this bill has been cited as the magic n bullet to wrest control of the ganja market from gangland T&T. In keeping with the politics of the day in the west, these claims are being made devoid of context, with no reference to reality on the ground, simply delusional pie in the sky.

### The Reality

T&T has the largest volume of imports of ganja in the Caribbean island chain imported solely for local consumption. T&T has the largest import based ganja local consumption market in the Caribbean. T&T has the most lucrative import based ganja market in the Caribbean island chain which shows all the symptoms of Dutch disease. This ganja market where demand outstrips supply is under the control of transnational organised crime as ganja from multiple sources are sucked into this traffickers market where they set prices because of the intense demand/supply imbalance. Transnational organised crime deliberately under-supplies the market which supports outrageous prices for imported product of questionable purity and efficacy. This grave imbalance of demand and supply heightened by the deliberate restriction of supply to drive up prices spawned and drives the ganja wars of the 21<sup>st</sup> century which are not abating. One result of these market forces is the price for a pound of local, high potency, organic non-compressed ganja at TTD 10,000. A commodity worth killing and to die for. Product is today sourced from Colombia via Venezuela, St Vincent, Guyana, Jamaica, the USA and Canada such is the potency of demand on the local ganja market. Prohibition in T&T has then failed miserably to curb demand for ganja across generational lines where the level of acceptance of ganja today as necessary to personal wellness amongst the digital generation outstrips that of the previous generation and dwarfs that of the generations of the 1960s and 1970s which were supposed to be our ganja head generations. The prohibition discourse therefore has no hegemony over the digital generation and its proponents will not go quietly hence the punitive punishment emphasis of the amendment bill.

The volume and value of illicit ganja imports that continuously and sustainably enter T&T and sold on the local ganja market potently indicate the failure of the State to police its borders and stem the corruption of State agencies by transnational organized crime to purchase impunity for their illicit trade. The State and its politicians then resort to policing the end users in their bid to maintain the grand mansion of prohibition for it is the basis of social control. The move to decriminalize the possession of 30 grams and less of ganja whilst buttressing the grand mansion of prohibition attests to the operative political imperative of the moment. The pressing need to illustrate that we deliver to our voter base in an environment of hard times, hand to mouth survival in the midst of gangland on a roll is just one operational reality. What you give with one hand you take

with the next as we can only grow four male ganja plants per cycle. This condemns us to become ganja farmers overnight as the rearing of a single female ganja tree is probable cause to bust down on us whilst we reap ganja crops of less than potent and efficacious ganja we need for our personal use. The product of a male ganja tree is pure junk, of no use especially to those using ganja as medicine. The State is now policing four ganja plants to ensure we are growing the allowed type by sex, opening our four plants to policing and criminalisation by denying us access to the female plant which is the premier producer of quality ganja. The message from the politicians is then clear that we must remain consumers never evolve into producers so we either go on the ganja block or access medical marijuana sold at outrageous prices as a result of the monopoly guaranteed by the politicians to the less than 1 per centers waiting in the wings or both. Prohibition on steroids for the masses and for the oligarchs a new licit, high demand industry to bleed us by.

Transnational organised crime, gangland and decriminalization

The amendments will not defuse the ganja wars only intensify them as: demand will move out of the shadows and make itself apparent, palpable. The subsequent scramble for supply will intensify the wars and transnational organised crime will complete its assault to exert hegemony over the ganja supply side of T&T which includes producing and selling legal medical ganja. With the application of the protocols developed by transnational organised crime for retailing in a decriminalized market, ganja blocks that presently operate with purchased impunity will now operate with de facto legalization. The cost of purchased impunity from State agencies will drop whilst gangland attached to transnational organised crime maximizes its profits from the ganja trade. The single most important instrument to impact the ganja wars i.e. the number of plants a person can plant, rear and reap has been sacrificed on the altar of political expediency. Four male plants is then worse than none at all when what we need are seven plants per person. But seven plants per person places the medical marijuana hustle in jeopardy. In order to justify its intervention vehicle the State refuses to recognize and act upon the ganja wars, the blood letting simply does not matter exposing the worldview of a prohibitionist.

The salient reality is the powerlessness of the State and its politicians to prevent transnational organised crime from exerting hegemony over the legal ganja business in T&T. Wherever the MTTOs are operational in a decriminalized or legalized ganja market they fully exploit these markets just look at the State of California, USA. In the case of T&T demand is not going away no matter what the prohibitionists say and transnational crime dominates the supply side of the market best poised to dominate the present intervention to ensure sustainable hegemony coupled with profit maximization. The present bill is then a boon, a free ride to transnational organised crime and its affiliates in gangland T&T because of the refusal of the politicians to recognize that prohibition has failed and is the cause of the blood letting of the ganja wars. If you don't have the testicular fortitude to legalize ganja then accept that your only worthwhile

intervention in this market is to give persons the right to plant a quantum of ganja plants that will change the supply side dynamics of the market but you cannot do this as it does not flow with your political DNA.

The creation of retail outlets selling licit ganja termed medical ganja will heighten the present level of criminal violence in T&T as these outlets will be mobbed, robbed and looted to seize their cash and ganja stock in trade as in decriminalized ganja markets this is the new criminal growth enterprise. This will be especially so in T&T given the acute imbalance between demand and supply. Cash earned from the sale of licit ganja in T&T will be banked where? Banks in T&T connected to SWIFT via correspondent banks under the control of the New York Fed face expulsion as in the USA this is drug money, dirty money subject to interdiction and sanction of the correspondent banks. Prohibition for the masses but putting the financial system at existential risk for the oligarchs.

The decriminalization of possession of 30 grams and less of ganja is not the end of prohibition. In the great mansion of prohibition decriminalization is a very small room and this will be expressed via the backlash that will be unleashed whenever the bill becomes law. Expect urine analysis tests when you apply for a job and no job when you test positive, expect more and more drug testing on the job putting the Industrial Court in play given its jurisprudence of treating with a permanent employee with an addiction problem. For due to no lack of trying there is no data to-date that proves ganja use alters the chemistry of the brain to render the brain dependent on the substance. That is what is an addiction. Ganja is not rum, tobacco, crack, meth, Ex etc. Whilst you are policing the end users transnational organised crime trafficks tonnes of ganja at will with impunity. This bill is then faulty legislation which is worst than none at all because it refuses to deal with the specific and unique features of the local ganja market of T&T and when enacted as law the ganja wars, the violence that results will escalate in T&T with no effective rise in economic activity in the licit economy. It is then a boon, a windfall for transnational organised crime. Pax Mexicana!