

Reason 16

The Cancerous Prison-Industrial Complex

“The War on Drugs, besides being laughably inept and already visibly lost, is in fact the driving force behind serious crime.” (1)

Justice William A. Newsom, California Court of Appeals

Our rate of imprisonment is seven and a half time greater than the Group of Seven (U.K., Japan, Germany, France, Italy, and Canada, without the U.S.), almost five and a half times the European country rates and more than four times the world average, according to the National Council on Crime and Delinquency. Prisons are career crime college for inmates. They create real criminals out of non-violent offenders.

The proof: Two-thirds are rearrested within three years of their release, substantiating that prisons rarely succeed at rehabilitation. Furthermore, one-third of prisoners die before they reach forty-five years of age, again proving prison is a ginormous fiasco and the War on Drugs a monumental failure. This chapter presents the different ways prison wrecks and prematurely ends so many lives.

When we incarcerate a drug dealer, we neither reduce the number of dealers nor the amount of drugs on the street. Instead, we simply create a job opening with multiple applicants, who often use deadly violence to land the position. Many narcotics officers report there’s already a back-up dealer on the street by the time they return from processing an arrest.

And when we imprison someone for mere possession, it’s not just a total waste of time and money; we change a taxpayer into a tax burden and we immorally convert a simple user to a career criminal. It needlessly ruins a life forever and it’s an abuse of our judicial system. So in both instances we accomplish absolutely nothing.

More important, there’s no ethical basis for incarcerating someone just because they use drugs and harm no one, yet we arrest someone every twenty seconds.

Our prison rates are so high because our politicians have been able to convince us that they are “tough on drugs.” They con us into believing that by locking up our fellow citizens, they can diminish drug use and make us safer. Both are huge lies. All this imprisonment has accomplished is to destroy millions of lives. Meanwhile, we continue to elect people who don’t care about the welfare of our children, teens, women, or men, and certainly not about our minorities. More drugs than ever are available and we’re much less safe because of the drug war.

Drug expert Joseph Califano, Jr., concludes, “After years of studying the relationship between crime and substance abuse, I am convinced that this jumble of warehousing and punishment-only prison systems is public policy crafted in the theatre of the absurd.” (2)