

Narcotrafficking - Underground Activity or Business Venture?

The production and trafficking of drugs is a highly profitable, transnational capitalist activity. At present, the production and trafficking of drugs is one of the most profitable businesses in the world, equal or superior to arms trafficking.

Drug trafficking is not an "external evil" of capitalism. The term "illegal" does not explain the economic reality, since capitalism, according to its own logic, accepts any activity which generates the process of capital accumulation, whether this activity be harmful to humanity or not. Thus, we have seen phenomena ranging from the contamination of the environment by legal industrial activities, to the major weapons industries raking in record profits as a result of genocidal wars.

The drug trafficker is acting within the framework of the capitalist system, not against nor outside of it. The notion that the narcotics industry is reserved for shadowy criminals is a fallacy. In fact, the narcotics industry forms part of the international economy. Those who control the international trafficking of "illegal" drugs are also those who control "respectable" and "legal" enterprises. Billions of dollars are injected into the world's markets as a result of "illegal" trafficking of drugs. This tremendous sum is invested in all areas of industry and has helped reactivate the economies of major industrial nations. Given this situation, referring to drug production and trafficking as part of an underground economy is profoundly contradictory.

Condemning Indigenous people as the source of the problem is more practical and acceptable for policy-makers in the industrialized countries than examining and correcting the problems in their own culture. In any event, if cocaine production were to end, the present drug-users would continue to consume legal, illegal, natural and/or synthetically-produced drugs. This situation has been exacerbated by the North American government's drastic cutbacks in drug treatment programs, among other significant social programs.

Coca and Cocaine - as Different as Grape is from Wine

The official discourse has incorporated two completely different realities into one issue: the reality behind coca and the reality surrounding cocaine use. Lumping these together invokes feelings of social decay and collective guilt. Coca has been stigmatized, its use (whether masticated, used as a medicine, or in ceremonies) has been confused with drug addiction. Coca, as the raw material for cocaine, has been targeted as the critical element in the "crime" of drug trafficking. Therefore, the coca growers, the

peasant farmers and the nations located in the coca growing region, have been fingered as the guilty parties. Rather than approaching the problem of drug addiction in a rational and objective manner, human feelings and social values are being manipulated. Without a doubt, the interests of those in power lie behind this discourse.

It is necessary to change the manner in which the problem has been approached, analyzing the concrete differences existing between coca and cocaine, two distinct phenomena and two distinct realities.

1. Coca and cocaine are two completely different substances. The first is a natural substance which produces no harmful effects on human health, is of great nutritional value, and possesses medicinal properties. The second is the result of a chemical transformation, denaturing coca in both appearance and effects. Cocaine is harmful. It is a drug which destroys and enslaves.

2. Coca cultivation and cocaine production are two radically different activities with respect to the material and social wealth generated by each.

3. The marketing of coca is completely different from the marketing and transportation of cocaine. The use of the coca leaf in its natural state, whether masticated, employed to cure or as part of a ritual, is a harmless, traditional manner of using the leaf. Drug trafficking is a problem for the producer nations because it involves a new form of economic, political and social aggression by the capitalist system. It maintains and reinforces a dependent relationship with consumer nations, and requires the economic and political subjugation of the producer nations. The clandestine nature of drug trafficking has contributed to the extremely inhumane working conditions for those involved. It has created a social sector which is virtually enslaved. Additionally, the production and trafficking of drugs in the producer nations is encouraging the use of these drugs locally.

In light of the dramatic differences between coca and cocaine, it is necessary to change the course of "drug war" policies.

The present policies of the consumer nations constitute a direct aggression against the coca producing farmers, namely the Indigenous populations of the Andes. These policies do not represent an effective means of interdiction because they are based on the premise that coca cultivation is at the root of the problem, which is clearly not the case.

To lash out against Indigenous farmers is certainly easier, less costly and more prudent than combating the drug traffickers whose origins lie in Western culture.

