



British “Drug Czar” Fired Over Inconvenient Facts

While serving as the chairman of the government’s Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD), Nutt made claims about marijuana, ecstasy, and LSD being less dangerous than legal substances like alcohol and tobacco. He compared the risks of horseback riding with those of ecstasy, and even accused the government of “Luddite tendencies” and misleading the public.



"Gordon Brown makes completely irrational statements about cannabis being 'lethal', which it is not. I'm not prepared to mislead the public about the harmfulness of drugs like cannabis and ecstasy," Nutt explained. "I think most scientists will see this as an example of the Luddite attitude of governments towards science."

In response to the criticism, Home Office Secretary Alan Johnson charged Nutt with crossing the line into politics and even “lobbying” and “campaigning against government policy” regarding drugs. Johnson said he had “lost confidence” in Nutt’s ability to offer unbiased advice, and demanded that he resign his post. Following the spat, several members of the Council resigned in protest as well, and others may follow after a meeting next week with the Home Secretary.

But Nutt went on a rampage, remaining unrepentant and blasting the government’s attitude. "My view is policy should be based on evidence," he opined. "It's a bit odd to make policy that goes in the face of evidence. The danger is they are misleading us. The scientific evidence is there: it's in all the reports we published. Our judgments about the classification of drugs like cannabis and ecstasy have been based on a great deal of very detailed scientific appraisal."

The professor emphasized again that marijuana was “not that harmful” while railing against alcohol. "My view is that, if you want to reduce the harm to society from drugs, alcohol is the drug to target at present," he explained, suggesting that tripling the price may help mitigate the problem.

Nutt is also [threatening](#) to set up an independent advisory committee. Though he refuses to disclose the backers, he claims to have the financial support for creating the body and that he would bring a lot of the government’s panel with him. “All I can say is many of them are completely behind me and many of them are minded to resign,” Nutt said of his former colleagues.

The furor has spread beyond the drug advisory committee as well. "I am writing immediately to the Home Secretary to ask for clarification as to why Sir David Nutt has been relieved of duties as chair of the Advisory Council on Misuse of Drugs at a time when independent scientific advice to Government is essential," said Phil Willis, the chairman of the government’s Science and Technology Select Committee. "It is disturbing if an independent scientist should be removed for reporting sound scientific advice."



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on November 5, 2009

Other groups outside of the government have joined in as well. Policy and communications chief Claudia Rubin from the non-profit group Release, described as a center of expertise on drugs and drugs law, blasted the decision to penalize Nutt. "It's a real shame and a real indictment of the Government's refusal to take any proper advice on this subject," she said.

Last year 7,341 deaths were directly attributed to alcohol in the nation, while tobacco claimed almost 115,000. According to the figures released by the University of London, ecstasy killed 12, while no deaths were attributed to marijuana.

In related news, the U.S.-based non-profit Law Enforcement Against Prohibition is [warning](#) of a new rule to silence U.S. government drug advisers that is currently making its way through the Senate. In a statement posted online, the group said the amendment "will legally prevent some of the government's top advisers from even discussing the idea of legalizing or decriminalizing drugs as a solution to the failed 'war on drugs.'"

The "censorship amendment" being sponsored by Republican Senator Charles Grassley of Iowa would be part of a larger bill creating a commission to study the nation's criminal justice and drug policies. It is supposed to offer recommendations on how to improve the system, but would be barred from considering certain alternatives if the amendment is passed. It could be voted on in the Senate Judiciary Committee as early as November 5.

The "war on drugs" has clearly failed. Around the world, the United Nations' drug treaties are forcing countries like the United States and Britain to adopt senseless policies. Millions of nonviolent offenders are in prison while governments squander tens of billions every year enriching criminal syndicates and spreading violence throughout the world. But if governments continue to silence dissenters, constitutional and rational approaches to the problem may not even be considered.



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