



General Certificate of Education  
Advanced Level Examination  
June 2010

## **Critical Thinking**

**CRIT4**

**Unit 4 Reasoning and Decision Making**

## **Unseen Source Material**

The material consists of one source (**Document I**) for use with **Questions 6 to 9**.

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**Document I**

# **Hit the drug users. It's that simple.**

## **If the war on narcotics is failing, then giving up isn't the answer.**

1. It didn't need Lord Birt<sup>1</sup> and his "blue skies" thinking to tell the Government that the war on drugs has failed miserably. In fact, anyone who tried to make out that it was being won would be seeing the sky rose-tinted, through their spectacles. As a report by the strategy unit at the Cabinet Office makes clear, the result of the global war against drugs so far has been a massive increase in drug consumption. I can quite believe Lord Birt's estimate that the cost of crime associated with heroin and crack use in Britain is £16 billion a year.
2. It is becoming received wisdom that the only solution is legalisation. Lift prohibition, goes the argument, and the price of drugs will fall, putting the drug barons out of business. Occasionally a further argument is added: that making things illegal merely tempts people to do them and that if prohibition were to be lifted, drugs would lose their allure.
3. Around dinner-party tables in London, clouded in pungent reefer-smoke, it is no doubt an easy line of thought to sustain. It is less easy when not stoned. Were illegal drugs to be legalised, their supply and distribution would presumably fall into the hands of multinational companies, just like those who sell tobacco.
4. True, tobacco executives don't gun each other down on the streets, but they are frequently accused, often by the same people who advocate liberalisation of drugs, of peddling death to impressionable young people, especially in the Third World. It is hard to imagine that many supporters of drug liberalisation would be pleased by the sight of Western executives touring China and Africa promoting crack cocaine.
5. As for the argument that prohibition gives allure to drugs, it is nonsense. Look at the relative numbers of people who drink and smoke, and those who take illegal drugs; there is no comparison. Legalisation of any illegal drug, be it cannabis, cocaine or heroin, would inevitably be accompanied by a huge rise in consumption as experimentation became much easier.
6. Much as I favour free-market solutions to many economic problems, this is one free market that we can well do without. Is there anyone who really fancies an increase in the squalor, violence and mental illness associated with drug taking, and to see more young lives ruined? To say that drug takers would no longer have to steal if hard drugs were legalised is foolish: it would still cost money to buy your fix of heroin, even if not quite as much. Given that heroin addicts tend to find it hard to earn money at all, you can be sure they would still end up stealing to maintain their habit.
7. As for the assertion that drug-dealing gangs would cease to fight each other were there no illegal drugs over which to fight, it is extremely naïve. There will be plenty of other criminal openings for any drug dealers forced into a career change. The result of drug liberalisation could prove extremely hazardous to the public if, say, the drug dealers moved en masse into, say, carjacking.
8. The war against drugs is failing, but giving up on it is hardly the only option. There is, of course, the option of intensifying it. In spite of the fearsome resources deployed against coca growers in Colombia (which Lord Birt says has merely switched the industry to Bolivia), in some respects the war against drugs has been extremely feeble.

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9. When he was justifying war against the Taliban in 2001, Tony Blair made the astonishing claim that Britain was sending in the troops partly in order to suppress the heroin industry. In fact, it was the Taliban who had suppressed heroin growing, and us, after the war, who failed to tackle its resurgence.
  10. But there is little point in engaging in a war against drugs if we are going to tackle only supply and do so little to fight demand. What effort is going into the punishment of users of illegal drugs? None at all. On the contrary, drug users are increasingly seen as victims, who have no power to resist what is pushed at them by evil dealers and should in no circumstances be saddled with a criminal record.
  11. Ann Widdecombe, the former Shadow Home Secretary, was scorned for daring to suggest that anyone caught in possession of cannabis should be fined £100. I have never understood what was wrong with her suggestion. We prosecute those who buy stolen goods, not just those who steal them. We prosecute those who view child porn on the internet, not just the porn merchants.
  12. Why are we so feeble at prosecuting those who encourage drug dealers by buying their product? Admittedly, it would be counterproductive to send drug users to prison when our jails are awash with drugs. But dope smokers forced to do community service with the mentally ill (many who gained their affliction by smoking dope), crack dealers forced to help victims of street crime? Why not?
  13. The negative outcome of Prohibition of liquor in America in the 1920s should not blind us to the fact that a war against hard drugs has been fought once – and won. Parts of Britain in mid-Victorian times, most notably the Fens<sup>2</sup>, were plagued by opium addicts. One chemist in Wisbech was found to have 40 gallons of laudanum in stock. Wisbech, not coincidentally, had an infant mortality rate worse than inner-city Liverpool. Yet between the 1870s and 1920s opium taking in Britain was almost entirely eradicated, through a combination of restriction of supply and suppression of demand.
  14. If it can be done once, it can be done again. But it will take more than just a campaign against Yardies<sup>3</sup> and South American farmers to succeed. Above all, we should stop treating drug takers as helpless victims, and instead make them responsible for their actions. The drugs problem lies as much with middle-class recreational users as it does with Third World farmers who grow illegal drugs and British gangs who trade in them.

Source: Adapted from ROSS CLARK, [www.timesonline.co.uk](http://www.timesonline.co.uk), 4 July 2005

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<sup>1</sup>Lord Birt was strategy adviser to Tony Blair from 1999 to 2005.

<sup>2</sup>The Fens is a rural area in Eastern England; it contains the small town of Wisbech.

<sup>3</sup>Yardies are drug gangs of Jamaican origin. The word 'Yardie' stems from the slang name given to Jamaican neighbourhoods suffering poverty, crime and gang violence.

**END OF SOURCE MATERIAL**

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