

“It’s the drug war, stupid”

I want to talk about fighting back.

Three years ago, my house was raided. My roommate, a really decent fellow, and something of a party animal, was honestly also a small-time drug dealer. I don’t mean he made a living selling drugs; he just had plenty of marijuana and cocaine around, and would sell it to those of his friends who wanted some. He worked a full-time job, waiting tables in a restaurant, and would stay up partying after work until two or three in the morning. I’ve seen him give away a hundred dollars worth of drugs just passing it around to the people in the room, then do the same thing again the next night. I doubt he ever made much money on drugs. He didn’t stand out on street corners hawking crack to teenagers. Like I said, he had plenty of drugs around, and would sell to people who knew this.

One of his friends, or should I say a friend of a friend, got busted and cut a deal with the police. He became what the search warrant called a “confidential informant”. He persuaded his girlfriend to call her friend, my roommate, and arrange a small transaction. Wearing a wire, he came to our house, bought \$50 worth of cocaine, then walked back to the detective waiting in a car outside and handed it over to him.

A few weeks later, the house was raided. I was the only person home, working in the kitchen as I recall, when the knock came at the door. “Police officers executing search warrant!” they announced, pepper sprayed the dogs, handcuffed me against the wall and began their search. I didn’t resist, but there was no need for me to cooperate. I said little, and sat handcuffed in the living room, reading the search warrant, while they combed the house. I knew what they were looking for, and knew they would find it in my friend’s possessions. There was nothing in my possessions, so I was arrested, jailed, released, and eventually had my charges dropped in exchange for taking three months of counseling. Five days after the raid, we were evicted.

I wanted to fight back.

I wanted to hurt people the way people had hurt me. I want to violate society. I toyed with the idea of crashing a plane full of explosives into the DEA headquarters, but never saw myself as much of a terrorist. For a while I fantasied a plan to organize a militia and take over the Delmarva Peninsula, but that was just a pipe dream. I settled on something simpler, like walking up to a D.C. Metro station, sitting down on the railroad tracks, and refusing to let the trains go though until I was arrested and dragged away. Then I started thinking about all the ordinary people who’d just be trying to go somewhere on the Metro for their lunch hour, and all the people who’d be screaming and cursing at me while I screamed and cursed at them.

I gave up on fighting back.

W.H. Auden wrote, “Those to whom evil is done/Do evil in return.” The lesson has not been learned by those who finance and conduct the war on drugs. It’s hard to imagine a world where only the police bust down doors and storm into people’s homes, yet everyone else is peaceful and non-violent. There is a cycle of violence in our society. Armed men bust into people’s homes — criminals, yes, but also the police. Police violence is not limited to bullet-ridden corpses in New York streets. Armed search and seizure has become a standard tactic in the war on drugs. C.O.P.S. has to be one of the most violent shows on television, and the nightly news often runs a close second. The reason? Simple. Armed force has become an acceptable means of social reform in our society, and the drug war is leading the vanguard.

No legitimate government is omnipotent. To prohibit an individual’s actions, a real harm to others must be present. To justify the use of force, those targeted must themselves use force. Those who see the war on drugs as a popular crusade believe in a mirage, one that only needs to be walked up to and confronted to expose it. The war on drugs is a war. Nothing more, nothing less. We’ve seen war in Bosnia, war in Iraq, war in Vietnam. Now we’re seeing war at home, and there’s nothing glamorous or heroic about it in the least. Everyone’s cracking down, getting tough, fighting back, and having “zero tolerance” for “them”.

Yet a survey of the main political campaigns websites’ reveals almost no mention of the war on drugs, and any discussion of violence tends to focus on gun control, not government restraint.

I’ve decided to fight back in a more constructive way.

I propose a political campaign to focus against the war on drugs. Why? First, the drug war is a poster child for intrusive, violent, unconstitutional government. Also, it is prominent and controversial. There’s no need to raise the drug war in people’s

conscience, because it’s already there. Everyone’s heard about it, and everyone has some kind of opinion about it. Enough people are opposed to it to provide an initial base of support. If these people can’t be mobilized to protest against it, the fault lies with the organizers. Finally, but perhaps most importantly, it’s something I feel passionately about because it’s touched me personally, and if you’ve read this far, I hope you feel the same way.

What is needed, first and foremost, is to create the war on drugs as a national campaign issue. The candidates are not talking about it, and the way to get them talking about it is to stage effective media events that highlight it.

I propose a series of protest rallies at the DEA’s headquarters in northern Virginia. Nothing violent or even confrontational; there’s no reason not to talk to the DEA and police in advance and hopefully find a mutually agreeable format. The key will be to attract enough people to get media attention. The way to do this is to stage a series of rallies, not just one, perhaps one a week, and make them entertaining and interesting enough to bring people back the next week. Have a couple dozen people pounding the pavements for the week in advance of each rally. Pass out flyers on local college campuses, at sporting events and concerts, at clubs and bars, and put ads in local newspapers and on the Internet. Expect something like a 1% return. One thousand people would be an excellent target number for the first rally; this means approaching 100,000 people. If twenty people can hand out 1,000 flyers a day for a week in advance, this goal can be obtained.

Once the rallies have begun creating the drug war as a campaign issue, a rapid and subtle tack is required. The issue is not drugs, it is violence. The issue is not whether people should use drugs, but whether the government should force people not to use them. The issue is not whether the government should pass laws against drug use, but whether force and coercion should be embraced as means of social reform. Always the question should be turned back into, “Do we want armed men busting into people’s homes because of what they smoke?”

After a few weeks or perhaps a month of rallies, discussing and debating the issues, it will be time to tack again and present a solution. Not an outright condemnation of the drug war, but a call for a vote on the drug war, a national referendum to decide the issue. This can be implemented by an act of Congress placing an item on the November ballot and repealing the drug laws if a majority of nation’s people vote against the drug war. Whether such a vote actually occurs is unimportant, it simply must be proposed. Any discussion about the drug war is then shifted to a discussion about a vote on the drug war. Anyone then opposed to our position has aligned themselves against a popular vote on a controversial issue, and this must be fully exploited, by hammering at it repeatedly. “A vote, a vote!” should be the constant rallying cry.

If we can successfully reach this point, ideally by late summer 2000, we’ll be over the hump. By creating a discussion, the political parties and candidates will be forced to respond, primarily at their party conventions. Two major courses of action present themselves. If the major political parties are willing to pursue reform, and in particular if the sitting Congress is willing to authorize a national referendum on the drug war, then we already have a voice in the government and should simply canvas the country, campaigning people to vote down the drug war in the referendum, and use this leverage to encourage further reform. If the major political parties take a strongly anti-reform position, then we should attempt to form a broad liberal-conservative coalition, based on the principles of restrained, constitutional government, and probably in concert with the Reform and Libertarian parties, in an attempt to turn the 2000 election itself into a de facto referendum on these issues.

What’s the next step? Organizing the organizers. Those interested in discussing this document are invited to a meeting:

Monday, April 24, 2000 at 8 P.M.

94th Aero Squadron Restaurant
5240 Paint Branch Parkway
College Park, MD 20740

10 minute walk from College Park metro station
Head west from platform (Kiss & Ride side)
Turn left on River Rd
Turn right onto Paint Branch Pkwy
Restaurant on left

The author can be reached via email as baccala@freesoft.org