

Portland's decriminalisation nightmare

Drugs have turned the city into a 'demonic hell hole'

Kevin Dahlgren, *The Spectator*, 16 December 2023

§1- In November 2020, Oregon passed Measure 110, decriminalising non-commercial drug possession. The state also significantly increased funding for recovery and harm reduction programmes. It sounded like a great plan to voters, so it passed with 60 per cent approval.

§2- What has occurred though over the last three years is nothing short of tragic. When Measure 110 passed, fentanyl was starting to take over our streets. For homeless addicts it began as a general curiosity, which quickly devolved into the widespread use of the deadliest drug in history. Fentanyl is 50 times stronger than heroin, and with two major competing cartels (China and Mexico), the price has now dropped to an all-time low. Three years ago, a blue fentanyl pill cost about six to seven dollars. That has now dropped to one to two dollars. Due to its addictive properties, low cost, and the fact that almost all other street drugs are laced with it, nearly all street-level addicts are using fentanyl – whether they want to or not. This is what has turned the city of Portland into the largest open-air drug zone in state history.

§3- As for the promised recovery programmes, it took 34 months for the first medical detox facility to open with Measure 110 money, and in that time, we have had a record number of overdoses and deaths that have increased each year since the measure passed.

§4- Despite the lack of new infrastructure, there have been empty beds in these detox facilities from day one, because Portland does not have enough outreach teams to find people to fill them. I have talked to and interviewed hundreds of homeless people in the last year, and over 90 per cent tell me they have never been approached by an outreach worker offering services. So what we have is the deadliest, most addictive drug in history introduced to a vulnerable population who lack rational thinking and critical thought just as the state passed the decriminalisation of drugs. Add to that virtually no outreach teams to find and help these individuals – except for harm reduction workers, who give addicts the tools to continue to use – and we ended up with the perfect storm.

§5- I have been doing street homeless outreach for over 30 years in Portland, Oregon, and by 2020, I thought I had seen everything. But I have never witnessed anything like what takes place on our streets daily. I have found more dead people and seen more overdoses this year than in all the other years of my working and volunteering combined. A homeless woman I interviewed a few months ago while working on a project with local photographer Tara Faul told us Portland had become a 'demonic hell hole.' She told us she has had an opioid addiction since she was 14 years old and has been on and off the streets ever since. She said at night, she hears 'screams and screeches that don't sound human.'

§6- A handful of us over the last three years have been very vocal about the negative consequences of decriminalising drugs. PDX Real, run by Angela Todd and Jeff Church, is one of the loudest and most influential voices who have successfully changed people's minds and helped move the needle. Many though were surprised when Governor Kotek, an early supporter of Measure 110, recently said, 'When it comes to open-air drug use, nobody wants to see that,' and said she now supports a ban on public drug use and wants to give additional resources to law enforcement. This is a huge step forward and I commend her for saying it. Not everyone, though, is happy she has taken this stance. One supporter of Measure 110 said Kotek's reforms would push people back into the shadows and 'people will die because of this.' The reality though is that people are already dying now and in record numbers.

§7- Homelessness and addiction should never have become a political issue. They affect all walks of life and do not care who or what you believe in. Oregon must speed up building additional recovery-type programmes and significantly increase outreach to find the people who cannot find us.

§8- The decriminalisation of drugs is a complex issue and has divided our community because both sides have points of views with valid arguments. If we can set aside our differences and work together, I am cautiously optimistic we can end this crisis, restore our communities and save countless lives.

- **Read the title. Explain what it might refer to. Try to link it with the previous video.**

- **§1: explain what happened in November 2020.**

A referendum was held in Oregon on the decriminalization of recreational drugs for non-commercial purposes. 60% of people voted in favor of it.

Was there any paradox in the measure?

At the same time, the measure provided for additional help for addicts. On the one hand, recreational drugs became legal for everyone, which sounds like a green light to drug use, but on the other hand the state tried to encourage people to quit doing drugs, through increased funding.

- **What is your stance on the decriminalization of drugs? Justify your ideas with precise examples/arguments.**

- **§2: pick out information about fentanyl.**

A painkiller that was soon diverted into a recreational drug.

- **Draw a conclusion on Measure 110.**

This might have been a badly timed measure, but it coincided with the boom in fentanyl use. One event might have led to the other, and the other way around.

- **§3, 4, 5: give 3 facts showing Measure 110 is a failure.**
- **Find the reasons for this failure according to the author.**

First, it took too long for the funding to be used appropriately, that is to say for the opening of new rehab/detox facilities. Then, the city of Portland doesn't have enough people (outreach teams) that patrol the streets and offer shelter to homeless addicts. Indeed, 90% of the latter have never met one of them. Eventually, another problem which is linked to the previous one, is that the city does have harm reduction workers, who are here to give addicts ways to use safely. Therefore, addicts have the tools they need to go on doing drugs.

- **What can you say about Kevin Dahlgren?**

The author of the article has himself been part of an outreach team for more than 30 years in Portland, and he thus offers us a first-hand account of the situation.

- **§6, 7, 8: try to list some of the reactions to the decriminalization of drugs.**

After 3 years of legalization in Oregon, some people are starting to express their disagreement with the measure, notably the Governor (Tina Kotek, a Democrat), who initially supported Measure 110. One of her reactions is to say she wants to increase funding for law enforcement, in other words, she wants more repression.

Some people disagree with this idea, as they think it won't solve the problem, but just push it away 'to the shadows'.

The author remains optimistic and thinks that by working together, a solution can be found to end this crisis.

- **Lexical exercise: find words to translate the following expressions (in the order of the text)**

- Considérablement:
- Guérison:
- La réduction des risques:
- Se produire, se passer :
- Généralisé :
- Le bénévolat :
- Des hurlements :
- Saluer, féliciter :
- Prudemment :