



The Secretariat  
Senate Legal & Constitutional Committee  
Room S1.61, Parliament House,  
Canberra ACT 2600

The Disability Discrimination Act Amendment 2003 which proposes to remove from its protection those people who are deemed to be addicted, (dependent), is a proposal fraught with iniquity, social and legal danger. The demonisation of drug dependent people has been politically linked with racist attacks and alcohol prohibition in the USA. Prior to this, addiction was rarely seen as a problem. With the Harrison Act drug addicts and the doctors who prescribed to them were criminalised, leading to the current gross over representation of drug-related criminals in the US prison system.

Most pertinent to the DDA Amendment, were the findings of the 1926 Rolleston Committee under Sir Henry Rolleston, President of The Royal College of Physicians. This British report, which was to form the basis of current Australian attitudes and practice, is that addicts are to be regarded as patients not criminals and it was agreed that a doctor could prescribe to maintain an addiction if the patient could not otherwise survive. If that patient is able to access his drug of necessity without hindrance, then that person on the whole will remain indistinguishable from any other person. If however an individual shows no respect for his position in the workplace, there are within the existing Act sufficiently well developed provisions to deal with that situation.

To amend the Act and create an Underclass is simply to marginalise and further demonise an already alienated segment of society. Addiction 'per se' does not indicate a denial of social and ethical mores nor an abrogation of those values which are held in common with society at large.

Dependent people are not demons, witches, freaks or some "other species". Drug dependent people, especially those in the workforce are determined, often ingenious and are willing to fit in to a system which would probably not have them were the truth known about their secret lives. Drug dependent people are our sons and daughters, our mothers and fathers, uncles and aunts.

The government recently tried, unsuccessfully, to require Social Security recipients on Disability Pensions to work more hours if they were deemed able. One assumes that many of those people would be suffering some painful disability, perhaps requiring painkillers. If so, many of those people would be dependent, ie addicted to drugs like morphine etc. Had that bill been passed, was it then intended that there then be another witch hunt to drive those addicts out of employment?

Mr. Howard is once more blindly following the USA, this time in the footsteps of the Harrison Act, which flies in the face of our inherited and generally accepted credo of "a fair go for all". As Tasmania produces approx. 40% of the licit pharmaceutical opium in the world, there is no doubt considerable pressure from our American cousins to gradually impose zero tolerance. Eg: no further talk of heroin trials. Fair enough perhaps.

The excision of drug dependent people from the safety net of their human rights as declared by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled People is unconscionable and should be vigorously opposed.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ian Harvey".