



War on Drugs: A Global Retreat?

Guest: Jeff Berwick

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Jeff Berwick is the founder of [The Dollar Vigilante](#), host of [Anarchast](#), and creator of [Stockhouse.com](#), Canada's largest financial website.

WOODS: I want to talk about a very recent piece of yours talking about the end of the drug war, about marijuana legalization and showing how international it is. I didn't realize that. I tend to be U.S.-centric, and I was thinking that the whole story is contained within Washington and Colorado, but you show that it goes well beyond that.

BERWICK: Yes, absolutely, and I am so thrilled to see what I think is the end of the drug war happening right now. I think the drug war was one of the most heinous times in human history, and of course, it has enabled so much of this statist control. As you know, when people go through airports, they are going through all their bags and everything, and if you ask the TSA goons at the airport what they are looking for, they usually tell you, oh, we've got to look for drugs, and you cross borders, same thing, and cops pulling people over all over the U.S. and checking them because they might have plants in their car called marijuana. So this has been just a horrible thing for human beings, and as you pointed out, it's not just U.S.-centric, although this movement did start in the U.S., which was really great to see. Actually, a friend of mine named Jody Weeks started it. He was in Colorado a couple of years ago, and he decided he had had enough of this, and went out and asked people to sign a petition to bring marijuana decriminalization bill towards, to be voted on, and a year later it actually got done. And since Colorado has fully legalized recreational marijuana, we've seen all over the world people—governments and people—saying this is enough of all of this. They have all been doing it mostly because of the U.S. influence for whatever reason, and yes, we're seeing it all over. Uruguay has completely decriminalized marijuana now.

We're seeing it in Argentina, Switzerland, Brazil, Mexico. Of course, in Mexico, not many people know this, but all drugs are legal for personal possession in Mexico, but they are starting to move towards decriminalization of anything to do with marijuana, and I think marijuana is going to be the start. And yes, it's a global movement, and it's not going away, and I think these

are incredibly exciting times for both liberty and in terms of investment because for the first time in a long time we can actually invest in this giant business. It's a huge, billion-dollar business that's been underground, and that's what's caused all the problems, just like alcohol prohibition in the '30s. Whenever you try to make something illegal and you have these governments, it drives things underground, and there's no dispute resolution, so there's a lot of people just getting killed and shot, and in Mexico where I am right now, beheaded and things like that. But it was very amazing for me. I was just in the Cayman Islands about a week ago at a meeting for a large cannabis production company, and there were about 60, mostly senior citizen, older sort of people there all with their reading glasses on and all asking questions about exactly which strain of marijuana this company would be growing, and which one is the most popular, and it was just amazing for me to see because, of course, a few years ago having a meeting like that would be highly illegal. If it was caught by the authorities—the so-called authorities—a lot of those people would be in jail, but now that it's becoming decriminalized it's just becoming a normal business, and it's fascinating and exciting, and I think the profit potential is going to be amazing for people to get into it. But even more than that, more important to me is liberty, because this will really show a lot of people it's like, why did we have all these borders and government and checking us at the airports and things like that if drugs are now legal?

WOODS: You know, originally, I guess it was in the 1930s that marijuana was first criminalized— and that, by the way, is interesting to a lot of people, I think, because we're so used to the drug war that I think that we assume that all of these substances were always illegal, but they weren't. This is actually not that long ago. There are people living today who were alive before the whole thing happened. But on the marijuana question they pushed through the so-called Marijuana Tax Act of 1937 amidst propaganda hysteria coming out of the U.S. Congress about the dangers of this substance, and then seven years later they sheepishly admitted that, okay, none of that is true. But that didn't cause them to lift the ban. Tell us a little bit about that.

BERWICK: Yeah, the history of marijuana, especially in the U.S., is fascinating, and not many people know this, of course, because in the public indoctrination camps, the government schools, they don't tell them anything about any of this. But people like George Washington were hemp growers. They grew marijuana mostly for cannabis and mostly for hemp to make things like clothes and things like that, and actually the cannabis crop, the hemp crop, is an amazing crop that has so many uses, and so what happened, as you pointed out, around the 1930s is—as usual within the U.S. it's very fascistic, and the big monopolies work with the government to try to crowd out everyone else and create rules and laws so that people can't compete, and that's what they did back in the '20s and '30s. Back in the 19—I think it was 1910 or 1920, on the back of the \$10 bill was an image of a hemp farmer, and it was very normal you could get your—of course, in the U.S. you need licenses for everything in the land of the free, but you would get your license to grow hemp. And then what happened was, some of the industries like the petrochemical and chemical industries, they had come up with all these ways

to make clothes and all that sort of stuff. But the hemp industry made a lot more sense. It was a lot cheaper. It was easy to grow the crops. It made better quality substances. So they tried to make it illegal, and they tried to say all kinds of things about how dangerous it was, and it was really ridiculous. Of course, still to this day the mainstream prostitutes, media prostitutes I call them, are still trying to say these things about marijuana, but if you look at the actual marijuana usage and the amount of deaths attributed to marijuana—tobacco, for example—there were 400,000-plus deaths in the U.S. from tobacco, 300,000-plus from poor diet and exercise, alcohol 85,000, prescription drugs 32,000, even aspirin 7,000, peanuts 100, and marijuana caused 0 deaths in the U.S. Actually, I just saw today in Colorado that there was a stat that I believe they said that the murder rate is down by about half since marijuana was decriminalized on January 1 of this year.

WOODS: I am looking right now at a graphic you have up at dollarvigilante.com that has a lot of those statistics that you just mentioned. Peanuts giving rise to 100 deaths a year, marijuana 0, and the caption is “Marijuana—safer than peanuts,” which is funny, but that leads to another question. I think any reasonable person, anyway, can see that the propaganda against marijuana was based on nothing. And incidentally I have no interest in using it or using any of these substances. It makes no difference to me. The point is, I don’t want other people being harassed, and I don’t want it to be an excuse for the government to harass me or anybody else and to use it as a pretext, but anyway, having said that: the trouble will be that there are drugs, though, that are more dangerous than actually we can attribute deaths to, and it’s nice for us to say that the beginning of the end of the drug war is upon us, but I think you’re going to have a much tougher row to hoe, so to speak, when it comes to some of these other drugs.

BERWICK: Yes, I agree. Definitely, there are some other, what they call drugs, most of them are just plants, but what they call drugs, and then of course, you have things like methamphetamines and all these things, but these things were actually caused by the drug war. Cocaine, for example, isn’t all that dangerous at all. Alcohol is actually one of the most dangerous substances on Earth that causes hundreds of thousands of deaths and who knows how many violent acts and things like that, but cocaine isn’t that bad at all. It’s mostly like caffeine or something like that, but what has happened is through the drug war they made these things illegal. If they didn’t, cocaine would be very cheap. It would be almost the same price as salt, and because of that people have started using more and more really toxic chemicals. Of course, when you’re using just the regular plant, which is natural, and it’s always much better. Things are a derivative of the plant. Marijuana is the plant itself. But because they’ve become so expensive due to the drug war, and it’s been harder to get them, and a lot of people are scared to be kidnapped and thrown into a cage if they are caught with a plant in their pocket, people will move to more and more really crazy, dangerous chemical concoctions such as methamphetamines, which is definitely very bad.

But I think what might happen here is, as marijuana becomes legalized people might start to see how great things are when it’s legalized, the same way that people probably see the

difference now between alcohol prohibition and when it's decriminalized, when it's legalized alcohol. So we'd like to see people just being more open to letting the free market actually be because they are going to see tremendous changes happening with this marijuana decriminalization around the world, and they are going to start to say, why are we making anything illegal? Making it so that people can't access things that they just want to put into their own bodies, which is, of course, nothing to do with freedom, and it might start a movement. There's definitely no way to know where this is going, but it's definitely moving in the right direction, and I commented that it's so nice to see this drug war come to such a—just a so funny end to it with, all of a sudden in just a matter of months, all this stuff—you've got millions of people in jail in the U.S. for having plant possession. You have people still getting their doors knocked down by SWAT teams in the U.S. looking for these plants while they are being basically decriminalized all over the place. It just comes as just an obvious, such an obvious and amazing end, and I think it will really awaken people to just what exactly do we need government for, or do we need it at all. I call it, of course, an unnecessary evil, and the more things that we can get the government out of, the better it is for everybody.

WOODS: Jeff, I'd like to ask you a personal question, if I may. You are free to decline to answer. But how long ago did you move to Mexico? And what made you decide to do that?

BERWICK: Well, I answer all questions. I'm not a politician. I will respond to any question anyone wants to ask me. I started something called the Dollar Vigilante around 2009, but before that I had decided I had enough of—I am originally from Canada, and I had moved out of Canada. I had had enough of this socialism and taxes and regulation and just the general culture where a lot of people thought those were really great things. And I decided to live as something called a permanent tourist, or a prior-taxpayer-type lifestyle, and so I have lived all over the world since then. I have been to about 100 countries. I have lived in Hong Kong, Thailand, all over the place, Mexico. I currently—I am actually not a resident of Mexico. I stay here as a tourist because I live the permanent tourist lifestyle, so I am never a resident in any place that I actually live. That way the government really has no control over me and things like taxes don't apply to me as well—all legally. It's more difficult for Americans, and we could go into that if you'd like, but for most people around the world, for me, from Canada, if I don't live in Canada, I am a resident of another country that doesn't have any taxes to apply to me, I don't have to pay taxes anywhere in Canada. So I really don't have to pay any taxes due to this lifestyle I live, and the main reason I moved to Mexico was about five years ago, I just loved it here. I have been to about 100 countries. It's one of the freest countries on Earth. It's obviously not totally free. There is a government here, but most people just ignore the government a lot better, and I think that's a part of the reason that the U.S. continually tries to demonize Mexico is because they don't want people to know that the land of the free in North America is not in the U.S., and it's just a short drive or flight south to Mexico, and so they try to always make it look as bad as possible, but I think it's just much better here in almost every way. I feel it's much safer here. I am definitely not being kidnapped by people in blue costumes here, and I am not getting

extorted every year for half of my income called taxes, so it's definitely a lot safer in Mexico and a lot freer.

WOODS: Given how extensive your world travel has been, I wonder: have that travel and your experiences around the world reaffirmed your political views or challenged them in any way?

BERWICK: Well, it's kind of funny, because when I first left Canada and decided to travel around the world, I didn't really have any political views. I really just didn't understand what was going on, and that's why I decided to leave. I actually bought a sailboat, and I was trying to sail around the world, and I ended up sinking in El Salvador, but I kept going by backpack, trains, plane, and automobile for about five or six years and went to about 100 countries, and the whole purpose of that was I knew I was not getting a real view of what the world was in Canada from the government propaganda channel, CBC, and their nightly news. I knew I wasn't getting the full story, so I decided to go see the world for myself. What I discovered during those years, and this is still to this day what I am doing and what I am living, is that governments around the world are the biggest problem to every country, every single country, and as you see how different countries work—for example, I was just in Cuba, and so when you get the chance to see how things work under these different government systems, it really starts to make you realize that in every single country you go to the biggest issue, the biggest problem, that is causing problems in that country is the government itself and all of the things it does, and the more freer countries—and I would say freer countries that I have been to would be places like Cambodia, very free right now, it almost has no government. You really don't see any police, and it's booming. It's almost turning into the next Thailand, and quite possibly, in 10 or 20 years, the next Hong Kong. Places like Mexico are quite free. It's definitely not totally free, but it's so much freer that the economy is booming here. Not many people know this, but the Mexican stock exchange is up about 400 percent in the last decade. A lot of the economy is booming here. There are actually more Mexicans leaving the U.S. now than going there, but of course, you don't hear that on the propaganda, on the mainstream media, which keeps telling people that people from Mexico are coming here to take our jobs. It's just all propaganda. In actuality I meet so many Mexicans who used to live in the U.S. who have now moved back here, and they always give me the exact same two reasons. They say, first of all, the economy is atrocious in the U.S, and it's so much better in Mexico, and secondly, there's just no freedom in the U.S., and it's so much freer in Mexico.

WOODS: Jeff, led me read the tagline at DollarVigilante.com: "Surviving and Prospering During and After the Dollar Collapse." I have two questions. I will just ask them one at a time. The first one is, if you were to talk to Paul Krugman and use the words dollar collapse, he would just laugh in your face, and say: of all things to be worried about at a time when inflation of consumer prices seems to be so low, we have a lot of problems, but for heaven's sake, you're worried about a dollar collapse? That's just not going to happen. What would you say to him?

BERWICK: Well, first of all, I am not sure I would even talk to him. I don't talk to insane people because I find it just wastes my time, and they are just saying babble.

WOODS: For the sake of argument.

BERWICK: Okay, if I were to talk to him, of course, he would be telling me all of his plans for saving the economy, like his plan he came up with last year faking an alien invasion to boost the economy. And then he had his other idea to make a trillion-dollar coin. He's obviously insane, and I can't believe that anyone even pays attention to him. He even looks like a homeless man. I am not sure. He probably is someone off the street they just brought on just to talk on the *New York Times* and try to sell people things, but yeah, he would say things like that to me, and if I did take him seriously I would just respond that if you look at the actual situation, if you look at the financial situation of the U.S., the dollar is already—it's a foregone conclusion it will collapse. The U.S. government or the dollar or both will collapse in the next five to ten years. There's \$17 trillion worth of U.S. government debt right now. That doesn't include any of their liabilities, things like socialist insecurity, Medicare, Medicaid, and all those things, and all that money has already been spent. It's already been stolen and spent. The total amount of debt and liabilities of the U.S. government is over \$80 trillion, some people say as high as \$200 trillion, but at even maybe—actually it's over \$90 trillion by my calculations right now. That works out to about \$250,000 per person—man, woman, and child in the U.S. So a family of four has over a million dollars of federal government debt and liabilities overhanging it. So this is not going to get paid, especially when 80 percent of Americans are living paycheck to paycheck right now. The economy has been hollowed out and destroyed by the U.S. government and Federal Reserve. There's no chance of paying it back. And even if you take the \$17 trillion of just debt alone, not including liabilities—if interest rates were to rise to say 10 percent, which is not a massive level at all, of course; during the 1970s they rose to the high of 18 percent and things were much better back then, believe it or not, than they are today. So if interest rates even rose to 10 percent on \$17 trillion worth of debt, that would be \$1.7 trillion worth of interest payments alone, and that's almost the entire budget of the U.S. government in their tax extortion, theft, revenue base that they use. So it would immediately make the U.S. government insolvent. So this thing is already over. It's baked in the cake. People like Paul Krugman are mostly just clowns they parade out there to try to fool people to think that things are still okay while they steal the last remaining money from the last remaining people who have money in the U.S.

WOODS: I am looking at your website right now, and I think it's very attractive. I think it's one of the most attractive sites I have seen in some time. Why do people want to visit this site? What do you get? What are you guys producing on a daily basis that benefits people?

BERWICK: Well, the Dollar Vigilante started as just my realization after studying Austrian economics for about 5 to 10 years that the entire financial system and monetary system of the world was unsustainable and is on the verge of collapse, and I started it up in 2008 because that was the first wave of this collapse, so it really became obvious to me that this has begun now. People like George Soros said in 2009 that the financial system did collapse, and all they are doing now is printing money to make it seem like it's still alive. That's exactly the case. I rarely

agree with George Soros, but I do agree with him on that point. So I started the Dollar Vigilante to awaken people and try to get them information on the truth about what's going on, because if you watch CNBC or any of the mainstream media, you're just going to hear all the usual propaganda things like there's green shoots, or it's a Goldilocks recovery. I like that one because it is really a fairy-tale recovery, but it's the furthest thing from the truth. There's a lot going on, and most people in the U.S. just don't even hear about it or see it on the mainstream media, and that's why it's so great to have people like yourself, Tom, and so many others, and people like Lew Rockwell and the Mises Institute putting out real information. For the first time ever, really, since the Internet, people actually have access to real information. So the Dollar Vigilante is mostly what started to awaken people to how to protect themselves, and actually profit from it during the collapse of the dollar. I actually have four Bs that I have been talking about. I just added the last B just recently, but the first three Bs to survive and then prosper were bullion, in terms of gold bullion, bullets, both as an investment and as protection during what might be coming ahead in the complete societal collapse in the U.S., and Bitcoin, which of course is fairly new, and I think that's a great way to move beyond this monetary system and as well has been a great speculation. We got into it around \$7. It's currently \$450. And then I just added the most recent one just recently, marijuana, bud, so those are the four Bs. I think the marijuana industry is an amazing investment opportunity, and that's something I am going to be focusing on. So yeah, these are all the sort of things that have evolved from this initial concept of trying to awaken people to the dire financial situation that's going on, and now we talk about so many ways to internationalize yourself—get foreign passports, expatriate from the U.S. I think it's going to be ground zero for this economic collapse, and it's going to be dangerous and not very comfortable for a lot of people, and as I mentioned earlier I have traveled the world, so I have seen that so many other countries have so much more freedom, so much better economies, and it's just a better place to be for the coming years, and the two areas I focus most on and I like the most are Asia and Latin America.