

Decriminalization & Moral Panic: Necropolitics & Right Wing Backlash in British Columbia, Canada

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Abstract:

There was a consensus in British Columbia, Canada: we can't arrest our way out of the overdose crisis. Since 2016, more than 15,000 have died from OD in the western Canadian province. After years of struggle by advocates, change was in the air. In 2023, it became legal to possess 2.5 grams of opioids, coke, meth and MDMA for personal use. Police couldn't seize it or lay charges charge. But the backlash began the day the law changed. Right wing politicians and pundits spread fear and disinformation. Decriminalization was blamed for every pre-existing social problem. After only 18 months, the government gutted decrim and the previous prohibition regime resumed. Garth Mullins was first jailed for possession at 19 years old. He fought for decriminalization for years and sat on a multi-stakeholder committee with government officials to build the new regime. But the politics of fear and moral panic took over, as they so often do in the drug war.