

Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform (ACT) Inc.

committed to preventing tragedy that arises from illicit drug use

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NEWSLETTER

May 2005

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NEXT Meeting

Thursday 26 May 2005

meeting at 7.30pm

speaker at 8.00pm

Speaker: Karen Lenihan

**Newly appointed Director of the ACT
Alcohol and Drug Program**

Venue: St Ninian's Uniting Church, cnr Mouat
and Brigalow Sts, Lyneham.

Refreshments will follow

DRUG ACTION WEEK 20-24 June

Drug Action Week is a national week of activities to raise awareness about alcohol and other drug issues. It is an initiative of the Alcohol and other Drugs Council of Australia (ADCA)

Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform are
organising a

PUBLIC DEBATE

The prohibition of the recreational use of drugs
is based on good principles – featuring the world
class ANU Debating Society

on Thursday 23rd June, 12 midday – 2pm
in the Reception Room at the Legislative
Assembly

An invitation/flyer is included with this newsletter. Please
tell others about this event.

**PLEASE NOTE: THIS EVENT WILL REPLACE
OUR MONTHLY JUNE MEETING. THERE WILL
BE NO MEETING THAT EVENING.**

HELP NEEDED: Sandwiches and slice will be provided
for a light lunch. If you can help by making sandwiches or
a slice please phone Marion on 6254 2961.

Editorial

The mass media resulting from the capture of nine
Australians in Bali is certainly interesting. It dramatically
demonstrates one of the methods by which drugs are
smuggled into this country. It also clearly demonstrates the
long chain of distributors.

There are however a number of curious incidents needing
further explanation.

The first concerns the real reason why the Bali 9 were not
allowed to return to Australia and be arrested here rather
than the Australian Police tipping off the Indonesian
police.

Australia officially opposes the death penalty while Bali
has a death penalty even for drug offences which would be
seen by Australia as relatively minor. (Not that one could
say that this particular incident is minor.)

The interrogation approach by Indonesian police appears
to be much more vigorous than that used in Australia and
the judicial system seems to be somewhat more arbitrary
than Australia's.

Those interrogations are reaping some rewards for the
Australian police as they undertake more raids and capture
more of the people allegedly involved in the Australian
distribution chain.

However it is curious too that while the Australian police
were progressing down the chain the Indonesian police
were working up the chain. But then a significant person
of interest was shot by Indonesian police – possibly losing
the opportunity of catching the Mr Bigs further up the
chain.

An important question to also ask is “to what extent will
the capture of the Bali 9 and the seizure of about 10 kilos
of heroin make to the price and availability of drugs in
Australia?”

Note that 10 kilos represents **less than a half of one
percent** of the estimated quantity available annually on
Australian streets. Advice so far is that it has made no
difference.

It would seem that the AFP has effectively exported
stronger penalties such as the death penalty and possibly
exported stronger interrogation methods. Perhaps the latter
has been learned from the USA which transports terror
suspects to countries that are more vigorous interrogators.

Whatever the answers to these questions the Federal
Government must be pleased with this publicity boost to
its \$6 million ‘drugs are dangerous’ advertising campaign
that is currently being aired.

Thank you to all those who have renewed their
membership and for the notes of encouragement that
accompanied some of the renewals.

Thank you also to those who have included an extra
donation with their membership renewal. It is very much
appreciated.

If you have not yet renewed and possibly have mislaid
your return envelope another is included with this
newsletter.

Another US-led war we can't hope to win

***Decriminalisation of drugs makes more sense
than the death penalty***

Phillip Adams

[First published in the Australian newspaper]

DRUGS to Bali, coals to Newcastle. This wretched case
highlights two important issues of politics and public

policy. Both at their worst. First, the moral horror of capital punishment. Second, the endless moral panic driving drugs, a local and international issue.

Many of us oppose the death penalty in all circumstances. I even regretted Israel's decision to execute Adolf Eichmann. That prime example of Hannah Arendt's "banality of evil", that human black hole should have been left alive. As should Saddam Hussein, Osama bin Laden and any other monster you care to name. Try them, find them guilty, imprison them for all eternity. But don't kill them like the dogs they are, like they've killed others. Keep them in a cage, if you must, parade them through the streets, but don't degrade your selves with an act of official murder.

Least of all for the crime of drug smuggling. The crime that shouldn't be a crime at all. The crime that more than any other on this sad, silly earth of ours preoccupies the police, clogs the judicial and penal systems, chokes the courts and crowds the prisons. The prisons we can't build fast enough.

Were drugs to be decriminalised in this country, we would regain something of our collective sanity. Were it to happen in the US, where this insane war against drugs was first declared, millions of kids, overwhelmingly African-American, could be decriminalised as well. Then a state such as California could stop spending more money on jails for its young than it does on funding new universities.

Prohibition and interdiction of drugs has proved to be as foolish and futile as prohibition of booze. If anything, it encourages the black market in narcotics, pushing the pushers to push harder while pushing up the prices. And, of course, upping the ante on police corruption. A public health problem becomes a cause celebre for grandstanding politicians.

If we can't keep drugs out of our prisons, with their high walls and thick bars, with all the screws, surveillance and cavity searching, then what hope have we of keeping drugs out of Australia, with its thousands of kilometres of unguarded coastline? With millions of tonnes of unexamined containers piling up at our ports? With countless unsearched visitors arriving at our airports? That's right. Absolutely none. No hope at all.

So what that some of it is discovered en route, to be proudly displayed to the television cameras, along with hyped-up street prices. All that nonsense about the seizure being worth \$2 million, \$3 million, \$5 million. Thanks to market forces, the shipment will be replaced and the street price, at least for the short term, will increase, forcing addicts to steal more TVs and DVD players. Watching all that effort to grab a few plastic bags of white powder is like watching someone baling the ocean with a bucket. A bucket with a hole in it.

In any case, were every effort to bring in illegal drugs to be thwarted, were everyone convicted of any role in smuggling, selling or using to be dragged off to a local death row (and hence to a place of execution where they'd have, at taxpayers' expense, a final fix with a nice clean needle), do you imagine that would put an end to humans taking drugs? Human ingenuity would find another way to supply the market. Prescription drugs are always promising. And new drugs are always being invented. You can cook 'em in

the kitchen, brew them in the basement. Ask your local biker gang.

It's time to give the death penalty the death penalty. The fact we gave it up after Henry Bolte's hanging of Ronald Ryan in 1967 gives us some authority here. Unfortunately, we signed up to the US war against drugs long before we joined its war on terror and the US Commander-in-Chief has the world's worst record on capital punishment. So George W. Bush can't help us in Bali even if he wanted to.

It's also time to get out of that drug war. Even if you support the war in Iraq, surely you can see that we must extricate ourselves and our children from this unwinnable war against drugs. Certain drugs, that is. The few drugs our moral panic merchants choose to demonise.

America's great conservative - many would argue its greatest - has been urging Washington to admit the war is lost. In this stand William F. Buckley is joined by anyone with half a brain. Sadly, it won't happen in the US. But it should happen here. And it could if our political leadership contained any leaders.

'Drug enforcement and crime: recent evidence from New York State'

Shepard, E & Blackley, P 2005, , Social Science Quarterly, vol. 86, no. 2, pp. 323-42.

Abstract

Objective. The objective of this article is to provide evidence about the effectiveness of drug law enforcement as a tool for reducing other types of crime. Considerable resources are devoted to enforcing our nation's drug laws, but existing research suggests that intensifying drug law enforcement may serve to increase, rather than decrease, crime.

Method. Using data for 62 counties in New York State for 1996-2000, we estimate a set of models that evaluate the effects of recent drug arrests on reported rates of assault, robbery, burglary, and larceny. The estimated statistical model includes controls for fixed effects, time effects, autocorrelation, and heteroskedasticity.

Results. The consistency of results is striking - there is no model in which drug arrests are found to have a significant negative relationship with crime. All crimes are positively related to arrests for the manufacture and sale of "hard drugs." Increases in total per capita drug arrests and arrests for "hard drug" possession are accompanied by higher rates for all crimes except assault. Increased arrests for the manufacture or sale of marijuana are associated with increases in larcenies.

Conclusions. The empirical findings raise serious questions about the effectiveness of drug enforcement as a crime-control measure and suggest that significant social costs may arise from existing approaches to drug control.

Insight

On Tues May 17 SBS aired an Insight program called "Dealing with Drugs". Insight is a program hosted by Jenny Brockie, with a reasonably large audience who contribute to the discussion.



Its focus was on the use of party drugs, mainly ecstasy, and the Federal Government's \$6 million advertising campaign. The program opened with two young university students, reporting on their use of party drugs. They were quite clear on why they chose party drugs rather than alcohol:

Both girls say their drug use, has never interfered with their study, work or relationships. And that drugs like speed, cocaine and ecstasy are a normal part of life in the club scene.

REPORTER: What makes people choose to use drugs rather than have a few cocktails, say?

AMY SINCLAIR: Drunkenness I think makes a lot of people messy and I don't think they like that. I think the fact that so many dumb things happen when people get drunk. They do stupid things, they throw up, it makes them sick, you have that whole hangover thing.

STEPHANIE CORP: And it's the money - I know a lot of people think it's the money - It's cheaper to take a pill. It's cheaper to take one pill and not be messed the next day than spend however much on alcohol...

There was a majority view expressed that the advertisements are aimed at a limited audience – parents and that the advertising was a scare campaign.

NICK PRICE: I think that ad paints a very small picture of the entire scope of people that use drugs. I mean, as a young person to me, that almost feels like false advertising because I have peer experience and I work for a peer harm reduction - a harm reduction group. And that's only a very, very small segment of the people who actually use drugs. I mean I think you would say the large majority of drug users are non-problematic drug users.

JENNY BROCKIE: So does that get through to you in any sense. I mean do you relate to the fact that people do die from drug overdoses and people have trouble with drugs?

NICK PRICE: Yeah, I think those are big definite issues but I think for the Government to spend the amount of money that it has on the campaign to only target such a small percentage of these people, I think is a waste of taxpayer money.

JENNY BROCKIE: Yes.

PARENT: I think those ads are actually aimed at parents not actually at the youth culture themselves. I'm a parent myself and if I look at that I think yeah, I'm worried about my kids but if my kids were to look at that ad, they'll say, "Mmm, it doesn't really affect me."

CAMERON DUFF, CENTRE FOR YOUTH DRUG STUDIES: There's a particular representation of

young people's drug use in these ads that doesn't seem to resonate with young people's own experiences. It doesn't really capture a typical Saturday night for a young person. It's unrealistic.

But Tony Wood whose daughter died after taking ecstasy but whose friends were too afraid to call for help when she got into trouble, thought the advertisements were exactly what was needed:

TONY WOOD: I'm happy with the campaign. Do you support the campaign? Yeah, 100%. I think it's really good particularly for us parents. I had no idea about drugs. Until Anna's death I didn't realise we had a drug problem and then our telephone started to ring at home and parents started to tell me about their problems.

Tony Trimmingham felt that it was all right to present graphic stories such as those depicted in the advertising but felt that it was more important to listen to what young people, such as those at the forum, were saying:

TONY TRIMMINGHAM: Yes, I don't think there's any harm in telling people what can happen to drugs and in

our organisation, Family Drug Support, and we deal with families who have the real problems all the time, problems of dependency and some of the extremes. However, I think we've got a wonderful opportunity tonight to hear these voices of young people. I think this is something that has been missing from the drugs debate, that we are actually listening to the real experience of young people. And I think it's really uncomfortable for families to hear it, and I know certainly I

don't feel comfortable listening to it but I think it is a reality that we have to listen to and experience. And I certainly believe that when we look at drugs there's is a context issue that everybody seems to miss, and I believe that what these young people are saying is that they are educated about the drugs and their effects, they do have boundaries and know where to stop and where to not step over.

The advertisements state that "You don't know what you are taking" with illicit drugs.

JENNY BROCKIE: ... ultimately you never know what you're getting. With legal drug use do you know what you're getting. Now is that an issue for you people? Yes.

JOHNBOY DAVIDSON: Well that's exactly what we're campaigning for with the idea of pill testing. If we give people information that they can then make a choice, we may not agree with that choice entirely but you know once we give someone the information of what exactly is in their drug, they can then make those choices.

Doctors, researchers and psychiatrists were in the audience and provided their perspective:

CAMERON DUFF: ... This is becoming a really normal part of young people's leisure time. Certainly the research work that we've done would suggest that for a lot of young people drug use has become part of their weekly leisure, they're going out with their friends, socialising with friends, going out and dancing, going to clubs and probably, we know from recent research in Victoria that 90% of young people who use these drugs, who report using ecstasy in their life, use these drugs once a month or less frequently. So it's certainly - it's part of a recreational pattern of drug use. There's no doubt that there are other young people for whom their drug use becomes much more problematic, but in the main that's certainly not the case.

What's been staggering in recent times is the sheer range of drugs that are available now for young people, I suspect that there's so many different choices that young people can make. It's probably the combination of drugs that really I think is most concerning, the patterns of poly drug use where people are mixing different types of drug use in one occasion of use. And that's, I mean, that's probably a different area of concern but certainly we're seeing that this is becoming increasingly mainstream.

PROFESSOR CHRIS TENNANT, RNS PSYCHOLOGY UNIT: You're hearing that the really, really serious effects of most stimulant use is extremely rare. Mortality is really quite rare compared to say use of heroin, people who abuse and take overdoses of heroin. So it's not surprising you've got this sense of confidence in these young people and when you match that with in younger people risk taking behaviours are far more common and there is a bit of a sense of invincibility in young people. Put it all together and you can understand why it's going to happen and that ads like this are certainly not going to work to my mind. Not with stimulants.

JENNY BROCKIE: ... we've gone from 'Reefer Madness' through to people thinking marijuana's relatively harmless. Now, Chris Tennant, is that your view?

PROFESSOR CHRIS TENNANT: ... when you hear people say marijuana's a safe drug. When it's used properly, if you like, it is a safe drug. If people were to smoke a joint once every two or three weeks in a recreational setting, there are... unless they drive motor vehicles, or they've got a really, really serious predisposition, say, to psychosis, there are unlikely to be serious effects. The dangers all relate to dosage and strength of drug. Back in the '60s cannabis wasn't hydroponic, less problem. Today those people who smoke regularly and smoke hydroponic, big time trouble.

... I work at the front line in acute psychiatric ward and I would say half the people who present with psychosis have been using comorbidly cannabis and, to a somewhat lesser extent, speed.

JENNY BROCKIE: And using it how heavily?

PROFESSOR CHRIS TENNANT: Usually quite regularly, sadly... sometimes 20 or 30 bongs a day.

JENNY BROCKIE: Alex Wodak, can I involve you in the discussion at this point because you've campaigned long and hard for decriminalisation of drugs over many, many years. Now, when you hear David describing his research and you hear Chris talking about the people turning up in his practice with psychosis and with problems from marijuana, does that shift your view at all about the issue of decriminalisation, for example?

DR ALEX WODAK, AUSTRALIAN DRUG LAW REFORM FOUNDATION: No, it intensifies my view because I think if drugs like cannabis are so dangerous that they can cause schizophrenia or depression or the other serious harms that people allege - and they might be right - then why would you give that drug to Al Capone to distribute? Why would you give it to criminals and corrupt police? Why wouldn't you regulate the drug as carefully as you can and have age limits so that kids below a certain age can't purchase it like we have with alcohol?

The last word was left to Dr Alex Wodak:

DR ALEX WODAK: Evaluation of advertising campaigns like we've seen tonight shows very consistently dismal findings. And I think people have been optimistic in believing that these advertisements are intended to have a real benefit. The real benefit that the Government is after - and whoever's in government doesn't make much difference - the real benefit is trying to lift the political stocks of whoever's in power. And we have to remember cannabis is smoked by 2.5 million Australians in the last 12 months. It's not a minority niche drug. The cannabis industry's twice as big as the wine industry in Australia now. It's got an annual turnover in 1997 estimated at \$5 billion. We have to get real about it and we have to realise that alcohol prohibition failed in the United States in 1932, cannabis prohibition has failed all over the world.

[The full transcript can be found on the SBS website: www.sbs.com.au.]

Family Drug Support is holding an important Drug Awareness day

At PADDINGTON TOWN HALL

Cnr Oxford Street and Oatley Road, Paddington
on **Wednesday 22nd June, 11 am - 8pm**

- Expo and stalls of Service Providers
- Displays and Presentations Safe Drinking
- Red Cross CPR Workshops
- Police Drug Initiative
- School Drug Debate – 1 P.M.
- Cannabis and Alcohol Quizzes
- Guest Speakers on cannabis, party drugs etc
- Family Forum – 6 P.M.

Please ring 9798 0001 to register