

Anti-drug paradigm is no accident

A realization is slowly dawning on many advocates of drug legalization: The only thing that ever made it look reasonable was the corruption that George Bush and his gang brought to the Reagan administration's war on drugs. You might say that "without George Bush to kick around," legalization has to stand on its own merits, and it isn't passing muster.

Panel after panel at the Nov. 16-19 Drug Policy Foundation meeting (p. 56) called attention to the political limits which confront the movement.

- *Justice channels.* Yale law professor Steven Duke, a former teacher of the Clintons, presented a letter urging the President to decriminalize, but offered no prospect that it would get a hearing. One of his students, Ron Weich, who is counsel to Ted Kennedy's Senate Labor Committee, explained that drug decriminalization arguments are never seriously presented at hearings which address criminal law matters, and attributed this to the general popular climate. Duke, and others at the convention, seem to believe that Attorney General Janet Reno is possibly a sympathizer to their idea.

- *Media treatment.* A panel devoted to analyzing media treatment of the issue was similarly pessimistic, noting that except for the newspaper commentaries generated by the Drug Policy Foundation, no editor will push the issue. It was noted that *Rolling Stone* magazine, which targets the most pro-drug segment of the population, took a financial bath when it devoted an entire issue to legalization. Every regular advertiser panned the issue except two—a CD manufacturer and a condom manufacturer. The next issue featured a *Playboy*-style cover story on "The Girls of Baywatch" in order to regain circulation and advertising.

Jacob Sullum, staff writer at William Buckley's *National Review*, summed it up: "Opponents need an over-arching story to compete with the myths of the war on drugs, and so far we don't have one."

- *Human rights.* One hope of overcoming this barrier was the idea of making drug use a *cause célèbre* in the human rights circuit. Here as well, panelists were divided over the proposition. Kevin Zeese and several other stalwarts of the organization have begun an initiative to elevate drug legalization, medical use of marijuana, and various proposals for legalizing cocaine to the status of human rights issues. The feature panelist on this question was Kenneth Roth, director of Human Rights Watch, who argued that there is not much likelihood that these issues would get a hearing in this forum.

The basic problem is that big human rights stories get

attention when they expose abuses in states which have rudimentary legal systems and repressive governments. In the context of drugs, these issues are not so clear, and with respect to "relating drug use to human rights issues . . . we're not there yet."

- *Medical aspects.* Dr. Jonathan Mann, the World Health Organization official who developed and enforced the idea that the AIDS virus had a "civil right" to be free from traditional public health measures, told the conference that this "AIDS revolution" could be applied to drug use.

The list of public health officials participating in the conference would indicate that there is a wide range of practitioners who are gravitating toward the "harm reduction" philosophy of the decriminalization movement. Brown University co-sponsored the medical seminars and arranged academic credit for attendees, for example. While many of these people are advocates of legalization, as a group they are dealing with the fact that the Bush administration cynically targeted low-level drug users in order to expand its prosecutorial powers, and threw the last vestige of rehabilitation out the window. The decrepit state of health care delivery overall contributes to the confused sentiments among these professionals.

Legal reform on the agenda

On the areas where the Drug Policy Foundation has allied itself to broader civil liberties issues, there is a very active collaboration with Democrats and Republicans who are committed to reversing the excesses of the Thornburgh/Bush era. One panel discussed the need to reform the current draconian sentencing system, and the mandatory minimum sentencing schemes which are allowing prosecutors to play at solving the drug problem by filling the prisons with the lowest-level street pushers. A lead speaker was a representative of the U.S. Sentencing Commission. The chair, Julie Stewart, spoke highly of the commitment of people such as Henry Hyde and former Attorney General Edwin Meese to these much needed reforms.

Ronald Reagan came to office with an overwhelming popular mandate to reverse the decriminalization trend initiated under Jimmy Carter. That mandate was organized, almost single-handedly, by Lyndon LaRouche, who commissioned the classic study *Dope, Inc.* and initiated the organization of the Anti-Drug Coalition, a grassroots movement of parents and educators who revolted against decriminalization. Almost 100,000 of them subscribed to a magazine called *War on Drugs*. The movement and its magazine inspired the Reagan administration's adoption of the term "war on drugs," although the actual program never lived up to that.

But it was George Bush who was entrusted to implement it, and he betrayed that trust by making drug policy an element of geopolitical gamesmanship, and recruited the traffickers themselves as allies in his maneuvers.