
Australia

Anti-drug campaign: talk, but no action

by Allen Douglas

On April 6, for the first time in Australian history, the chief executives of Australia's federal, state, and territorial governments went on national television to make a Joint Report to the Nation. Led by Prime Minister Robert Hawke, and preceded by investigative commissions, cabinet studies, and a press campaign, the appearance was supposed to initiate a \$100 million, three-year federal-state campaign against drugs.

Yet, less than three months later, when Malaysia, with which Hawke's government claims to be collaborating in the war on drugs, hanged two Australian heroin couriers connected with organized crime, Hawke was the first to protest "this barbaric act," a protest echoed by the world's liberal media. Given that the heroin seized in Malaysia was destined for the major *Australian* cities of Melbourne, Sydney, and Perth, that his statements were an attempted sabotage of Malaysia's war on drugs, and that his own "anti-drug program" is based almost entirely on "education," *not* on enforcement, one wonders why the Hawke government is doing virtually nothing about drugs.

As a leading transshipment point for heroin from the opium-growing Golden Triangle of Thailand, Burma, Laos, (and China), Australia has seen its own narcotics syndicates expand dramatically over the past decade, poisoning not only Australian citizens, but spreading far afield, to the Philippines, India, and elsewhere in Asia. They are fully integrated into the international narcotics cartel: The executed heroin smugglers, Brian Geoffrey Chambers and Kevin John Barlow, were couriers for the Australian-Italian "Honored Society," a branch of the Calabrian Mafia centered in Plati, Italy.

As Australian trafficking has expanded, so has its financing, run through the dirty, "offshore" banking facilities of Hong Kong, Singapore, Vanuatu, and increasingly, New Zealand. Vanuatu, an island 1,000 miles northeast of Australia, is an important offshore banking center, hosting dozens of international banks operating under the same secrecy that exists in other British dirty-money centers. Though it is forbidden to export Australian dollars to Vanuatu, the money can easily be laundered through other offshore centers, to wind up in Vanuatu "as clean as a whistle," ready for redeployment into Australian political and commercial life.

The Vanuatu and New Zealand cases have other ramifications as well, curiously ignored by the Socialist International's Hawke. New Zealand, which Socialist International Prime Minister David Lange plans to make the "Hong Kong of the Pacific," has been the cutting edge of the Soviet-designed "nuclear-free zone" schemes in the South Pacific, while Vanuatu, often called the "Cuba of the Pacific" for its support for terrorism, opened full diplomatic relations with the Soviets on June 30.

The burgeoning Australian narcotics trade, taken together with a very high rate of drug addiction among Australia's youth—the prime minister's own daughter and son-in-law were heroin addicts—led certain Australian circles to realize that something had to be done. In 1983, the Costigan Royal Commission was established and began investigating the drug trade. Led by attorney Francis Costigan, the commission produced several volumes of evidence by early 1985, and, in certain cases, "named the names" of the drug trade's high-level political and financial protection, including the alleged involvement of one of Australia's major national press syndicates.

Mysteriously, some of the names in the sealed, confidential reports to parliament were "leaked," resulting in court censure of Costigan. Disbanded in 1985, the upshot of the commission was Hawke's announcement of a National Campaign Against Drug Abuse, launched at a special Premier's Conference on April 2, 1985, involving federal, state, and territorial officials, and producing the decision to launch the new campaign.

Though the international media would never admit it, the majority of Australia's population supported the Malaysian action. Shortly before the execution of the heroin couriers, an Australian Opinion Poll study showed 76% support for the execution. Other newspaper polls showed a solid majority for the re-introduction of the death penalty for drug trafficking. When Australian television tried to deluge the population with shots of the weeping family members of Barlow and Chambers, the volume of hostile popular response forced the stations to run anti-drug films the following days.

Clearly there is a demand in Australia for a serious war on drugs. Enter Hawke. Though the anti-drug campaign will to some extent upgrade the Australian Bureau of Criminal Intelligence and Australian Federal Police, the focus of the campaign is outlined in the prime minister's official communiqué of April 2, 1985: "The Campaign will place a major emphasis on reducing the demand for drugs through education, treatment and rehabilitation programs, particularly for young people and particularly relating to hard drugs." As part of this, Hawke himself has set up a "drug hot-line" so that drugged youth from all over the country can call the prime minister personally. This "touchy-feely" approach is a growing scandal in Australia. The newspaper *The Australian* asked in its lead editorial, on April 8, six days after the campaign's launching, "But what about the drug syndicates?" Yes indeed, Mr. Hawke, what about them?