



THINGS ARE LOOKING UP — Ben Dronkers, Joep Oomen (ENCOD), Freek Polak (Stichting Drugsbeleid) and Job Joris Arnold (Cannabis College). www.cannabistribunaal.org, www.cannabisbevrijdingsdag.org (Liberation Day), www.cannabiscollege.com

Cannabis Tribunal sparks coordinated action in Netherlands

By Derrick Bergman, GONZO Media

A two day Cannabis Tribunal, held in Holland's center of power, The Hague, has led to coordinated action to stop the dismantling of the world renowned coffeshop system. A documentary on the Tribunal was presented May 8, followed by *Cannabis Liberation Day* on May 9 at Amsterdam's Museumplein.

The Cannabis Tribunal took place on Dec. 1-2, 2008 at Nieuwspoort, the Hague, around the corner from the Dutch parliament. Scientists, activists, entrepreneurs and a few politicians discussed the future of the liberal Dutch cannabis policy. This policy, started in 1976, has come under attack from right wing political parties. Since last year, the christian party CDA of prime minister Balkenende is calling for a closure of all coffeshops. The Tribunal was organized by Amsterdam's Cannabis College and NGO's Stichting Drugsbeleid (foundation for drugpolicy) and ENCOD (European Coalition for just and effective drug policies). A reward of 200.000 euros was put up for anyone who could prove the central position of the Tribunal wrong: cannabis prohibition has more negative than positive effects. It came as no surprise that the prize wasn't awarded.

The most memorable moment of the conference was an unannounced appearance of professor Louk Hulsman (85), who laid the foundation for the tolerant Dutch drug policy in the seventies. His witty speech turned out be his swan song: Hulsman died less than two months later.

He pointed out that drug use has never really been criminalized in the Netherlands: the government's main objective was to stop a big criminal market from establishing itself. Hulsman also explained that calling an activity criminal has nothing to do with the question whether that activity is good or bad. "It used to be criminal not to report Jews or to be homosexual." Other speakers included Ben Dronkers, Wernard Bruining and Freek Polak. After the hearings and a debate between CDA politician Cisca Joldersma and former police officer Hans van Duijn, Holland's main LEAP representative, a special law court issued their verdict: cannabis prohibition doesn't work and should be ended.

Apart from the almost non-existent coverage by mainstream media, the Tribunal was a great success. One of the results is the creation of a new umbrella organization, VOC, that has finally brought much needed unity and coordination within the Dutch cannabis scene. For the first time consumers, coffeshop owners, activists and scientists have come together to fight the growing prohibitionist trend and save Holland's world famous coffeshops. Two government studies are being carried out this year to evaluate the Dutch drug policy: the VOC will focus on providing media, politicians and researchers with honest information on cannabis, coffeshops and effective, evidence-based drug policy. A documentary on the Cannabis Tribunal, including an extensive booklet, is an important tool.