

Headline Ambiguity in Political Volatility

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Tuesday, August 30, 2005

<http://politicsrespun.org/2005/08/headline-ambiguity-in-political-volatility/>

It's so easy to become paranoid about the character-maligning insults that *The Province* newspaper may be willing to heap on BC teachers who are stepping up their campaign for better teaching and working conditions in BC after having their legislated non-contract contract expire 14 months ago.

Today in the paper [see below] we read that a BC man teaching in Taiwan may face the death penalty if found guilty of drug smuggling. Beyond the odd, irrelevant or demeaning epithet Ethan Baron heaps on this man, "the lanky, laid-back Canadian," the title of the piece is cause for concern.

"BC teacher may be facing death penalty" certainly sounds like a BC teacher could face the death penalty. True, this man is from BC and teaches in Taiwan. He, however, is not currently registered as a BC teacher with the [BC College of Teachers](#).

Perhaps it was just a convenient headline wording. Technically, he is a BC teacher. But in a climate of tension between BC teachers [in the BCTF] and the provincial government [with their neoLiberal privatization agenda] and their media/communications lackeys in CanWest, the headline has more political currency than what the story merits. Context is important. CanWest gets a dig in.

But then again, bias is a tricky thing. Mine opposes the government and supports the teachers [and generally public sector unions in BC]. CanWest is coincidentally or intentionally in league with their ideological unregulated free marketeer counterparts in Campbell's neoLiberal government. But then I read NYU Journalism professor [Jay Rosen's fascinating piece](#) about disillusionment in journalism education based on a panel discussion he attended called "Things I Used to Teach That I No Longer Believe". In Rosen's piece he laments the degraded professionalism of journalism, including this:

"For many years I taught in my criticism classes that pointing out bias in the news media was an important, interesting, and even subversive activity. At the very least an intellectual challenge. Now it is virtually meaningless. Media bias is a proxy in countless political fights and the culture war. It's effectiveness as a corrective is virtually zero."

In light of this insight, I question the value of the media or a free press at all, especially when another idea Rosen laments is this:

"Alas, I used to teach that the world needs more critics; but it was an unexamined thing. Today I would say that the world has a limited tolerance for critics, and while it always needs more do-ers, it does not always need more chroniclers, pundits, or pencil-heads."

Here's hoping *Vista* is not a land of mere pencil-heads. At least we don't pretend to be journalists.

B.C. teacher may be facing death penalty

Man, 28, arrested on trafficking, smuggling counts

Ethan Baron
The Province

Monday, August 29, 2005

A teacher from B.C. is facing the death penalty in Taiwan after being arrested for allegedly smuggling and trafficking cocaine.

Mathieu Forand, 28, was arrested Friday night and jailed. He was allegedly found with cocaine, ecstasy and marijuana.

Friends in Taiwan said the lanky, laid-back Canadian teacher was throwing a party in his home in the Neihu district of Taipei at the time of the raid, and guests were arrested as well.

Forand may have signed a confession to drug crimes so his visitors won't be caught up in the prosecution.

"From what I've heard, he's signing things without knowing what they are, without having them translated," said Forand's father Peter of Port Moody, who learned of his son's arrest yesterday. "What I've heard is he's done some of this without legal assistance. That's a problem."

Forand's friends in Taiwan said authorities kept him up for nearly two days while trying to get him to sign documents in Chinese.

Taiwan is one of 58 countries worldwide that impose capital punishment, and drug crimes are subject to the death penalty.

In January, Taiwan's parliament ratified a criminal code overhaul that will phase out capital punishment.

Taiwan executed three people last year, down from 32 in 1998 and 24 in 1999, according to Hands Off Cain, a group opposed to the death penalty.

Friends of Forand told The Province that the prosecution is pushing for the death penalty or 25 years in prison, and that Forand's lawyer is arguing for a sentence of 10 to 15 years.

The Taipei Times said Taiwan Coast Guard agents spotted a Taiwanese-American man leaving a building, allegedly after buying drugs, then used the man as bait to snare Forand.

Friends said Forand was reportedly caught with one to five kilograms of cocaine.

Authorities allege he was the kingpin of a ring that smuggled drugs into Taiwan inside textbooks and sold them in pubs, nightclubs and over the Internet to foreign and Taiwanese students, the Taipei Times said.

His friends said they thought it unlikely Forand would have been involved in smuggling.

Cocaine commands a much higher price in Taiwan than in B.C., a friend of Forand's said.

Forand has been teaching English in Taiwan for several years. His arrest shocked his parents.

"It's out of character," his father said. "I don't know what he was thinking, or why he wasn't thinking."

A friend who also taught English in Taiwan said the case has already gained a high profile in the media.

It will likely become a flashpoint for racial tensions, with outraged Taiwanese calling for severe punishment.

A Canada Foreign Affairs spokesman said his department was aware of Forand's arrest. Forand's father contacted Foreign Affairs yesterday but was denied information. "Because of privacy legislation they can't tell me anything until they get clearance from [Forand]," he said.