

Swedish conference: Win the war on drugs

by Karen Steinherz

The strengths and weaknesses among “the best and the brightest” of anti-drug specialists were reflected at the First International Conference on Research, Treatment/Prevention and Organized Crime, which took place on June 9-14 in Hassela, Sweden. The 36 specialists addressing the conference included scientists, health, criminal intelligence, and money-laundering experts, parent activists, justice ministry officials including from the United States, the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Moscow legal attaché, and representatives of law enforcement agencies of England and Ireland. The conference was sponsored by the Swedish National Institute of Health and hosted by the Hassela Nordic Network.

In 1969, in the midst of the “peace and love” era of the drug counterculture that was sweeping Sweden along with the rest of Europe, the Swedish government began a nationwide campaign for “a drug-free society.” Thirty years later, Sweden is still not drug-free, but, in comparison with other countries in the West, it has the least drug abuse. Experimentation with marijuana among teenagers is significantly lower there, for instance, than in the United States, Canada, or England, and there are almost no new Swedish young people addicted to heroin.

One reason for Sweden holding this conference, is that international collaboration is critical in winning the war on drugs, anywhere. Sweden faces new inroads by the international drug cartels, with Poland now a base to smuggle amphetamines into Scandinavia, while the “borderless Europe” of the European Union’s Maastricht Treaty is making it easier for traffickers to bring drugs into Sweden. Sweden is encouraging alliances, in the hopes of spreading its example.

Uniquely among European nations, Sweden has a cross-party alliance against every form of drug legalization. Stockholm serves as headquarters for European Cities Against Drugs (ECAD), which was initiated by the former mayor of Stockholm, Carl Cederschiöld, in 1991. Conference host Torgny Peterson is currently both director of ECAD and the Hassela Nordic Network therapeutic community for young addicts, where the conference was held.

ECAD is a mechanism whereby mayors and cities against drugs can organize conferences and establish ties in collaboration against the efforts of the well-heeled

Drug Policy Foundation and other exponents of drug legalization.

Research and preventive efforts bear fruit

At the conference, Dr. Bertha Madras, from Harvard University and the New England Primate Center, reported that irrefutable medical proof is accumulating at American research facilities that will create the basis for a much more convincing public educational campaign about the dangerous effects on the brain of the mis-named “soft drug” marijuana, as well as heroin and cocaine.

Madras is also principal investigator for five research projects, some of which are funded by the U.S. National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA). Her efforts were vigorously endorsed by Kent Auguston, associate director of the Center for Substance Abuse and Prevention of the U.S. government in Rockville, Maryland.

Dr. George Ricaurte, a neurologist from Johns Hopkins University, demonstrated the effect of drugs on the brain, emphasizing that there is no such thing as “responsible use.” Ricaurte spoke of his most recent clinical and pharmacological findings concerning the effects of the “designer drug” Ecstasy, or MDMA, on the human brain. According to reports from the State Criminal Office of Baden-Württemberg, Germany, the Narcotics Police of Sweden, and the NIDA, the most prevalent drugs abused in those countries are “designer drugs” and hashish. Ecstasy has spread as the chief drug of the rave party or “techno” music movement in western Europe, where this form of computer-generated dance sound is popular.

Ricaurte stated that his research demonstrates that Ecstasy use creates axon depletion of serotonin in the cerebral cortex, where cognition, the highest human mental function, takes place. He is certain that “MDMA has been found to be considerably more neurotoxic to serotonin axons (the unbranched extensions of the neuron) in the primate brain than in the rat.”

As Dr. Madras described in her speech, techniques like positron emission tomography (PET) scanning, to map brain activity while the subject thinks, looks, listen, speaks, writes, and sings, are also providing new insights which provide the basis to educate people to the dangers of marijuana.

Successful rehabilitation approaches

Hassela Nordic Network prevention expert Peterson reported that there are modalities in abstinence therapy and counselling that can cure youthful addiction. Hassela rejects the term “addict” for its young patients, and optimistically refers to them as “students.”

Hassela has a success rate of upwards of 90% if the “student” remains the full year and a half to two years in the program, which culminates with some type of vocational training. This nationwide network of “students” is trained and counselled to reenter society as meaningful contributors

to the workforce, instead of being pumped full of more heroin, as heroin programs in Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands are currently doing.

The unusual dedication of Sweden to its young "students" was also evidenced in the remarks at the conference of Ka Westerberg, founder of Hassela Nordic Network in 1969, who stated that "every addict has the right to re-enter society as a pilot . . . or an engineer," a far cry from what liberalization advocates say: that both the addict himself and the population have to tolerate this misery.

Also addressing the conference was Andrea Muccioli of the San Patrignano therapeutic community in Rimini, Italy, one of the largest of its kind in the West. It has treated upwards of 2,300 addicts since 1978. Like Hassela Nordic Network communities, it is abstinence-based and believes in restoring its patients to the ideals of hard work and responsibility. San Patrignano runs a cooperative which specializes in metalworking, lithography, and farming.

Money laundering

Disappointingly, there was little discussion from the speakers on organized crime, about a coordinated strategy to deal with the activities of the banking system, both on- and offshore.

There was caution apparent in the speeches of dedicated career civil servants who spoke on organized crime. These speakers confined themselves to examples from their personal careers, or relied on anecdotes about their experiences. The speakers on this panel certainly have had much experience investigating the international drug cartels, but stated little about it. One speaker was Wilmer Parker III, the Assistant U.S. Attorney from Atlanta, Georgia, who was one of those responsible for prosecuting the government's largest drug-money-laundering case, Operation Polar Cap. The case showed how the Colombian Medellín Cartel laundered in excess of \$1 billion.

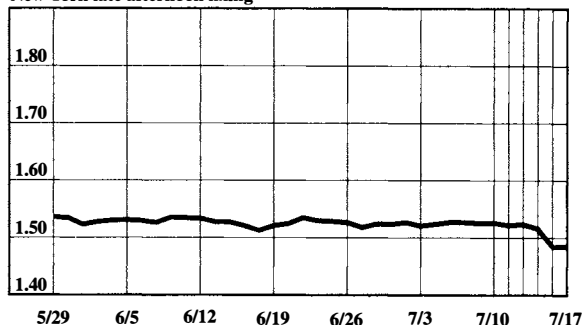
Another speaker was John Featherly from the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration office in London. Also representing the United States was Interpol General Counsel Charles Sapphos, who has helped to formulate international laws against the use of precursor chemicals for illegal drug production.

Yet the "public relations" content of these speakers' remarks seemed to reflect the fact that law enforcement officials from the United States do not know exactly where they stand in the drug fight. First, there is the "silly season" election-year politics. And, despite some partial victories over Colombia's cocaine kingpins, despite some improvement in cleaning up some offshore centers in the Caribbean, law enforcement still operates with one hand tied behind its back. There has been no coordinated decision on the part of all governments to give law enforcement the mandate to investigate and prosecute money laundering ruthlessly—the key to a winning strategy in the battle against drug addiction.

Currency Rates

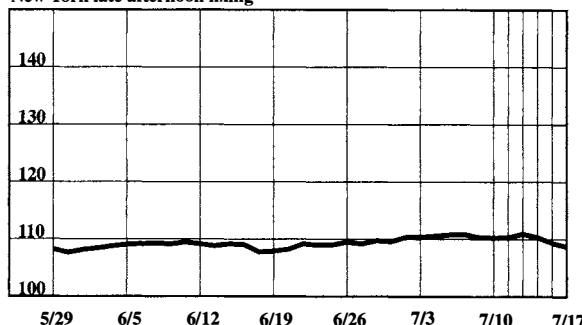
The dollar in deutschemarks

New York late afternoon fixing



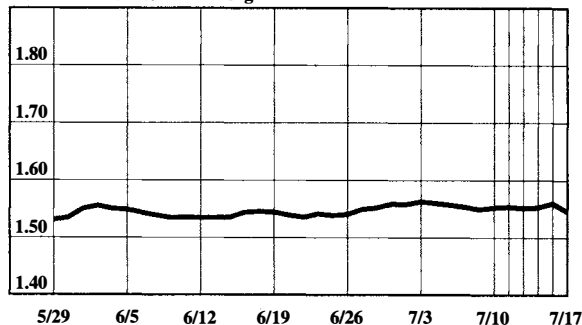
The dollar in yen

New York late afternoon fixing



The British pound in dollars

New York late afternoon fixing



The dollar in Swiss francs

New York late afternoon fixing

