

Scotland Yard hits drug traffickers

by Mark Burdman

An 18-month-long investigation by the "Special Operations" unit of Britain's Scotland Yard into the circumstances of the November 1984 theft of 26 million British pounds sterling in gold bullion, has resulted in what British police and press sources are heralding as one of the biggest breakthroughs in years against drug traffickers and drug-money laundering.

The announcement, widely reported in the British press during the Oct. 22-24 period, comes after a number of decisive pronouncements by officials of the Thatcher government supporting an international war on drugs, whose traffic Home Secretary Douglas Hurd denounced as the "modern equivalent of slavery." During the late-September Conservative Party conference in Bournemouth, the Home Office official responsible for the fight against drugs, David Mellor, announced that Britain would be supporting international legislation to have drug trafficking declared a "crime against humanity." The legal department of the Home Office is preparing legislation for a U.N. conference on narcotics-trafficking in Vienna, Austria, in February 1987.

This summer, Mellor visited several South America countries, to view first hand the war these countries are conducting against drugs. His statement to the Bournemouth meeting echoes declarations made by Pope John Paul II, during his most recent tour of South America, and by several leaders of Ibero-American nations, denouncing drug trafficking as a crime against humanity.

On Oct. 19-20, on the eve of the Scotland Yard announcement, European interior ministers had gathered in London, to discuss the relationship of drug trafficking to international terrorism. The meeting discussed a plan put forward by Hurd, for several measures to fight drug trafficking, including European-wide actions to seize traffickers' assets, and pooling of information not only on drug traffickers' movements, but also on developments in the drug-producing countries of the Far East and South America.

British insiders report that the fight against drugs and money laundering has been spurred by fears that the Oct. 27 deregulation of the London financial markets—the widely touted "big bang"—could be an invitation to drug-money-launderers to flood into the City of London. The announce-

ment of the Scotland Yard breakthrough would have a certain preemptive quality.

'The world's biggest operation'

The investigation into what happened to the gold bullion stolen in November 1984 from Britain's "Brinks-Mat" firm, carried out jointly by Scotland Yard and officials of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, quickly expanded into something far beyond the original robbery. Tracking the money and the networks involved, has already resulted in 11 indictments in the United States (Florida), including traffickers and lawyers. According to the Oct. 24 *Daily Telegraph*, joint British-U.S. efforts "have smashed a marijuana-smuggling ring which bought shopping centers, ranches, boats, apartments, and other legitimate enterprises in the United States with money laundered in the Isle of Man, the British Virgin Islands, Hong Kong, and Panama."

In a statement released Oct. 22, an official Scotland Yard spokesman reported that the task force created by Deputy Assistant Police Commissioner Brian Worth, head of the "Special Operations" unit, to trace the stolen gold bullion, had "unearthed a multi-million-pounds [sterling] drug ring and money-laundering operation in the United States.

"As a direct result of evidence obtained by the Yard's detectives," the spokesman continued, "the Drug Enforcement Administration in Fort Lauderdale has indicted a number of people, including drug dealers and attorneys, and believes it is a gigantic breakthrough in the fight against drug traffickers."

The Yard spokesman stated that the joint Yard-DEA work had uncovered "an unprecedented organized crime network between the United States and the United Kingdom. Inquiries have taken detectives to the British Virgin Islands, Anguilla, the Isle of Man, and Europe. A number of shell companies, set up specially to launder the proceeds and profits from American drug-dealing, have been discovered."

Two of the arrested individuals are a Florida-based racing-car driver, Randy Lanier, and a Miami lawyer, Michael Levine. According to the *Telegraph* Oct. 23, the latter is charged with having master minded the "laundering" of money.

All available information, at this point, is that these arrests are only the beginning, and that many more will follow. In a front-page article Oct. 24, the *Daily Express* said that what was being smashed by the joint Yard-DEA work was "the world's biggest drug and money-laundering racket." The original inquiry into Brinks-Mat, said the *Express*, had "snowballed into an inquiry into crooked cash all over the world."

The *Express* quoted Yard Detective Superintendent Tony Lundy, who is heading the Yard task force within the United States: "There is hardly a country that has not been used to launder money. These figures are staggering. We started by chasing money from the gold, and finished up chasing every-

body. . . . Many more arrests will follow. Some celebrities I cannot name will be arrested and indicted shortly." According to the *Express*, these "celebrities" would include a London merchant banking official, and City of London lawyers and financial experts.

The Yard's number-one detective, Metropolitan Police Assistant Commissioner John Dellow, released a statement in London on Oct. 23: "I'm sure there will be further arrests and I think we are very close to identifying where the [gold-bullion robbery] money went. . . . The amounts involved are vast. One hundred and twelve million dollars has already been identified in the first few weeks of the investigation in America. In this country, our inquiries are really only just beginning. Over the long term, there are going to be many arrests. Identification of laundered money would continue over many years. . . . I think we've got the tip of the iceberg here."

Reporting Commissioner Dellow's statements, the *Daily Telegraph* commented that more than 500 million pounds-sterling (about \$1 billion) would be involved in the laundering, overall.

Yet another comment came from Billy Youth, of the U. S. DEA in Miami, reported in the *Guardian* Oct. 23: "There is a massive drug laundering of money into the Isle of Man and the British Virgin Islands. . . . We are talking in excess of \$30 million into both of these islands, with the investigation continuing, which will inevitably document much, much more."

One factor that may lead to new breakthroughs is that U.S. law-enforcement officials have begun questioning a key figure in the Brinks-Mat case, John Fleming. Scotland Yard investigators had discovered that the British-born Fleming had had a secret meeting in Spain with one Scott Errico, a suspected drug dealer wanted by authorities in Florida. Trying to escape from British police officials, Fleming, eventually, ended up in the hands of U.S. authorities. The *Daily Telegraph* Oct. 24 reported that Fleming was being questioned "about a global Mafia banking network 'laundering' huge sums of criminal money." The same day's *Daily Express* reported that it is hoped by British officials that the questioning of Fleming "will cause a scandal among legal and accounting circles on both sides of the Atlantic."

Otherwise, according to an Oct. 22 *London Times* account, important information about the Brinks-Mat network, and its wider ramifications, has been coming from an informant, British-born financier Shaun P. Murphy, managing director of a firm called Financial Management Trust, which allegedly has operated illicitly in the Virgin Islands. Using Murphy's leads, and other information, the *Times* noted, a financial network has been uncovered that is laundering criminal monies in the City of London, Hong Kong, Singapore, Panama, France, and Luxembourg. But the broader network "includes Boston, Chicago, and New York as well as Florida."

Other fronts

On Oct. 19, British Customs Agents revealed that they had cracked a drug racket involving £18 million in profits from cocaine smuggling. This "evil operation," the *Express* stated, was "one of the world's biggest." It centers around a Colombian jet-setter named Oscar Cuevas, who has been extradited to the United States, where he faces 25 years in jail on 15 counts of drug trafficking and money laundering. The Cuevas gang, the *Express* reported, would launder profits made from cocaine sales in the United States into British banks, and then would redeploy these profits back into the United States, for further cocaine sales.

On Oct. 26, the *Sunday Times* reported that British Customs Agents had cracked a network of Nigerian traffickers, who were transporting heroin produced in Pakistan by air from Lagos to London.

Over the past weeks, senior British drug investigators have been attempting to increase the deployment of detectives abroad, as liaisons with anti-drug officials, including the Netherlands and Spain. The Netherlands, particularly the city of Amsterdam, has been identified by both British and West German officials as the "soft spot" in fighting drugs in Western Europe, and Spain is viewed as the *entrepôt* for drugs coming into Europe from Ibero-America.

David Mellor on 'crimes against humanity'

David Mellor, British Home Office Minister responsible for the war on drugs, addressed the British Conservative Party conference in Bournemouth Oct. 10.

We are pushing for a new United Nations convention against drug-trafficking to which all countries of good will can subscribe. We want drug-trafficking to be made an international crime against humanity—for that is what it is—an international crime triable anywhere in the world, on evidence gathered wherever in the world the trafficker has operated, with effective action against his assets, wherever in the world they are located.

British government legal experts have assisted in the preparation of a first draft which will be discussed in Vienna in February of next year. I hope there will be speedy progress thereafter. . . .

My experience on my travels around Britain, and overseas, makes it clear to me that it would be nothing less than a calamity if we failed to meet and turn back the challenge of the drug-trafficker, and the menace of drug abuse.