

Drug war ravages nation's capital

by Nicholas F. Benton

A Washington, D.C. city councilwoman has called on President Reagan to declare a state of emergency and deploy the National Guard in an effort to stem the record homicide rate in the nation's capital, which has resulted from an escalating drug trade.

District of Columbia Councilwoman Nadine Winter said Nov. 21 that she fears for the safety of the hundreds of thousands of participants in the presidential inauguration next month, because of the level of lethal violence now occurring in the shadows of the White House.

So far, President Reagan has given no response to the call. As for Washington Mayor Marion Barry, according to an aide in Councilwoman Winter's office, he "does not want to admit there is a problem serious enough to warrant measures of this kind."

However, the cold statistics indicate otherwise. Through November, there have been 331 reported homicides in the District in 1988 alone—a rate of almost exactly one per day and already far ahead of the total of 277 last year, and the previous all-time record of 289 set in 1969. The one-per-day murder rate is phenomenal, given the population of the District, which is only 600,000. Officially, 165 of the murders this year remain unsolved.

The rate of homicides is also rising, with the total of 43 in November setting an all time one month record (averaging out to a annual rate of 526). In October, the total was 42, and in September, 41.

Clearly, the biggest cause of the homicides is drugs. The District police department estimates that 60% of the murders are "drug-related," although other sources say the percentage is over 70%.

The most alarming factor in the drug-related homicides is the evidence of a growing turf war between competing gangs or drug networks. Police spokesmen deny that gangs are a factor in drug trafficking in the District, but other sources point out that the notorious Los Angeles drug-trafficking gang, the Crips, are "well established" in southeast Washington, where many of the murders have been occurring. These sources point to a pattern of "execution-style" murders since the first of the year.

The most that a police department spokesman would admit in a Dec. 1 interview with *EIR* was that "competing drug-trafficking networks" are battling over turf, but he denied there are gangs as such, and said that there was no breakdown of homicide statistics to reflect what percentage of the deaths have been related to such warfare, compared to deaths resulting from individual drug deals gone sour, or from persons under the influence of drugs.

However, a member of Mayor Barry's Youth Leadership Institute was quoted in the Dec. 1 *Washington Times* that gangs are burgeoning in the District due to the influence of the Crips, who, he says, are "much more sophisticated in their organization" than anything previously in the District.

As a result of their influence, however, local youth are engaging in a deadly drug-trafficking turf war called "Gangster Rock." The object of the "game" is to sell "rock," or cocaine crystal, which is smoked in the highly addictive and dangerous form of "crack," on another dealer's territory, or "turf."

What results, according to Mario Perez of the federal Drug Enforcement Administration, is "urban guerrilla warfare." He said, "They are still using semi-automatic and automatic weapons. There are still firefights."

The *Times* article quoted a 24-year-old drug dealer saying, "The war on the streets is between the New York boys and the California boys. When one particular dude gets iced, you know it was done on the say so of a New Yorker or a California dude because they are the major suppliers in the area."

According to sources, New York drug suppliers used to dominate in the District—which has been ravaged with some of the highest unemployment and poverty levels in the nation.

However, the Los Angeles Crips arrived in the District in January, and began offering 50-50 cash splits to local dealers, as well as providing them with guns. It is reported that 30 to 40 Crips are headquartered in the southeastern quadrant of the District, and one Crips member was arrested across the Potomac in Northern Virginia last September.

Perez said the DEA is "bracing for an all-out war between the different drug factions," although there are many indications the war has already begun.

In her Nov. 21 announcement, Councilwoman Winter called on President Reagan to redeploy military police divisions of the National Guard to immediately supplement the District's police force effort at intelligence gathering and enforcement to put a stop to the war and drug trafficking altogether.

She also called for police reservists to be called up to take on administrative functions in the department. This, she said, would free up 50 or more police officers for redeployment onto the streets. She said that Mayor Barry's proposal to hire 200 new police officers would take too long. The time consumed in their recruitment and training cannot be lost, she said.