

Drug dealers rush through shattered Iron Curtain

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

When the Iron Curtain came down across Europe over 1989 it was not only freedom-hungry Eastern Europeans and excited West European tourists who rushed through the crowded borders. The international drug cartel was among the first enterprising concerns to set up shop in the East. Land was bought up, front organizations set up, bank accounts opened, and local contacts made. The street vendors staked out their territory and began to peddle.

Europe, unified, represents the promise of the biggest economic boom in history, and, thereby, hope for impoverished millions there as well as in the developing sector. Dope, Inc. is moving in on this political target with marijuana, hashish, cocaine, and heroin, in an attempt to demoralize the younger generation and to reap enormous profits from the immense, 500 million-strong market.

That the drug cartels were setting their sights on Europe was already clear in the trends of 1989, which showed a jump in drug deaths and in confiscated drugs. The Federal Republic of Germany held the unenviable first place with 991 deaths (compared to 670 in 1988 and 442 in 1987), Italy was close behind with 965 (compared to 804 and 542), and France suffered 318 deaths (compared to 236 and 228). Officials were staggered at the amounts of drugs flowing into the F.R.G.; 35,479 kilos of cannabis products and 708 kilos of heroin seized showed a large increase over the previous year (29,008 and 537 kilos respectively). But the biggest jump appeared in cocaine seizures. While only 496 kilos had fallen into customs officials' hands in 1988, in 1989 the figure rose to 1,388. Somewhere between DM 4 and 8 billion was spent by addicts in street sales, whereas DM 2-4.5 billion changed hands at the wholesale level. The best estimates indicate that there were about 100,000 addicts in the F.R.G. in 1989, about 150,000 in France, and 300,000-500,000 in Italy. In Western Europe as a whole, there were an estimated 900,000 heroin addicts and 775,000 cocaine addicts.

According to law enforcement agencies, no relief is in sight. European-wide, 4,000 kilos of cocaine had been confiscated in the first three months of 1990, compared to 6,300 kilos in 1989 as a whole. The German criminal police (BKA) could not believe their eyes when they put their hands on *one*

ton of Colombian cocaine in a single raid in Frankfurt in early October. A few days later, their colleagues seized 24 kilos of heroin coming in through the Balkan route. Accordingly, last year's sad record of drug deaths has already been surpassed, as the 1,000th German victim was counted in October.

In the former G.D.R. (East Germany), drug addiction was not a social problem. The communist political leadership, which dealt in drugs as part of the international cartel, was careful to prevent their spread among its captive work force. Alcoholism and abuse of medicines was a problem: The G.D.R. was number ten in the world ranking for alcoholism. But the drugs seized by the authorities were minimal. Joachim Pfeiffer of the G.D.R. customs told the magazine *Horizont* in September, "In the last three years, we blocked 41 drug shipments in transit. Forty-six dealers were arrested in this span of time, and altogether over 100 kg of cannabis and 14 kilos of heroin or cocaine were confiscated. . . . And with an annual quota of about 200 cases—it was mostly tourists with one or two grams of drugs for personal use—one could not really talk about a drug scene in the G.D.R."

That changed rapidly. Within the first half of 1990, 493 persons were found in possession of drugs, mostly from West Berlin, a European center of the trade. And it was not for personal consumption: 4,819 grams of cocaine, 989 grams of amphetamines, 785 grams of hashish, 776 grams of cannabis, and 747 grams of heroin were seized. This added up to double the amount confiscated in the corresponding period of 1989.

With the opening of the borders, drugs have increased their flow into Poland, whose citizens traveled in droves to visit Berlin, as well as into Czechoslovakia and Hungary. According to Yuri Shchekochikhin, a commentator for the Soviet periodical *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, drug addiction inside the U.S.S.R. has existed for some time, and is increasing. He estimated, in discussion with *Horizont*, that the Health Ministry's figure of 130,000 addicts is a gross underestimate, in that the actual figure is probably 4-5 times that. Last year, he said, 3,000 dangerous dealers were arrested, and tons of drugs confiscated, including 10 tons of heroin,

seized in transit through the U.S.S.R. Furthermore, he reported the existence of poppy fields and hashish crops inside the country.

What to do

One would think that the alarming statistics would have shaken the political elite into action, particularly in Germany, where the recent reunification has defined clear economic tasks for the nation within the broader European perspective. Instead, the response has been one of helplessness, at best. At the first national conference on drugs held on Chancellor Kohl's initiative in June in Bonn, what emerged was a vague plan to fight drugs through an information campaign, with emphasis on prevention and therapy. Improved law enforcement, through legislation, and international cooperation were promised. But what made the headlines as a truly bold initiative on the drug front was a call for legalization made by ranking politicians in Germany, Switzerland, and Holland.

The most outrageous intervention of this nature came from Henning Voscherau, the Social Democratic mayor of Hamburg. In a widely publicized interview to *Der Spiegel* magazine, just four days after the official unification, Voscherau proposed that "heroin addicts who can not otherwise be helped, should if necessary receive their dose of drugs from the state, under medical supervision." Were this "medicalization" of the problem not successful, then, "a further step would have to be taken. Then we would have to think about the complete free distribution of hard drugs." Reciting the familiar argument, that legalization would halt criminality, Voscherau said he was "for drug distribution through the state and not through the mafia."

Voscherau, who governs in a port city known as the "high of the north," the biggest drug transit center in Germany, leans for support on the drug decriminalization program that has long been in effect in Holland. One week after the Sunday papers announced Voscherau's proposal, the mass circulation *Bild Zeitung* featured in its Sunday edition a report on the "success story" of the Dutch. Paul Vasseur, drug commissioner for the infested city of Amsterdam, was quoted boasting, "We have spent DM 34 million for aid programs, methadone projects, police work, and information campaigns. We have our drug problem under control." Of the 15,000 heroin addicts (among them 6,000 Germans) who had settled in the drug paradise city five years ago, he claimed, only 2,000 Dutch addicts were left. Only 42 died of overdose in the city in 1989, the statistics say, compared to almost 100 in the same time in Voscherau's Hamburg. But where have the thousands of former addicts ended up? Paul Vasseur explained that they are participating in the city's methadone program—in other words, they have traded addiction to one narcotic drug, for addiction to another. A bus from the health department is parked in a central part of the city, at addicts' disposal day and night. Some 5,000 addicts come by, in total anonymity, go into the bus, and get their methadone dose.

The city maintains these, and any more who may appear, on the substitute drug methadone, and boasts that criminality has dropped, and the addicts even hold normal jobs.

There is every reason to fear that, although Voscherau's free heroin plan will be shunned as too extreme in Germany, the methadone maintenance program which Amsterdam is advertising, with all of its implications for creating a drug-dependent labor force of docile slaves, could be adopted. Already in Germany, methadone programs have been introduced in numerous cities and states, among them Hamburg, Bremen, Berlin, Hesse, and North Rhine Westphalia. It was no left-leaning Social Democrat who sanctioned the program, but Christian Democrat Rita Süßmuth, when she was Health Minister in Bonn. Following a July 1988 trip to the U.S., where she met Dr. Robert Newman, who heads New York's biggest methadone program, and traveled to San Francisco and Washington to inspect similar projects, Süßmuth returned to Germany an enthusiast. It was not only the case against criminalization which Süßmuth, who is currently president of the Bundestag, argued, but also the case against AIDS transmission. Süßmuth's anti-AIDS policy as minister was based solely on promotion of condom use.

Thus, the drug lobby, while moving the merchandise in by the truckload or planeload, is busily corrupting public opinion, to force through political approval of narcotics. Following Voscherau, *Der Spiegel*, *Bild*, and Süßmuth, the former vice president of the constitutional court, Martin Hirsch, German judge Manfred Bruns and Free Democratic parliamentarian Ulrich Irmer spoke out in favor of decriminalization or outright legalization, even of heroin. Just to the south, in Switzerland, leading personalities representing the churches, political, and social layers made public their position regarding the government's drug program, in which they stated their commitment to decriminalization. Spain introduced methadone maintenance programs in October.

Whether or not Europe beats back the drug onslaught will depend to a large extent on Germany which, together with France, is the driving force for economic reconstruction of the East. The first all-German elections on Dec. 2 will vote in a parliament which will elect a government, whose task will be to concretize this effort. When this new government, the first to be elected by all Germans in free elections in almost 60 years, assumes power, it will have the chance to recast legislation in a number of areas. The drug issue, coupled with the related issue of terrorism and internal security, has become the number-one political issue in the election debate. Germans, particularly those in the eastern part of the country, do not want their hopes for a prosperous, meaningful future to be dashed by cocaine and heroin. If the electorate succeeds in making its voice heard loudly enough, there are real chances that the liberalizing trend which has so weakened the West over the last decades, may be halted and reversed. If it is not, the promises for economic and social progress will ring hollow.