

European cities start movement to counter the drug legalizers

by Ulf Sandmark

The long-awaited response to the campaign to legalize drugs got off the ground in Stockholm on April 28, with the ceremonial signing of a joint declaration of "European Cities Against Drugs" (ECAD). Here, 21 major European cities joined forces to resist the legalization drive and the massive increase of drugs pouring in from all over the world which are plundering the buying power of the European population. The effort to stop the legalization drive comes not a moment too soon.

Stockholm Mayor Carl Cederschiöld, summed up the political situation in his introductory speech. "Stockholm took the initiative to hold this conference against legalization of drugs because we're concerned by the trend among certain European cities toward a more liberal drug policy," he stated. "What used to be a marginal phenomenon has grown to much greater proportions in just a few years. Today, the advocates of legalization constitute a disturbing and dangerous political movement. They've made their mark on, for example, the German Social Democrats, who, at their latest party congress, passed two motions on the legalization of certain types of drugs. And in a vote held in one of the committees of the European Parliament earlier this year, the restrictive policy won by a scant six votes."

The direct challenge, which is the main reason for the Stockholm initiative, was the formation of "European Cities on Drug Policy," a group of cities directly promoting legalization which have signed the so-called Frankfurt resolution. They were directly addressed by Cederschiöld: "We are sending a clear message to cities like Amsterdam, Zurich, Hamburg, and Frankfurt. Their policy is not the solution to the drug problems of Europe. To the contrary, the 'let go' policy of these cities leads to more youths destroying their lives in the drug swamp. Such a policy is directly irresponsible to the citizens of these cities as well as other Europeans."

The mayor of Berlin, Eberhard Diepgen, referred to the arguments of the legalizers ("If you can't control it, legalize it") and made the comparison: "The criminalization of murder thousands of years ago has by no means eliminated murder from human society. Yet no one would consider decriminalizing murder simply because it cannot be prevented by constitutional means or because some people kill as if under

the influence of drugs."

Deputy Mayor of Paris Philippe Goujon made the comparison to China in the 19th century "where legalization led to a considerable increase of drug addicts. . . . Most youths are against drugs. Are we to bypass them and say they are not normal? . . . We can win. We have rational arguments. The anti-prohibitionists use innumerable arguments . . . that all subscribe to a pessimistic conception. . . . We save lives every day. Half of the drug addicts who get treatment, get off" drugs. Paris has been a strong supporter of the initiative from the beginning and will host the next conference.

A new era in the fight against drugs

What we see is an ideological counteroffensive. It is clearly free of the compromises typical of other international initiatives, such as in the U.N. The cities will meet every year and formulate and reformulate arguments against legalization. This means a tremendous strengthening of the resistance to the drug mafia. "A new era has commenced in the fight against drugs in Europe. The most important large cities are standing united against the legalizing of drugs," Cederschiöld said.

The 21 cities which signed the declaration in the Golden Hall of the Stockholm City Hall included 16 national capitals—Berlin, Budapest, Dublin, Helsinki, London, Madrid, Moscow, Oslo, Paris, Prague, Reykjavik, Riga, Stockholm, Tallinn, Warsaw, and the capital of Malta, Valletta. The other European cities were St. Petersburg, Gdansk, Lugano, Gothenburg, and Malmö. Messages of support for the resolution and regrets that they were not able to attend were sent from Jerusalem, Vilnius, and Zagreb. The organizers were happy to receive greetings from the Dutch cities of Oldenzaal, Breda, Zeevorden, Gendringen, Aalten, and Bergenop-Zoom, and from Dr. Ad Havermans, mayor of The Hague. This showed that even in the Netherlands there is a possibility of winning. The mayors of Cork and Limerick in Ireland also sent their greetings. Liverpool, England, and Strasbourg and Nancy, France participated as observers.

The case of Liverpool shows the tremendous impact this initiative can have. Last summer, the invitation to the Sept. 28, 1993 preparatory meeting for the drafting of the resolu-

tion caused a major brawl there. A committee of the city council decided that the city of Liverpool would work against legalization and therefore supported the cities' anti-drug initiative. This was a major turn, because Liverpool was testing a so-called "harm reduction" policy, which was the main argument for legalization.

The recruitment of more cities is the main vehicle to change the debate in Europe. It will help to remoralize isolated city councils which have been resisting the onslaught of the drug mafia.

The resolution

The key demand in the resolution is, "We reject all demands for legalizing illicit drugs." This is a clear and unambiguous stand. The cities also go on the offensive, demanding, "We request that our governments respect and with determination apply those conventions and agreements regarding drugs which they have signed." The battle is a defensive one, in the sense that it is a matter of upholding the existing ban against drugs. It is the legalizers who want to change the law, who have the most difficulties in justifying their position. The upholding of the ban on drugs in the U.N. conventions is a perfectly clear standard around which to rally anti-drug forces.

The city of Stockholm, along with the Swedish institute for public health and the national board of health and welfare, has decided to set up an office staffed with one or two people to work with ECAD. The task of this secretariat will be to inform and recruit other cities, assist in influencing public opinion in Europe, exchange ideas and information on anti-drug education, arrange study trips and practical training for people who work directly with drug addicts, and motivate seminars on different subjects concerning the work against drugs. It is clear that the potential strength of ECAD is the pooling of resources from the city administrations, which all are directly involved in programs for the prevention and treatment of drug addiction. Some cities also have their own police forces, and the exchange of ideas on this level has great potential and can become the backbone in the counteroffensive against the legalizers.

The formation of ECAD can be especially important for East European cities, which, under the totalitarian system, were relatively free of drugs. "The drug problem is the Achilles' heel of an open society," Berlin Mayor Diepgen said. In this period of transition, these cities also face a rapid expansion of drug addiction. Their treatment facilities are preoccupied with the widespread alcoholism problem, and drug therapy has mostly ended up being consigned to the psychiatric hospitals. A member of the city government of Warsaw, Dr. Marek Kaniewski, thought the cooperation of city mayors could play a very important part in the improvement of therapy and the creation of positive alternatives for youth. He submitted a list of problems on which he saw the need for cooperation: a role for municipal agencies, cooperation with

governments and non-governmental organizations, anti-drug education for youth, and information to urban residents.

The Social Democrat Lena Nyberg, who is in charge of social affairs in Stockholm, announced at the meeting that her party, after the election, will make an initiative for a joint course of action with fellow Social Democrats in Europe. Already the three Scandinavian Social Democratic leaders in Sweden, Norway, and Finland have sent letters requesting the Group of European Socialist Parties to vote against any resolution in favor of legalization. Because the parties, from left to right, in these countries are all supporters of a restrictive drug policy, similar initiatives may be started by greens, leftists, and neo-liberal conservatives, who all have legalization proponents among their international friends.

The integration of the Scandinavian countries into the European common market means that the border protection against smuggling will ease up. The ECAD type of initiatives are a way for the new applicants to the European Union in Scandinavia to counter this threat. The strategy is to help strengthen the international drug enforcement by police and at the same time launch this ideological counteroffensive against drugs. These countries have to win the battle against drug legalization in Europe or they have to give up on the integration with Europe, because the restrictive drug policy has broad, popular domestic support. It is the first major political issue in which the Scandinavian countries wholeheartedly are joining the fray in a European political policy fight. In the Stockholm resolution, the aim of influencing national drug policies and governments is clearly stated.

Reviving the great cities

The many praises for the beauty of Stockholm and the respective cities sounded like tourism propaganda. Freeing cities of crime and the pervasive scenes of drug addiction is, of course, very important for the tourism business, but it is also a call to make cities liveable. The enthusiastic praise for the great cities of Europe is a call to defend the idea of great cities in a time when growing inner-city problems risk making them uninhabitable, and when the idea of city building, as a focus for culture and civilization, is being trampled upon in several ongoing wars that are especially directed to turning beautiful European cities into rubble.

The resolution contains the following inspiring appeal to the defense of the city culture: "We, the European Cities Against Drugs, wish to care for our inhabitants. We wish to create cities that are secure and attractive to live and work in. Our work against drugs is undertaken because we care for individuals, families, and communities. The fact that we have not managed to turn the rising tide of drugs must therefore lead to renewed and vigorous efforts."

More information about ECAD is available through:
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