

Free-traders plan phony debate on drug legalization

by Our Special Correspondent

From Nov. 15-20, an international assortment of city administrators, police officials, jurists, and health practitioners met in the Washington, D.C. area to map out a strategy to “just say no” to the Bush era war on drugs (admittedly one of the most limp-wristed wars in history), and to bring about a de facto drug legalization policy on the city and state level. The meeting was held in two parts: the first conference of the International Network of Cities on Drug Policy, hosted in Baltimore by Mayor Kurt Schmoke; and then the annual conference of the Drug Policy Foundation.

The conferences took place in the political shadow of the recently passed North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA); and it is “free trade”—especially the promise of a further disintegration of national financial regulation—which is offering the most hope to the partisans of legalization.

The spearhead of the campaign is a resolution calling for the creation of a national blue ribbon commission to be appointed by Congress and the President, which would examine all existing drug laws and would propose alternative strategies. Federal legislation based on the resolution has been introduced by California Democrat Don Edwards as H.R. 3100, the National Drug Control Policy Act of 1993.

It is no joke to say, “If you liked NAFTA, you’ll love drug legalization,” since the architect of this drug legalization campaign is none other than Milton Friedman, chief theoretician of the free trade movement. The proposal for the national commission was drawn up by Friedman and some associates who met at Stanford University’s Hoover Institution; and while that organization disclaims association with drug legalization, the proposal is nevertheless popularly known as “the Hoover resolution.”

The conference organizers’ strategy is to overcome the immense popular resistance to legalization by gathering insti-

tutional support for a speciously benign proposal. City officials and other dignitaries who sign the resolution would be giving a vote of “no confidence” to the current anti-drug policies.

Two non-alternatives

The terms of the legalization debate would be limited to two alternatives: Keep the present course, or legalize. By thus limiting the debate to these two pre-selected “alternatives,” the orchestrators of the debate hope to ensure that no one addresses the fundamental role being played by the international financial markets, the derivatives speculators, and other banking interests which have been the prime movers behind the systematic destruction of all national barriers to the flow of contraband. They seek to avoid at all costs a repeat, or continuation, of the debate which occurred during the first Reagan administration (1981-85), when Lyndon LaRouche and some international associates made money laundering by the international bankers (as well as the mere smugglers) the focus of the original “War on Drugs” campaign. At the time, George Bush and his allies among the gangsters represented by the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith fought LaRouche’s proposal. Instead, they demanded that police-state legal procedures and violations of other nations’ sovereignty be brought to bear in order to net the lowest level of the traffickers, while at the same time lifting restrictions on the flow of money generated by the drug trade.

The “alternative” of sticking with the present policy course, is therefore no alternative at all, since current policy has already been moving toward legalization. It is not a debate over *whether* to legalize, but only of how soon it should occur.

Colombia offers surrender to Dope, Inc.

A dramatic indication of the "success" of Bush's policies was provided by officials of the Colombian government, who attended the conferences flying the white flag of surrender. For the first time ever, Colombian Prosecutor General Gustavo de Greiff Restrepo told an audience including representatives of the U.S. State Department, "The war on drugs is a lost battle. In the end, the only solution is legalization, with regulations to control the market."

De Greiff complained that "the profits [from the drug trade] are so large that it is a delusion to think that jailing or killing major traffickers will result in [a shrinkage] in the market." His sentiments were echoed by Colombian economist Sen. Enrique Gómez Hurtado, who scoffed at U.S. State Department promises to eradicate drug money laundering. "Money is fungible, and you can't distinguish a drug note from a bank note," he argued.

This is certainly true under the current policy of international banking deregulation pushed by the Federal Reserve on behalf of Wall Street and London. Therefore, even though Clinton administration spokesmen solidly rejected the legalization approach—a policy which the conference organizers consider "locked in" at least until late in Clinton's second term—the presence of high-level administration officials, including from the Pentagon and the newly created Inter-agency Counter-Narcotics Task Force, indicates that the "dialogue" on this question has already begun.

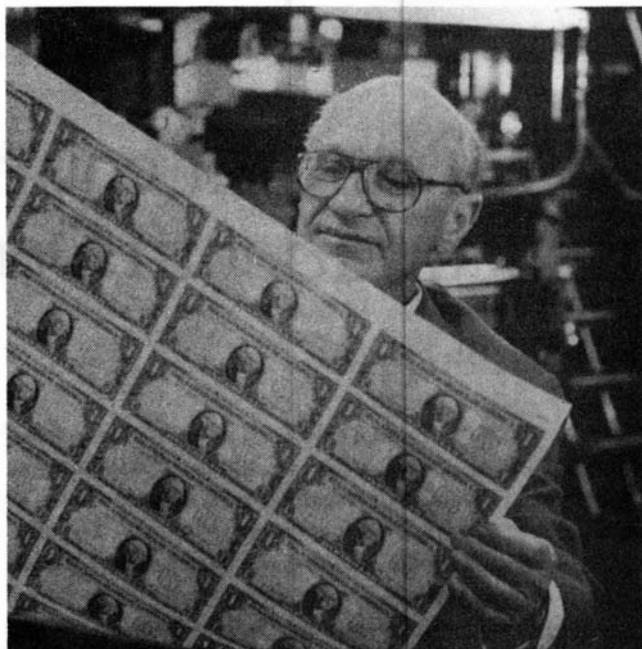
Speaking to the Baltimore conference, Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics Matters R. Grant Smith said, "I'm not here because this administration agrees with decriminalization or medicalization [legalizing drugs under color of medical or analgesic value]. We emphatically do not. I am here because, unlike previous administrations, the Clinton administration believes in open discussion and debate on social issues."

"Let me be frank," he continued. "We do not believe that legalizing drugs will move forward our common objectives. Even some supporters of legalization agree that drug use would rise if drugs were cheaper and more readily available."

The European legalization drive

Smith claimed that "this administration's stand against legalization . . . supports our international treaty obligations and the position of the United Nations International Narcotics Control Board." That remark should be evaluated in light of the report of a representative of the European Cities on Drug Policy. The ECDP has been circulating an international document, the "Frankfurt Resolution," which is identical to the Hoover resolution, except that it calls directly for steps toward decriminalization and legalization, and that its measures are found to be consistent with existing U.N. treaties.

The European initiative is being pushed by a network of city officials who champion drug legalization on the local level. Werner Schneider, drug policy coordinator for the city



Free trade guru Milton Friedman, the architect of the drug legalization campaign. For the Friedmanites, a dollar is a dollar—even if it comes from drugs.

of Frankfurt, Germany, had just concluded a three-month working tour of U.S. cities, and reported that the European model could garner support in urban American political circles. His theme was echoed by Paul Vasseur, drug policy coordinator for Amsterdam; Üli Löcher, drug policy coordinator for Zürich; representatives of the cities of Hamburg and Bonn; and other Dutch and British officials, including a representative of the London Police Department.

The so-called "Dutch model" of decriminalization provides justification for the implementation of "harm reduction" measures such as needle exchanges, the organization of "junkie unions," and other meliorist schemes which assume the existence of a permanent addict population.

Backlash brewing

American police and city officials, who have been attending such conferences in greater numbers each year, presented a somewhat different picture in workshop sessions. Prince George's County police chief David B. Mitchell, who is closely allied with Mayor Schmoke, and who polices a large, mostly black Maryland suburb adjacent to Washington, told the conference "my constituents have no interest in legalization." And Lonnie Hancock, a pro-legalization mayor from the ultra-liberal city of Berkeley, California, told the conference, "I am the local level talking. . . . I am now realizing the extent to which the drug and crime problem have become compounded into one problem, how liberalization can be read as not caring. . . . People want police saturation."