

# SBA Staffs Torture Trade

**A**mid the busy press of events in Babylon, the national media had no time for the "Tactical Skills and Countermeasures Conference", held at the DC Sheraton in late April. The trade show, featuring torture devices and kindred instruments, was sponsored by the British-based Contingency and Operational Procurement Exhibitions, known familiarly as COPEX.

As the company pr explains, "COPEX is a private (i.e. non-public) trade exhibition organized for three specific, international end user groups: tri-service special operations forces...specialist law enforcement operations...[and] intelligence agencies." Among those buying hardware through COPEX have been end users such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, China and Indonesia.

As busy shoppers prowled the exhibition floor, officials from the US Small Business Administration were on hand to "aid, counsel, assist and protect the interests of small business concerns". Duly bolstered by the helping federal hand were such outfits as the US affiliate of the British firm of Hiatt Thompson.

For more than two hundred years craftsmen at this venerable concern have been making sturdy Hiatt Thompson "Belly Chains" and "Leg Cuffs", deploying skills first honed in the glory days of the slave trade. Public outcry following a British TV documentary, "The Torture Trail", forced Parliament to ban the manufacture and export of such equipment. So sales are now handled here by Hiatt Thompson Corp.

Admission to the COPEX show was restricted to those with military-industrial or government ID. Press passes were hard to come by but several protesters managed to slip in. Art Laffin, a member of Ploughshares, says "there were over 100 exhibits and several hundred people inside. We saw a sign advertising King Hussein of Jordan as the main guest that evening. Along with surveillance equipment, we saw stun guns, laser guns, high tech rifles, telescopic lenses and lots of military apparel."

After thorough inspection, Laffin and a comrade addressed the crowd, telling them it was time to convert from a military to a peace economy and unfurling a

banner that read COPEX=DEATH. From among the crowd came the angry cry, "The reason you can do what you're doing is because of law enforcement." Security guards swiftly hauled the two protesters away.

The life of a torture salesman is not without inconvenience. In Germany last year a COPEX bazaar was canceled after protesters publicized the neo-Nazi ties of its local organizer. In England COPEX sued the group Campaign Against the Arms Trade for alleging that COPEX brokered sales of "electroshock batons and other torture equipment". COPEX

## Among the companies at the trade show was Hiatt Thompson, maker of "Belly Chains" and "Leg Cuffs".

director Julian Winkley insists that "electroshock batons have never been at the show", though he adds that "if a company were in possession of them legally and wished to exhibit them, then we would have no problem with that".

Indeed, COPEX's British catalog states helpfully that "just because the product you might desire may not be listed does not mean that it cannot be supplied". In early 1995 a British journalist proved the truth of this claim by

posing as a buyer for Zaire and successfully arranging to purchase electroshock batons from an entrepreneur working a COPEX booth. Such implements were banned in England in 1988. Last year an Angolan refugee who had been repeatedly subjected to electroshock torture in Zaire said, "you can't imagine the pain these batons inflict."

Winkley bluffly dismisses the British electroshock baton scandal as akin to "what goes on in a bar," adding "you can't close the bar down because two people get together to make a deal." When asked if such devices were for sale in Washington, Winkley answered "not to my knowledge". He overlooked Inbrafil, a Brazilian company which peddled their "electric sticks...specially developed for riot control" to the enthusiastic procurers in the bowels of the DC Sheraton.

Should such purveyors of weaponry as Benchmade Knife Company ("the leading American manufacturer of one hand opening tactical knives") and FN Manufacturing, Inc. ("a quality supplier of Military Small Arms...our in-house Engineering staff will design products to meet your specific requirements") receive financial aid from the Federal Government?

The Small Business Administration's press liaison explains that the agency was at COPEX DC to provide "access to information on acquiring financial, business development, import/export, and procurement assistance from the federal government".

Coming soon, to a trade show near you: SBA assistance for the crack trade. ■

## Pentagon Declares War on the Homeless

**P**resident Clinton and Congress continue to throw money at the Pentagon with great enthusiasm. The C-17 transport plane, the B-2 bomber and other Cold War-era boondoggles still eat up billions of dollars in taxpayer money. But the generals at Pork Central are angry over what they see as insufficient funding for "modernization programs" — i.e., gold-plated weaponry that prop up their friends in the arms industry — and have taken out their wrath on the homeless.

The Defense Authorization Bill now before Congress contains \$3.5 million for the Pentagon to "provide assistance to homeless shelters so long as the assistance does not interfere with military preparedness or military requirements". Pentagon officials have asked that the money be struck from the bill, this being possibly the first time in history the Pentagon has actually recommended a cut in its own budget. "Modernization programs, such as the Armored Gun System, have been canceled because of a lack of funds", a group of military officials wrote to Congress. "Therefore, the committee believes that providing \$3.5 million to this program qualifies as interference with military preparedness and military requirements." ■

(Dees, continued from p. 2)

the cameras aren't there, you'll never convince the Southern Poverty Law Center to go in."

**D**ees entirely controls the Southern Poverty Law Center's operations. His friends and colleagues dominate its board. He and other top executives receive salaries in excess of \$100,000 a year.

The Center is loath to allow outsiders to examine its books but its filings to the IRS, required for all non-profits, are quite revealing. During the past decade, the Center's expenditures on its projects have never matched the interest earnings on its huge endowment, which now stands at \$68 million. In 1992-1993, the Center raised \$11.4 million in contributions and had total revenues of \$13.6 million. Its program expenditures were \$4.2 million. In 1994, while income rose to \$15.2 million, spending was \$4.9 million.

Much of the money is provided by poor and elderly people on fixed incomes, responding to the Center's dramatic appeals for money. *The Montgomery Advertiser* is the only major newspaper to have taken a hard look at the Center's finances, publishing an eight-part series on the organization in 1994. It uncovered one case where a woman sent a check along with a note explaining that she needed to buy an overcoat but preferred to send her money to the embattled Center. Dees passed the note around the office and then incorporated the woman's letter in a new fundraising appeal.

The American Institute of Philanthropy grades charities on their spending of contributions and gives organizations an F if they can operate for more than five years without raising more money. In 1993, when the Center had \$52 million in reserves, \$16 million less than today, the AIP calculated that it could operate for 6.7 years without another penny. Only three of 300 charities examined by the AIP could have funded their programs for longer. The Council on Foreign Relations, spartan in contrast, had reserves to cover 3.8 years of operations.

Defending his group's huge reserves, Dees says that the Center is seeking to build a \$100 million endowment, at which point it will be able to end fundraising forever and concentrate on its civil rights work. Dees has been pitching this line at least since 1978, when the

Center's newsletter said it would halt fundraising activities as soon as it had accumulated \$55 million. When Bill Moyers learned of the Center's hoarding of cash a few years ago, he stopped acting as a fundraiser for Dees.

What's especially vile is that the Center rarely ventures into court. Between October of 1989 and December of 1994, the Center filed only a dozen suits; just two of these went to trial. During one 14 month stretch the Southern Poverty Law Center filed not a single lawsuit. During the five year period, the Center took in about \$50 million in contributions, more than \$4 million per lawsuit.

In 1995 the Center spent less than \$2 million on its legal cases. When a journalist asked for details of litigation, Dees came up with only three complaints: a suit on behalf of Connie Mansfield, whose son was murdered by the head of a white supremacist group and who was eventually awarded \$1 million by a Florida court; a suit seeking to prevent William Pierce, author of the racist novel *The Turner Diaries*, from collecting royalties; and a suit seeking damages for the heirs of Dr. David Gunn, who was murdered in 1993 by an anti-abortion activist. Stephen Bright runs a true civil rights organization and one that's not afraid to take on unpopular causes. His Southern Center for Human Rights has an annual budget of \$600,000, currently handling 50 death penalty cases and 24 cases on prison conditions. One person who formerly worked for Dees's outfit says, "The Southern Poverty Law Center doesn't raise money to do the work. It raises money to raise more money."

**D**ees declined our request for an interview, but the Center's Judy Bruno tells us that the number of cases handled by the Center is irrelevant and that it's the impact the cases have that counts. She also said that the Center performs far more than purely legal transactions. She points to its educational projects, such as the "Teaching Tolerance" program which provides free educational materials to schools across the country.

Dees's own lawyering skills are unimpressive. His big victory in the Donald suit was due to the hard work of the Figures brothers in the criminal case. Dees was especially inept in the 1975 defense of Joan Little, who was acquitted

## Wall Street Journal Ends Hunt for Red Clinton

**A**s noted in our February 1 issue, *The Wall Street Journal* had been predicting earlier this year that Bill Clinton's re-election strategy would have the president moving sharply left. Last January 23, the morning of the State of the Union address, a *Journal* editorial said that Clinton's most important and powerful allies within the Democratic Party were the "ideological liberals", whose chieftain the *Journal* identified as Michigan Rep. David Bonior.

After waiting patiently for months for Clinton to submit to Bonior's fierce will, the *Journal* has finally given up and faced the facts. Paul Gigot, "Potomac Watch" columnist for the *Journal* editorial page, wrote on May 24:

"I've recently tried to keep a list of conservative ideas Mr. Clinton has embraced. I don't dare miss a speech or press conference. Repeal the gas tax? Of, course. Megan's Law to inform neighborhoods about convicted sex offenders? Let's hold a White House signing ceremony. A tax credit for adoption? Splendid idea. Deplore judges who are soft on crime? His own appointee, Judge Harold Baer, is a bum! Drug war? Call in Gen. Barry McCaffrey for reinforcements...

"Lately, Mr. Clinton has been moving so fast to the right he's beating Mr. Dole to the spot. He declared his opposition to same sex marriages even before the Kansan could make it an issue. Then, lest Mr. Dole find even an inch of running room, the president preemptively endorsed a GOP bill to allow other states to ignore the constitution's Full Faith and Credit clause and reject Hawaii's looming endorsement of gay marriage. Who needs the Christian Coalition when Bill Clinton is around."

Gigot somehow forgot to mention Clinton's endorsement of the most vicious welfare program in the country, from Wisconsin Governor Tommy Thompson. There's only one issue Bob Dole has left, the "Star Wars" missile defense. We confidently expect Clinton to hold an unveiling ceremony soon, perhaps on July 4. ■