

From Page 1

UIC student advises Soviets on mob

By Thom Shanker
Chicago Tribune

MOSCOW—As Soviet lawmen try to get a grip on their faast-growing underworld, they are relying on an Illinois grad student to help them understand how the U.S. deals with organized crime.

Joseph Serio, 27, is no Moscow Elliot Ness, no Soviet G-man, but he has a desk in the secretive Ministry of the Interior's Sixth Department, properly known as the Main Administration to Combat the Most Dangerous Forms of Crime, Organized Crime, Corruption and Narcobusiness.

As the first American ever to work inside the ministry known as the MVD, Serio researched Soviet racketeering while helping his hosts better understand the U.S. criminal justice system.

But his insights were given a richer perspective by his life in a typical apartment block on a nondescript city street.

He rode to work and shopped like a Muscovite, spoke colloquial Russian, and saw problems from the same view as Ivan Ivanovich, the Soviet John Q. Public.

"What is indisputably affecting [Soviet] society to a great extent is the perception of crime," said Serio.

"The *glasnost* era has ushered in significant changes in television broadcasting, so now Muscovites can watch two or three times a day programs that speak exclusively to the worsening crime situation," he said.

"Missing children, fraud, murders; more knives, more guns, machine guns, organized crime shootouts at restaurants in struggles for territory—all this in a society that has grown up believing that such menaces occur only in capitalist countries."

Every visitor can sense the fear,



Tribune photo by Eduardo Contreras

Joseph Serio

Serio said. His Soviet neighbors bought big dogs, and he regularly heard screams for help from neighboring apartments and in his courtyard.

Serio was in the Soviet Union representing the University of Illinois' Office of International Criminal Justice, founded in 1984 as a center for information on legal systems around the world, as well as on other security issues including terrorism and drug trafficking.

The organization plans international seminars, and sponsors police-to-police exchanges with China, Egypt, England, Botswana and Panama, among others.

Serio arrived in Moscow in September 1990 as part of a delegation that included Chicago Police Supt. Leroy Martin and Deputy Asst. Supt. Matt Rodriguez. The police officers returned to Chicago; Serio

stayed to work inside the MVD for nine months.

In exchange, the MVD sent two militia majors to Chicago to work with the city police department while attending UIC courses.

Richard Ward, UIC's vice chancellor for administration and director of the international criminal justice office, said the Soviets focused on the workings of a big-city police department, and explored the relationship between Chicago police and federal law enforcement agencies.

Those links are particularly relevant as the Soviet Union undergoes wrenching decentralization with the collapse of Communist power.

"We discussed jurisdictional problems among agencies, as well as drug-trafficking and the sensitive role of undercover work—you know, how far does our government let law enforcement people go," said Ward, a former New York City police detective.

He said the two Soviets were shocked by recidivism rates among American criminals, many of whom have a record of 5, 10, 15 arrests and convictions.

"And they can't believe the number of weapons on the streets," said Ward, "although they admit that is changing in their own country."

The Soviets marveled at the authority given a beat patrol officer to make decisions without first checking with superiors, Ward added.

Ward was in Moscow just last month to sign a precedent-setting protocol with the Soviet Ministry of Interior for a program exchanging university professors, law enforcement officials from Moscow and the individual republics, and of computer technology and software.