

Jacqueline Buswell

CRACKDOWN ON DRUG TRAFFICKING

Often seen as a problem of producers rather than consumers, drug trafficking seems to be facing as never before a hard-hitting campaign against important elements of this intricate mechanism. The Mexican Government has not only imprisoned three drug lords —Caro Quintero, Fonseca and Felix Gallardo— but has gone even further. It has exposed part of the operational network of the drug traffickers: the collusion of the police at all levels.

This effort has been seen in a positive light by the United States Government, which has expressed an interest that it continue. Today, Washington, besides being worried about the political consequences of the situation is also concerned about consumption in its own territory, which is the other side of the coin.

The Mexican government, in a crackdown on drug trafficking this year, has arrested many drug runners and corrupt officials who gave traffickers protection in return for large sums of money.

Yet until recently it seemed that those arrested were using their ill-gotten fortunes to live as kings within the Mexican prisons, and even had telephones installed there, and were apparently running their business from inside.

Corruption inside the prisons is now also being brought under control, with those who collaborated being investigated, and important drug runners such as Rafael Caro Quintero and Ernesto Fonseca, and others such as Gilberto Ontiveros ("El Greñas"), have had their luxurious prison

apartments (complete with stereos, videos and saunas) dismantled and their visiting hours controlled.

Leading police officials during past administrations have also been arrested and charged with offences relating to the multi million dollar drug business. For example, Rafael Chao López, ex-

Comandante of the now extinct Federal Security police (DFS) for the north-eastern zone, who was arrested at the end of June, allegedly confessed that his fortune (millions of dollars and many real estate investments) was made by drug trafficking and by providing protection to other drug traffickers.

The Attorney General's department has announced that Chao López allegedly declared that during his employment in Tamaulipas he had to pay ten million pesos monthly to the former head of the DFS, José Antonio Zorrilla Pérez, who has also been arrested and who faces several serious charges, including the intellectual authorship of the murder of journalist Manuel Buendía in 1984, illegal possession of fire arms, abuse of his position of authority and undue use of public services. For example, Zorrilla Pérez allegedly provided police

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Journalist

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identification cards to drug traffickers such as Caro Quintero.

Chao López also alleged that Zorrilla Pérez received five million dollars from Caro Quintero for protection of the ranch *El Búfalo* in Chihuahua, where Caro Quintero cultivated extensive plantations of marihuana.

Zorrilla Pérez has denied that he received any of this money, describing the accusations made against him by ex-Comandante Chao López as "absolutely false, perverse and fiendish".

According to the assistant Attorney General for Investigation and Combat of Drug Trafficking, Javier Coello Trejo (who is dubbed in the U.S. Embassy here as the "Iron Prosecutor"), Chao López "used to be a good policeman, but he went astray".

Total Mobilization Against Drugs

Mexico's Attorney General, Enrique Alvarez del Castillo, ex-Governor of the state of Jalisco, has declared a "total mobilization against drug traffickers, against the bands of murderers who use peasants to cultivate marihuana and poppy, against the modern day pirates, the rubbish of today's world".

His department has been responsible for drug seizures in the first eight months of 1989, equivalent to more than half the amount of drugs confiscated during the entire six years of the last administration.

During the De la Madrid government, from December 1, 1982 to November 30, 1988, the authori-



The Mexican Army participates in the government's efforts to eradicate drug production and trafficking. Photo by Marco A. Cruz/Imagenlatina

ties eradicated 307,536 illegal plantations, with a surface area of 34,871 hectares; they seized 726.9 kilos of heroin and opium gum, 33,176.6 kilos of cocaine and nearly ten million kilos of marihuana.

Over the last six years, more than 70,000 persons were arrested and charged with drug related crimes, while 47 federal agents lost their lives in the anti-narcotics war.

Up till September this year, the Salinas administration has been responsible for the confiscation of some 300,000 kilos of marihuana and 21,000 kilos of co-

caine, 635 persons have been arrested on charges relating to drug trafficking, and ten agents have lost their lives on duty. A total of 8,007 arrests have been made for crimes against health, 4,527 weapons have been confiscated, some 3,000 land vehicles and 54 airplanes have been seized.

One of this year's most important arrests was that of Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo, captured in Guadalajara on April 8 along with several collaborators. According to the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City, Félix Gallardo "had

thousands of people on his payroll" as he used to pay off federal highway officers, as well as some members of the Army and law enforcement bodies.

When arrested, 122 grams of cocaine, a Magnum revolver, several pistols, a submachine gun, a carbine and two grenades were seized from him. Félix Gallardo has been charged with health crimes related to drugs, bribery and illegal possession of arms.

One week later, Álvarez del Castillo received the Parents' Resource Institute for Drug Education (PRIDE) award, in recognition of Mexico's efforts and results in the war on drug trafficking and drug dependence. The annual "Spirit of Freedom" award was presented to the Mexican Attorney General in Atlanta, Georgia, on April 13.

Meanwhile, Caro Quintero and Ernesto Fonseca, who were charged with the death of Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) agent Enrique Camarena in Guadalajara in 1985, have been sentenced to 34 and 11 years jail respectively.

The Camarena Case

The Mexican Attorney General's department has released the following statement on the case

of Camarena, who was kidnapped, tortured and murdered by drug traffickers while on duty in Mexico: "The Camarena murder was the reaction of drug traffickers whose interests were being seriously affected. This action was an aggressive act by organized crime, and not by the Mexican government, and the case should therefore be viewed as a problem shared by the two countries and caused by a common enemy. Instead of being a source of friction, it should induce even closer co-operation in the fight against drug trafficking, in which many Mexicans have also lost their lives."

In fact, the U.S. government, through its spokesman in Mexico City, has declared that it is very pleased and satisfied with this

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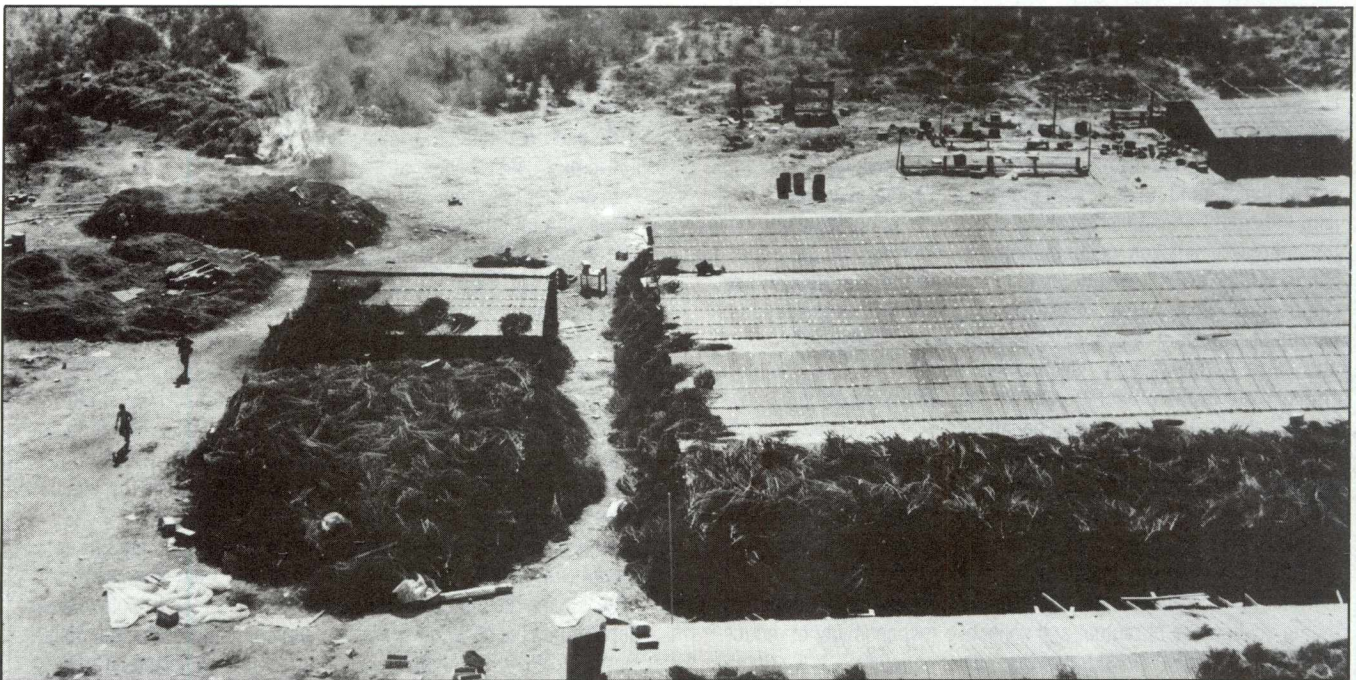
year's efforts against drugs. Spokesman Bill Graves told *Voices* that Mexico is really doing something now against drug running and against corruption in state, federal, executive and judicial branches.

"The efforts so far are very positive, we hope that they continue", said Mr. Graves, who added: "It is very typical to see a fictitious moral renovation campaign in the first year of a new administration, but it seems that President Salinas is not just throwing out rascals in order to put his own rascals in power. He seems to be really committed to improving Mexico's international reputation."

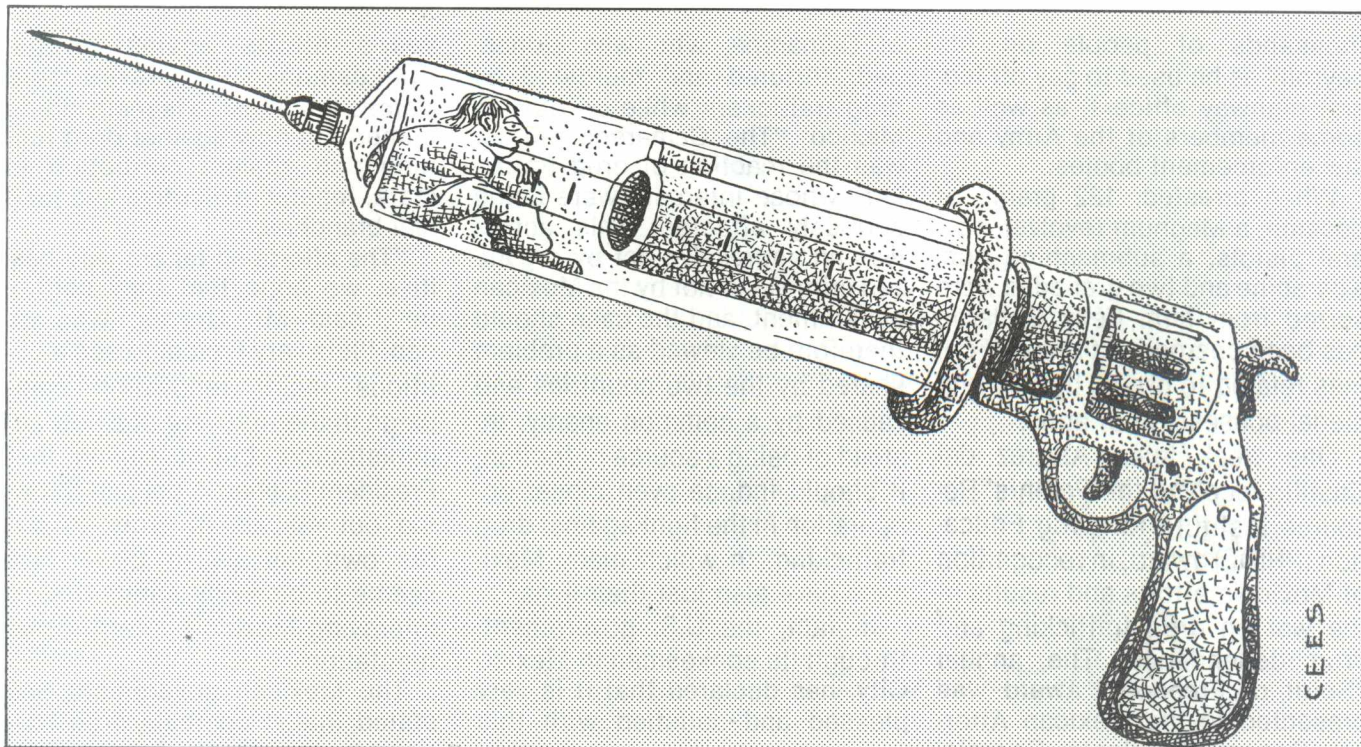
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The Mexican Attorney General's department has allocated 61 percent of its 1989 budget to the campaign against drug trafficking (more than 122 billion pesos), which represents a budget increase of 174 percent compared to 1988.

Meanwhile, the National Defense Department assigns 22,440 men (25 percent of the total ar-



Rafael Caro Quintero's ranch "El Búfalo" in Chihuahua was a grand producer of marihuana. Photo by Marco A. Cruz/Imagenlatina



INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AGAINST DRUG TRAFFICKING

Mexico will be host to the eighth International Drug Enforcement Conference (IDEC) in April 1990, and a preparatory meeting was held in Mexico City at the end of August, with the assistance of delegates from the Bahamas, Belize, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica and Mexico, with an observer from the United States.

This meeting agreed on the need to unite efforts in a common front as an effective instrument in the fight against drug trafficking, with international solidarity and collective responsibility.

The delegates declared that the fight against drug trafficking will be considered an ongoing, priority action within each country, in view of the fact that this crime affects humanity in general and the fight against it should be deemed an affair of national security.

The delegates discussed the advisability of updating national laws and the means and instruments for applying them, with the aim of establishing severer penalties, and declared that crimes associated with drug trafficking, such as arms contraband and corruption, should be dealt with globally and comprehensively. The joint statement announced at the end of the meeting specified that the international liaison would include the following actions: eradication of illicit crops, seizure of vehicles and weapons, dismantling clandestine laboratories, dismembering criminal organizations, control of migratory movements, control and surveillance to detect and seize narcotics and psychotropic substances and chemical agents used in the preparation of narcotic and psychotropic substances, application of severer penalties for drug related crimes, destruction of clandestine airstrips, comprehensive regional development programs for the substitution of illicit crops, prevention programs to reduce the demand for drugs, and the provision of treatment and rehabilitation measures, as well as the exchange of information among the collaborating nations.

In the fight against drugs, international cooperation is supported by the acceptance of mutual and collective responsibility to reduce the supply and demand sides of the "drug equation". U.S. President George Bush has declared "it is time to stop placing the blame

on others. North Americans cannot blame people in the Andes for our voracious appetite for drugs", while John Lawn, Administrator of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) since 1985, has also said that the time for name calling is over, "we must work together to reduce this epidemic, this plague that threatens us all".

Interviewed by officials and journalists by telephonic satellite hook-ups in August this year, William Alden, of the Federal Narcotics Bureau, said that thanks to education programs in the U.S. over the last five years about the dangers to health involved in the use and abuse of drugs, attitudes are beginning to change. A Household Survey conducted in 1988 showed a 37% decrease in the use of cocaine, while a High School Survey showed an increased awareness among students about the dangers of drug use.

Mr Alden said that in 1988, 65 million people aged over 12 in the U.S. used marihuana at least once, while 21 million in the same age group used cocaine at least once.

In another telephone interview conducted by satellite, John Lawn of the DEA informed that the U.S. seized 682 million dollars in cash and goods from drug traffickers during the 1988 fiscal year, and expects to seize some 800 million dollars this year.

In the same series of telephonic satellite conferences, a spokesman for the Mexican Attorney General informed that penalties for drug related crimes have been increased in this country, and asked about the possibilities of U.S. restrictions on arms traffic to Mexico.

Speaking for the U.S. government in reply, William Alden commented that it is a constitutional right in the United States to bear arms, but he said that the DEA has no authority on the issue of arms control.

More than 80% of weapons in Mexico are said to come from the United States, while Israeli connections with Colombian drug traffickers have recently been denounced by the press in Colombia. In September, the U.S. government began sending 65 million dollars worth of aid to Colombia to strengthen that government's battle against drug traffickers in a war that increases in violence daily.

med forces on active duty) to the fight against drug trafficking.

United States aid to Mexico in this aspect amounts to some 15 million dollars annually, as well as the training of pilots for reconnaissance and herbicide spraying flights, and the provision of "some herbicides."

A problem of National Security

According to the U.S. Embassy here, there is no state in Mexico which is not producing poppy or marihuana, while drug traffickers have untold millions of dollars. Thus, there is a test of strength between the Mexican government and the drug traffickers: "There was a feeling in the government that it was losing control of certain parts of the country, such as rural Michoacán, Guerrero, Jalisco and the 'Golden Triangle' (an area north of Culiacán, Sinaloa, composed of parts of three states, Durango, Sinaloa and Chihuahua)", says Bill Graves.

He continued: "We speculate that Mexican efforts today also have something to do with fears

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that Colombia drug runners were gaining more power in Mexico, and the Colombians are more ruthless and better armed."

On this point, the Mexican government has already stated that its fight against drug trafficking is motivated by reasons of national security, among others.

Dr. Irving G. Tragen, executive secretary of the Interamerican Drug Abuse Control Commission of the Organization of American States (OAS) has also commented on this theme: "American states are interested in the problem not only because of the impact of drugs on human beings

but because of the political dangers that are inherent in the power of the drug traffickers. In the case of Colombia, drug traffickers offered to pay the national debt in turn for legalization of their activities. A similar offer was made in Bolivia. We're talking about a problem that transcends public health; this is a geo-political security issue for most of the member countries of the OAS."

Dr. Tragen did not mention that in Mexico, Rafael Caro Quintero also offered to pay the foreign debt - in exchange for his release from prison!

The OAS executive, in an address to journalists on the organization's program of action against drugs, also had another opinion on the issue: "You can't 'Just say No' to drugs." (This was the slogan of Nancy Reagan's campaign against drugs.) The OAS plan of action includes proposals for standardization of legislation, improvement of co-ordination between police, courts and customs, and inter-American exchange of information. □