

Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

Crackdown in San Luis

The PAN party's drug connections were exposed in an anti-drug sweep of a key U.S.-Mexico border town.

At 3:00 a.m. on the morning of Feb. 1, two hundred soldiers of the Mexican army and 70 members of the state police of Sonora surrounded the police station of the border town of San Luis Río Colorado, moved in to dislodge the existing police contingent on duty, and installed not only a new police chief but an entire new police force.

What prompted this extreme measure? San Luis is the "drug jewel" of the border cities which are controlled by the opposition National Action Party (PAN). These cities include Agua Prieta further east in Sonora, and Ciudad Juárez, still further east in Chihuahua.

In the 16 months since the PAN took over the municipal government from the ruling PRI party, San Luis had become one of the biggest corridors for heroin, cocaine, and marijuana flowing into the United States. There was scarcely a PAN official in the town who was not on the drug mafias' payroll:

- Mayor Fausto Medina Ochoa, elected with the money and connections of the Meraz family, the biggest drug-based fortune in that part of the world, most of it now converted into investment in hotels, real estate, shrimp concessions, illicit casinos, slaughter houses, and the local press. Another big Medina backer, with ties to the drug mafias: department store magnate Jesús Mendoza Arguelles.

- Medina's Police Chief, Calalo Payán Martínez, a longtime associate and protector of narcotics interests. Pallán's brother, Gildardo, is the busi-

ness partner of a U.S. agricultural middleman named Bill Armenta, who reportedly put \$1 million into the PAN campaign in Mexicali last year.

- PAN councilman Conrado Flores Tapia, tied to international arms-for-drugs traffic. A substantial cache of illegal arms was uncovered a few years ago in a car with license plates traced to Flores Tapia.

- Enrique Orozco Ocegüera, PAN state deputy from San Luis Río Colorado, married the sister of Monge Viveros, one of the drug kings of the region. Monge was intercepted in Tijuana recently with large quantities of cocaine; he is now in hiding. Investigation showed that he was under suspicion in the assassination of a federal security police agent in the state of San Luis Potosí. Orozco has his own track record in such matters. He owns the lumberyard Las Palmas, scene in 1971 of a famous shootout with U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) officials attempting to intercept a major drug shipment on the premises. Several DEA agents died in the incident.

The problems for the San Luis drug nest began Dec. 31, 1983, when Police Chief Payán decided it would be fun to break up a social event held by the local Mexican Workers Confederation (CTM). He lobbed tear gas into the gathering and threw the CTM leaders into waiting patrol cars for a trip to the police station.

The same evening, in the small southern Sonora town of Navojoa, a leader of the Mexican Labor Party (PLM), Juan Pérez Gil, was savagely knifed in the abdomen by a PAN-linked

drug gang member hooked into the Meraz empire in San Luis.

Within five days, the CTM had rallied 5,000 in the central plaza of San Luis, and the state government had appointed a special commission to investigate the local police. The PLM added additional charges against PAN mayor Medina Ochoa and associates.

The full congress approved the commission's bill of indictment, citing its own investigations and the information supplied by the PLM and a number of other parties. Even a deputy of the PAN party itself, Alfredo Marín Castro, was obliged to recognize that the investigation had been "entirely impartial."

The press on the U.S. side of the border, in Yuma, has turned into a cheering squad for the PAN in the matter, suggesting that the FBI's notorious PAN support apparatus in the region may be working overtime.

Meanwhile the PAN leadership both regionally and nationally has decided to place the prestige of the party on the line to defend their exposed drug flank in Sonora. Speaking at a Payán defense rally in San Luis on Feb. 1 were Carlos Amaya, PAN state chairman of Sonora, and Hector Terán, Alfredo Arenas, and Eugenio Elorduy, the "high command" of the PAN in nearby Baja California Norte.

National PAN president Abel Vicensio Tovar declared in Mexico City that the state government had no right to intervene in a local government no matter what: "The township [*municipio*], as a natural community. . . has a higher human hierarchy, and of course a greater antiquity, than a state and even a nation itself." It is a succinct declaration of the PAN's hatred for the Mexican nation-state, and the party's separatist drive along the border.