

## Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

### Dollar accounts are for drug traffic

*The military and attorney general are cracking down on drugs—but the weak flank is the financial one.*

**O**n April 24, the Mexican House of Deputies approved the legalization of opening dollar accounts in Mexican banks in the border areas. The vote is a victory for the international drug-trafficking mafia,

cisely such banks as Bank of Boston and Security Pacific, both under scrutiny for drug-money laundering, which ardently advocated it.

In a related development, the Acapulco hotel owners announced their plans to set up casinos in the port on April 17 and 18, in statements to the press. This offensive forced the secretary of the interior to officially state that no casinos will be opened in Mexico, but since the dollar accounts have been okayed, many don't believe the ban can last.

The dollar-accounts decision comes in the midst of an all-out battle between anti-drug political forces here, and the protectors of the drug trafficking interests.

Two weeks earlier, Mexican Attorney General Sergio García Ramírez, met with the Justice Commission of the House of Deputies, where he said: "I would like to incorporate one more element which concerns us and ought to concern us extraordinarily: the geography of the investment of the product of narcotics trafficking. We used to speak of dividing the spoils which came from investment of laundered money. . . . In many areas and in many businesses there is laundering going on in many ways. So we have to take note of this new problem, this new topic, that of the geography of the investment of the huge, substantial

profits of drug trafficking, capable of buying decisions, buying instruments of crime, buying consciences. . . . They would like, undoubtedly, to buy more, much more."

The next day, the state of Sinaloa, known as the capital of drug trafficking, woke up virtually militarized as the army set up military patrols all over the state. Meanwhile, three of the officials closest to Gov. Antonio Toledo Corro handed in their resignations: Gilberto Zazueta Felix, public prosecutor; Roberto Robles Rendón, director of the Judicial Police; and Atalo de la Rocha Tagle, executive board member of the Forestry and Mining Commission. Although the governor hasn't quit yet, on April 17 Francisco Labastida Ochoa was named as the candidate of the ruling PRI party to be the next state governor, de facto putting the Toledo Corro machine out of the picture in terms of political decisions. In his first public statement, the new PRI candidate warned that drug trafficking "is not an unsolvable problem."

In the first week of April, Gen. Juan Arevalo Gardoqui, secretary-general of National Defense, announced that Operation Mangosta 86 was under way with a deployment of 50,000 soldiers, encompassing states from the Pacific littoral to the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, to Veracruz. This special operation will last eight weeks and is aimed at stopping the harvest of opium poppies and marijuana. It will reinforce the permanent deployments, Plan Canador and Task Force Condor VII-82-88.

In Ciudad Victoria, Tamaulipas, García Ramírez said on April 28 that in the first three months of 1986, 2.5 tons of cocaine were confiscated, with a black market value of over \$2 million. "This figure is the equivalent of all drug seizures during last year, and is also the maximum achieved in seizures in the entire history of the combat against the drug traffic."

This was the context in which, on April 14-15, another meeting was held in Cancún between the Attorney General Sergio García Ramírez and his U.S. counterpart, Ed Meese. The meeting ended with a joint communiqué, and an unprecedented recognition by the United States, that since the "last meeting in San Antonio, Texas, in December 1985, the government of Mexico has made great progress in strengthening eradication of marijuana and opium poppy."

The most important announcement was made by the Mexican attorney general: At year-end, at the initiative of Mexico's President, a meeting will be held in Mexico of all the attorneys-general of the whole continent to discuss strategy for fighting drug trafficking.

In early April the Federal Judicial Police raided the Vog Discothèque, owned by fugitive Leopoldo Sánchez Celis (son of the former governor of Sinaloa, and a crony of the ex-mayor of Mexico City, Carlos Hank González).

Agents of the "narc" squad of the Federal Judicial Police who took part in the raid revealed that other similar night spots exist, but that strong interests oppose law enforcement action. Moreover, they say there was a delay of nearly a week in the "Vog" raid, during which "somebody blew the whistle," so that many regulars did not show up at the club the night of the sweep.