

Economic policy held key to war on drugs

by Mark Sonnenblick

President Reagan's commitment of the United States to a war on drugs has begun to cut through what Mexican Attorney-General Sergio García Ramírez called "obstacles and diversions" to this effort. Mexico hosted the attorneys general from 13 Western Hemisphere countries in Puerto Vallarta on Oct. 9-10. At the same time, the United States, by providing helicopter fleets to be flown by local pilots for anti-drug use in Peru, Colombia, and Bolivia, has taken a belated first step toward serious levels of anti-drug aid to South America.

García Ramírez characterized the two days of secret sessions as "extraordinarily positive and useful." He had called for the conference in August, at a moment when dirty elements in the U.S. law enforcement community were using the existence of similarly corrupt persons on the Mexican side as a pretext to paralyze anti-drug cooperation between the two countries. García Ramírez, in his speech at Puerto Vallarta, noted how Dope, Inc. "is clever at provoking confrontations between those who fight it." He charged that the mafia "manages to turn friends into enemies and make allies suspicious of each other; that is why it defames."

The *New York Times* complained that the meeting was "a diplomatic success" for Mexico. U.S. Attorney-General Edwin Meese stressed that García Ramírez and Mexican President Miguel de la Madrid had "become world leaders in the war on drugs." Meese took the extraordinary step of recognizing that members of his Justice Department are among those corrupted by Dope, Inc., but the U.S. press chose to black out his frank admission (see *National News*, pages 70-71).

Financial constraints

The Puerto Vallarta meeting was the first cabinet-level session of continental leaders since President Reagan announced his war on drugs. Meese told the press that he went there "to let them know personally, face to face, the commitment of the United States to work with their drug enforcement efforts, and our internal commitment to create in our own country a drug-free environment." That commitment was appreciated by leaders of impoverished Ibero-American countries fed up with the burdens of unilaterally fighting drugs when demand-pull for them from the United States remains unabated. They have long demanded action in the United States, and the Reagan administration's new cam-

paigned eased the way for the frank discussions in the meetings. During two days behind closed doors, they were able to get their concerns across to Meese, Drug Enforcement Administration chief John Lawn, and Assistant Secretary of State Ann Wroblewski, who will pass them on to President Reagan.

Unanswered economic questions were primary among those concerns. As the *Baltimore Sun* reported, Peruvian Justice Minister Carlos Blancas "found it contradictory that the United States wanted Peru to devote significant resources to combat drug trafficking while at the same time demanding punctual debt payments."

Bolivian Interior Minister Fernando Barthelemy also raised the question of how to win a war on drugs when his country is dependent for half its foreign income on cocaine revenues. In the past, the World Bank encouraged such dependency as the best way to assure debt payments amid collapsing world demand for Bolivia's tin and oil. Barthelemy noted that most of the coca leaves are grown by 80,000 peasants with less than 1 hectare of land each.

He warned that unless Bolivia's legal economy is given a tremendous boost, drug traffickers would be able to buy the presidency, democratically. "A presidential campaign costs \$15 million. All that is necessary is that two drug-traffickers pull together the money for an electoral slate, and then, if they win, collect on their invoice, and in this way, they can operate freely."

A sample of the problem was given Oct. 10, when the mayor of the jungle town of Santa Ana led a stone-throwing mob which chased Bolivian anti-narcotics police and their U.S. army helicopter pilots out of town to stop them from arresting 12 mobsters. The town is owned lock, stock, and barrel by "Cocaine King" Roberto Suárez.

President Reagan is being told that resistance to direct deployment of U.S. troops in Ibero-America comes only from "leftists." Most of the region's Presidents, however, find foreign troop deployments politically destabilizing and a threat to their national sovereignty. They are asking the United States to arm their own anti-drug police with the state-of-the-art equipment needed to smash the rich and well-armed drug mafias.

The United States is taking small steps in that direction. Three 12-passenger Bell helicopters, with advanced radar simple enough to be operated by Bolivian pilots, arrived in Bolivia Oct. 11. By month's end, they will replace three U.S. Army choppers and their crews. Three of the same, plus one C-123 transport plane fit for short jungle airstrips, are in Colombia, ready for permanent deployment in the Andean region. If used in Peru's Huallaga Valley, a Lima-based U.S. anti-narcotics official told UPI, "We could run the traffickers down into the ground within six months if we were working every day." He urged that such fleets be deployed in several countries simultaneously to prevent the narcotics traffickers from escaping, "This thing has to be done regionally. It's got to be done in all these countries, kicking someone's tail every day."