

## Dateline Mexico by Carlos Cota Meza

### Narco-terrorism on the northern border?

*Recent violence on the U.S.-Mexican border is suspicious . . . and could be tied into drug-running interests.*

A demonstration on Nov. 29 in the city of Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas (the principal border crossing between Mexico and the United States), was transformed into an act of terrorism and vandalism. Citizens were protesting the orders of the treasury secretary to redefine the basic necessities traditionally purchased by Mexicans across the border in Laredo, Texas (because these goods don't exist in Mexico) as "imports."

The lack of sufficient domestic production has been aggravated by the free trade of the last few years, and it will be even worse when the North American Free Trade Agreement is fully applied.

The value of merchandise a Mexican citizen can bring home, free of duty, is \$50, while in other parts of the country, such as the Mexico City airport, the value is nearly \$300. Supposedly, the government orders are to "reduce imports" and avoid "unfair competition" against domestic producers.

The demonstration of about 12,000 persons (based on eyewitness estimates) was called by associations of professionals, groups affiliated with the CTM trade union, and the Committee in Defense of the Border. Upon arriving in the vicinity of the bridges that connect Nuevo Laredo and Laredo, a group of youths broke off from the contingent, throwing molotov cocktails, burning and looting the offices of Customs, Immigration, a branch of the Army Bank, and the federal tariff collection booths.

The main target of the terrorist group was the Integrated Automated Customs System (SAAI), which had

begun operations two days before as part of an effort to stop contraband. The SAAI computers were thrown into the street from the third floor.

According to journalists who witnessed the events, the vandals are presumably allied with the controllers of the illegal border trade. They observed that, strangely, the doors to all the federal offices were unlocked and unguarded. The border police from Laredo erected barricades on the northern side of the international bridges.

A heavily armed contingent of the Army and the Mexican Judicial Police succeeded in controlling the situation, arresting over 100 people engaged in acts of terrorism, the majority of whom were minors.

It is well known that the groups that control the illegal commerce (whether across the border or inside Mexico) are in fact mafiosi who traffic in everything (clothes, food, arms, drugs, jewelry, sophisticated electronic equipment, etc.), and, in some border states, they are organized politically into so-called Committees of Popular Defense (CDP), whereby they have won popular elections as local deputies and municipal presidents.

The events in Nuevo Laredo are the second time in a month that there have been suspected narco-terrorist actions in Tamaulipas. In the state elections on Nov. 8 in Matamoros, a city which also borders Texas, similar events occurred.

At a demonstration of opposition parties protesting irregularities in the voting for governor, local congress, and municipal presidents, an unidentified group threw molotov cocktails into a building of the Municipal Elec-

toral Committee, burning all election documents.

According to journalist Eduardo Valle, former president of the Union of Democratic Journalists, in a document presented to the Chamber of Deputies, in the conflicts in Tamaulipas, narco-trafficking interests who seek to gain political control were involved in the events associated with the electoral fight.

Valle affirms that "the Guerra family is again taking control of Matamoros; or what is the same thing, Juan García Abrego, the most powerful and dangerous narco-trafficker in Texas-Tamaulipas again controls that border."

In the perpetration of the grave occurrences in Tamaulipas, he adds, "the narco-traffic element is becoming essential." The fact that the PRI's candidate for deputy, Carlos Arturo Guerra Velasco, brother of the former PRI mayor of Matamoros, Jesús Roberto, may be the coordinator of the PRI in the border area of Tamaulipas, "opens that concrete possibility: Nuevo Laredo, Reynosa and Matamoros will be converted soon into a highest-priority location for the DEA [Drug Enforcement Administration] and the FBI," according to Valle.

There has been much speculation as to the origins of the Tamaulipas instability, and that which is coming in the neighboring state of Chihuahua. The events in Nuevo Laredo, more widely reported in the United States than in Mexico, occurred only 24 hours after President Salinas was to begin his trip to South America to participate in the Rio Group meeting. Others add that the events in Nuevo Laredo came 48 hours after the U.S. government began the trial against Dr. Alvarez Machaín, the doctor of drug-runner Caro Quintero who allegedly aided in the torture and assassination of DEA agent Enrique Camarena.