

Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

Washington's no to debtors' cartel

Regan and Shultz warn Mexico not to join any Latin American solutions to the continent's economic crisis.

When Secretary of State George Shultz, Treasury Secretary Donald Regan, and Commerce Secretary Malcolm Baldrige visited this country April 17 to 19, the overall impression the visitors left is that they came to swing Mexico away from its peace efforts in Central America, and its recent moves to join other Latin American countries in a joint solution to the continent's economic crisis.

Donald Regan publicly expressed his concern over the possibility that Mexico will join countries such as Brazil in a "debtors' cartel" as a way of forcing a workable renegotiation of their foreign debts. In a press conference April 19, Regan said that Mexico and Brazil "want no part of such a debtors' cartel. They think that they have put into effect a reasonable program under the International Monetary Fund." He went on to warn the two countries that their existence as sovereign political entities was threatened if they tried to create such a "cartel": Brazil and Mexico, he said, are "both very proud nations, proud of their financial reputation as well as their political independence, and they do not intend to sacrifice that."

There is obviously some nervousness in the Treasury Department over what President de la Madrid and Brazilian President João Baptista Figueiredo will discuss when Figueiredo arrives here April 26. The press has been reporting the two heads of state will talk about the financial cutoff to which their countries have been subjected. Barter deals exchanging Mexican oil

for Brazilian industrial goods will reportedly be signed.

"On a practical basis, we can look for programs of economic complementarity and integration, to accelerate technological collaboration," said de la Madrid after a meeting with Colombian President Belisario Betancur in Cancún, Mexico on April 10.

During a speech to the U.S.-Mexico Bilateral Commission (a cabinet-level consulting group between the two countries) on April 18, Shultz communicated the State Department's displeasure with this outlook. Mexico, he said, is part of the "democratic force of North America" together with the United States and Canada. The statements were quickly taken here as a reference to the discredited "North American Common Market," a David Rockefeller-inspired scheme which would make of Mexico a mere supplier of raw materials.

Most important, Regan made a point of implying that Washington has arrogated to itself the right to make sure that Mexico is complying with the austerity program which this country worked out with the International Monetary Fund late last year. He also insinuated that the U.S. wants Mexico to change its foreign investment laws. This had a particularly adverse effect here, since the laws, which limit foreign investment to a 49 percent stock participation, are seen as a pillar of Mexico's economic sovereignty.

It was, however, George Shultz whom the press and politicians here regarded with most distrust. There was

a universal suspicion that his assignment was to take advantage of this country's economic troubles to align Mexico's with the State Department's geopolitical shenanigans in Central America.

This suspicion was built up by Kissingerian geopoliticians in the department who in recent weeks have made a point of provoking a "Cuban missile"-style crisis over Sandinist Nicaragua. On April 11, the *Washington Post* reported that the Soviet Union was considering deploying nuclear missiles to that country. On April 18, an unnamed administration official reported that the United States was refueling AWACS planes in Mexican airspace to spy on Nicaragua.

Shultz announced in a speech in Dallas April 15, that Mexico's economic problems "could force the country into a situation similar to that of Central America."

All of this was obviously not appreciated here. By the time Shultz was sweetly saying in front of Foreign Minister Bernardo Sepulveda that when it comes to Central America, "there is no voice which deserves more respect than that of Mexico," an anti-U.S. demonstration of 3,000 people was already taking place in front of the U.S. embassy.

Furor over the State Department's Central American policies was expressed by the ruling PRI party and opposition parties' deputies in a congressional debate April 16. On April 18, the national committee of the PRI put out a statement through the national press warning of a coming showdown in Central America and calling on a popular mobilization behind the de la Madrid government's efforts together with Colombia, Venezuela and Panama (the Contadora Group) to resolve the bloody conflicts in the region.