

# PAN cashes in on Mexico's austerity

by Timothy Rush

There is no doubt that the International Monetary Fund is fostering the drug trade in Mexico. The IMF-run austerity program in Mexico is of such severity, particularly along the border regions, that after most of a decade when drug trafficking has been under control, expert testimony on both sides of the border now indicates that it is on the upsurge again. Many people who had left the trade in the "drug corridor" of Sinaloa, Durango, Chihuahua, Sonora, and Baja California Norte (see map), during the years that the Echeverría and López Portillo administrations waged one of the most successful wars on drugs anywhere, have returned to it as the IMF programs have eliminated legitimate opportunities to make a living.

Robert Mills, Senate Appropriations Committee staffer who recently helped organize two days of hearings on the flow of Mexican drugs into the United States, described the austerity regime in Mexico as "the catalyst" which brought a "sophisticated, new phase of drug operation" into being in the northwest, involving "integrated cultivation, packaging and shipping. This is no longer your mom and pop operation out along the riverbank, but high-quality stuff, packaged like Sears."

Mills said that in the Sept. 10-11 hearings, held in Phoenix, testimony from anonymous informants (hooded for their own protection) revealed that much of the new professionalism originates with Colombian drugrunners and money which has moved into Mexico's northwest, as Florida and other more convenient routes have become too hot. "The Colombian marijuana coming across the border into Arizona and California is extremely high-quality, better than Californian," noted Mills. The informants listed a series of names of the "citizens above suspicion" on both sides of the border, many of them owners of car dealerships or restaurants, who in fact are providing protection to the new "families" which are consolidating their operation. In addition to the transshipment of marijuana (and some heroin from the Far East), there has been a return to poppy growing on a significant scale, principally in Sonora, and some resurgence of marijuana-growing, though Mexico's dry, hot climate is not the best.

## The missing link: the PAN

Does the relation work the other way around as well? Do drugs help the IMF and its debt collection efforts?

There is a certain direct relationship. The several billion dollars in dope money sloshing around the "black economy" of the northwest has been the source of a large percentage of private debt payments made by Mexicans who had contracted dollar debt on the U.S. side of the border during Mexico's economic boom, and are now trying to service it. But Mexico's hefty oil revenues make drug flows less important for IMF debt repayment calculations than they are in a number of other Ibero-American countries.

The "missing link," which demonstrates the closeness of the interface between the IMF and drugs in Mexico, is the mass-based proto-fascist formation called the National Action Party (PAN), founded by Nazi sympathizers in 1939.

The PAN is the IMF's party in Mexico in a way the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) can never be, despite the fact that the PRI is now enforcing the IMF program. The coalition of forces in the PRI includes nationalist republicans of the Benito Juárez and Lázaro Cárdenas traditions, who know how to mobilize the population to historic actions in defense of national sovereignty and institutions. Such was the oil nationalization of 1938, and the bank nationalization of 1982.

The PAN leadership is philosophically and, in some cases, biologically descended from those Mexicans who allied with the invading Emperor Maximilian against Juárez. The private bank owners who lost their stranglehold on Mexican credit in 1982 are today the most powerful single force building the PAN as a battering ram to shatter the PRI.

The PAN does not campaign for the IMF on the streets, since it is attempting to cash in on the popular rage against the effects of the IMF program. But behind the scenes, it argues that if anything, the IMF program should be tightened. A best-selling political novel by PAN literary hatchet-man Sánchez Pontón depicts a military coup to put a PAN government into power, when the PRI president begins to sail too close to a debt moratorium. The finance minister in the new government immediately issues a new draconian IMF-style policy, while the PAN president dissolves the PRI party.

The party's campaigning boils down to a multimillion-dollar political protection racket for the IMF, by focusing all polemics on "PRI corruption and mismanagement" as the cause of the crisis, with no mention of the international interest rates, declining commodities prices, and flight capital operations (a large part conducted by the PAN itself) which set Mexico up for IMF takeover.

The PAN in turn is emerging as the vital political vehicle of the resurgence of drugs in the northwest. As can be seen on the accompanying map, the PAN's stronghold is precisely the five states in the northwest which are the center of the drug trade. The PAN won Hermosillo, the state capital of Sonora, in 1982, along with several key Sonora border cities. In mid-1983, it swept municipal elections in Durango and Chihuahua. It lost the September elections in Baja and the November elections in Sinaloa, but only by slim margins after fierce campaigning, during which its role in each state was expanded.

Recent drug busts along the border highlight the interface with the cities controlled by the PAN. On Oct. 28 the regional coordinator of the Permanent Campaign Against Drugtrafficking, run from the Attorney General's Office in Mexico City, announced that the biggest blow against drug cultivation in the history of the state had been struck with the location and destruction of a 22 hectare poppy field just a few kilometers south of Agua Prieta. A week later the coordinator, Raul Calvillo Muñoz, announced that his office was beginning major anti-marijuana operations in the Altar-Caborca area, where rich irrigated lands were more and more being turned to drug production.

Agua Prieta has been controlled by the PAN for six years, during which time, according to observers, it has become a playground for drug mafiosi who treat the area as a zone outside the law. On June 20, 1983, 15 economic czars of the region, including Adalberto Rosas, PAN honcho of Sonora, and PAN representatives from drug districts of Chihuahua, met in the Sea Food City restaurant of Douglas, Arizona,

across the border from Agua Prieta, to plan the extension of their operations. According to inside reports of the meeting, attention focused on capturing the mining city of Cananea, near Agua Prieta, as an essential new logistical base for the mafiosi operations in the region.

The border "port of exit" for the new Altar-Caborca marijuana region is San Luis Río Colorado—under PAN control since the elections of July 1982. PAN Mayor Fausto Ochoa Medina was put into office with aid of money from the pre-eminent drug *empresarios* of the town, the Meraz family, and has since been returning favors.

Both Agua Prieta and San Luis Río Colorado are directly interfaced with the empire of long-time mafia boss of the San Diego region, Johnny Alessio, via special gambling operations in the local bars, which accept bets on U.S. dog and horse racing relayed on close-circuit TV. The PAN regimes in both cities look the other way on this big-time illegal gambling operation, which serves as a premier drug-laundering conduit for the dope trade.

