
Dope, Inc.

Mexico suffers setback in the war on drugs

by Héctor Apolinar

The government of President Miguel de la Madrid has suffered a grave political setback in the fight which it is trying to lead against the international drug trafficking mafia, which is building up its operations day by day in Mexico.

In mid-December, the ruling Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) named as its candidate for governor of the state of Chihuahua—the biggest in Mexico, bordering the U.S. state of Texas—the federal deputy Fernando Baeza Meléndez, who is tied to the interests of international narcotics racket in Mexico. This occurred despite the opposition of the majority of the PRI and its chairman, Adolfo Lugo Verduzco, who is known as the man closest to President de la Madrid.

Baeza was named without consulting any of the national leaders of the PRI, or the President, as is customary in Mexican politics. The mass media announced his candidacy in Chihuahua, and the national leaders were only informed later. The decision was taken by three ex-governors of the state: Oscar Flores Sánchez (also an ex-attorney general of the Republic), Manuel Bernardo Aguirre (also ex-secretary of agriculture), and Teófilo Borunda. All three hold enormous economic and political power.

The kingmaker in naming Baeza was Oscar Flores Sánchez, whose role as a protector of national and international drug trafficking in Mexico is well known by the U.S. government. Between 1977 and 1982, as attorney general, Flores worked closely with Arturo Durazo Moreno, alias El Negro, the chief of police of Mexico City, who had more than 25,000 forces under his command.

Durazo, currently in jail in Los Angeles, California, is up to his elbows in the dope traffic, not only in Mexico but all over Ibero-America. In the 1970s, he was part of the so-called French Connection, thanks to his marriage with Graciela Izquierdo Ebrard, sister of Arturo Izquierdo Ebrard, recently shown to be linked to the drug traffickers Reynaldo Rodríguez, of Perú, and Ramón Matta Ballesteros, a Honduran-Colombian who was the key man in the murder of Enrique Camarena Salazar, a Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agent in Mexico.

Shortly after divorcing Graciela Izquierdo, Durazo was

sent to Chihuahua as bodyguard of a powerful businessman in that state. There he established ties with the dope traffickers of Ciudad Juárez, a town just across the border from El Paso, Texas, and of great strategic importance in drug trafficking into the United States.

The Durazo-Flores Sánchez collaboration in the 1977-82 period was no accident. Both as governor of Chihuahua and as Mexican attorney general, Flores kept Fernando Baeza as his most faithful lackey. Both were directly involved in an international drug scandal which exploded in mid-1979.

The scandal broke out after the charges of a grand jury in Los Angeles, California, which dismantled a cocaine trafficking network based in the Banco Comercial Mexicano (Comermex). The bank's manager in Tijuana ran the group, but in the city he passed as a respectable businessman, with a highly diversified investment portfolio. The scandal grew because Arce Flores had a long police record in Mexico. In July 1975, he was arrested together with other persons when, as functionaries of the Banco de Comercio of Tijuana, they ran a big money-laundering operation for drug traffickers from Colombia and the Mexican state of Sinaloa.

The problem was discussed by the board of directors of Comermex, whose president, until the banks were nationalized in 1982, was Eloy S. Vallina. Vallina decided that he had to block any investigation into the bank, and so he went to Attorney General Oscar Flores Sánchez. Flores Sánchez was a stockholder of the bank and, before 1977, was "commissioner general" of the institution. Needless to say, the investigation died on the vine. But the scandal left a nasty stigma on Comermex, Vallina, and Flores Sánchez.

Baeza's drug connections are not limited to his past. The most recent case in which he was involved was the marijuana fields of El Búfalo, raided in Chihuahua in late 1984. In those fields, 10,000 peasants and outcasts from various states "worked," and processed 8,000 tons of weed that was sent to the United States via Ciudad Juárez and Ojinaga, Chihuahua. The discovery and dismantling of the fields was one of the reasons for the murder of the U.S. DEA agent Camarena and his Mexican pilot, Alfredo Zavala, at the hands of known dope traffickers such as Rafael Caro Quintero.

There are strong suspicions that Baeza knew about the El Búfalo marijuana fields, given his position as assistant attorney general, as well as his extensive friendships in Chihuahua. He was friends, among others, with Gustavo Quezada Fournell, agent of the Federal Public Ministry in Chihuahua is supposed to monitor drug production and trafficking. But Quezada "did not see" the huge marijuana fields, which many people see as proof of how "dirty" his eyesight is.

Every time Baeza went to Chihuahua, he was met at the airport by Quezada, who was named to the Public Ministry by Oscar Flores when Flores was attorney general. Baeza's other face is his affiliation with the opposition National Action Party (PAN). Baeza was a leader of the PAN youth, and his entire family belongs to that party.