
Book Review

Drugs, crime, and politics in Mexico

by José Antonio Flores

The Underground Empire: Where Crime and Governments Embrace

James Mills, Doubleday and Co. Inc. New York, 1986.

1,164 pages, hard cover, \$22.95.

In his recently published book, James Mills, the author of pornographic novels, devotes a certain space to the story of the Cuban drug-trafficker Alberto Sicilia Falcón, arrested in mid-1975 in Mexico City, along with dozens of his band. The revelations Mills offers on Sicilia's connections to Mexicans in high places, provided by U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration sources, struck this reader like finding a kernel of corn in a pile of manure. The book as a whole is an anarchist's delight, a string of largely pornographic anecdotes and half-truths about drug traffickers and government officials, which leads the author to conclude that corruption = government. His recommendation: that the United States declare war against Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Bolivia, Panama, and any other drug-producing country, if it is going to be "truly serious" about a war on drugs.

This writer can testify that the bulk of the information on Sicilia Falcón is true, having personally witnessed the events leading up to Sicilia's arrest, as well as having done extensive investigation afterwards to penetrate the remaining mysteries surrounding the case.

The case of Mario Moya Palencia

The first kernel of truth that Mills provides regarding the case of Sicilia, is that he headed up an immense cocaine trafficking network, from Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru to the United States—through Mexico. Mills says that, according to DEA officials of those years, Sicilia traded arms for marijuana with groups of Mexican guerrillas, in particular with the band of Genaro Vázquez Rojas, who operated in the mountains of Guerrero state, at that time the leading producer region for marijuana and heroin in the country.

According to the DEA agents who investigated him, Sicilia Falcón had contacts with the intelligence services of the

Fidel Castro government, with the Portuguese dictator Antonio de Spínola, and with officials of many Ibero-American governments. The profits from the drug trade were deposited in banks as prestigious as the Union Bank of Switzerland, Merrill Lynch, and a certain Soviet bank with offices in Paris.

The DEA had no precise idea of whom Sicilia Falcón was working for. When he was arrested in Mexico City, in July of 1975, he was carrying very special credentials as an agent of the interior ministry. Nonetheless, Michael Decker, the professional assassin trained during "Operation Phoenix" of the Vietnam War period—and who worked for Sicilia Falcón until becoming an informant for the DEA—revealed that the Cuban mafioso maintained contact with high-level officials of the Mexican government. One of these was with Mario Moya Palencia, at the time interior minister and today the Mexican ambassador to the United Nations. Moya is also one of the godfathers of the present interior minister and presidential hopeful, Manuel Bartlett.

Mills writes that Moya was disqualified as a possible presidential candidate of the ruling PRI party when his links to Sicilia Falcón became known. In his place, José López Portillo was chosen as candidate.

Lola Olmedo

Other members of the *Grupo Falcón* included personalities like Dolores (Lola) Olmedo, Arturo Durazo Moreno, Francisco Sahagún Baca, the bullfighter Gastón Santos, and the showgirl Irma Serrano. The most important of these is Lola Olmedo, who was the lover of both former President Miguel Alemán and Communist painter Diego Rivera. In 1975, Lola Olmedo was also the lover of Arturo Izquierdo Ebrard, the former personal bodyguard of Miguel Alemán and a member of the infamous "French Connection." The ranch that Izquierdo Ebrard owned in Nautla, Veracruz, was built by Lola Olmedo, and there large quantities of cocaine and heroin were refined and warehoused.

Both the Izquierdo Ebrard family and Lola Olmedo lead back to Miguel Alemán, who played the role of godfather to the Mexican drug mafia for some 40 years. Neither Olmedo, nor Gastón Santos, nor Irma Serrano, nor Mario Moya Palencia was ever touched by the police.

During the administration of López Portillo, Lola Olmedo—who continues to have links to high-level Communist agents today—held the position of Political Delegate of Xochimilco, thanks to the then regent of the Federal District, Carlos Hank González. At the same time, his good friend Arturo Durazo Moreno was the chief of police. Durazo was married to Graciela Izquierdo Ebrard during the '50s, and through her was linked to the Alemán empire. Durazo is today sitting in a Mexican jail.

Mills utilized the DEA revelations in his book to lend a touch of credibility to pornographic ramblings which otherwise rather quickly wear thin. Despite this, the discriminating investigator—perhaps wearing hip-high boots—might find some worthwhile "kernels" to follow up.