

Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

Regan crony attacks anti-drug fighter

The White House chief of staff's friend is doing his best to protect the entrenched drug mafia in Sinaloa.

Listen up, friends: in the coming days I am going to get ready to die . . . but whatever it costs, they won't steal the Sinaloa election," said Manuel J. Clouthier, before a group of businessmen on Oct. 7. Clouthier was the candidate for governor of the state of Sinaloa on the insurgent National Action Party (PAN) slate, defeated by the candidate of the ruling Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI), Francisco Labastida Ochoa.

Clouthier's theatrical declarations are designed to hide the reality of what occurred during the Sinaloa campaign, one of the most important in Mexico, since the center of one of the biggest drug trafficking mafias is located there. In particular, it is the haven of trafficker Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo, who is charged by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration with masterminding the murder of U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration agent Enrique Camarena Salazar.

In fact, it is Labastida, the PRI governor-elect, who has been the target of attacks by the dope mafia. At the end of June, Labastida's car was shot full of bullets in front of his house, a clear warning of reprisal against his pledges to combat and banish the state's drug traffic. At the end of July, the plane in which Labastida was traveling with some of his collaborators almost crashed when a motor blew up; only the pilot's skill prevented Labastida and his entourage from getting killed. The case remains unsolved. In mid-September, José Angel Pesca-

dor, the PRI candidate for mayor of Mazatlán, the second largest city in Sinaloa, was leaving one of his electoral rallies when he was warned that unknown armed men were going around asking for him.

On Sept. 14, a former congressman and peasant leader from Sinaloa, Saúl Ríos Beltrán, was seriously wounded in an attempt on his life by drug-mafia-hired gunmen. The event was widely talked about because it was notorious that the outgoing state governor, the corrupt Antonio Toledo Corro, hated Ríos Beltrán.

The foregoing are some of the attacks suffered by PRI candidates identified with Francisco Labastida, without counting the 700 assassinations in the state this year.

In suspicious contrast, Manuel J. Clouthier did not get attacked or threatened *once* by the narcotics mafia. This is not accidental. Manuel Clouthier del Rincón is the head of one of the more powerful landowning families of Sinaloa state, linked to the drug trade. Clouthier's grandfather, Francisco ("Pancho") del Rincón, was a big "capo" of the Sinaloa mafia. In 1973, according to the daily *El Sol de Sinaloa*, the police discovered a warehouse of the VIMSA company, owned by Clouthier, filled with several tons of marijuana.

Clouthier dedicated his campaign to attacking Labastida, although he knew that Labastida was not identified with the corrupt policy of outgoing Governor Toledo Corro. Labastida is

recognized in the state and nationwide as a man dedicated to Mexico's industrial growth, and whose honesty is above reproach. When he held the cabinet portfolio of energy, mines, and semi-public industry, Labastida won enormous respect both in PRI political circles and among the national business community.

On Nov. 1, Clouthier held a demonstration in front of Labastida's private residence and placed a coffin at the door of his home, in flagrant violation of his rights of privacy. On Nov. 2, Clouthier was arrested for 45 minutes for insulting an election official. Previously, on Oct. 30, Clouthier staged a rally before the offices of the U.S. consulate in Mazatlán demanding that the U.S. government grant no more credits to Mexico. The demand was presented by Clouthier's uncle Jorge del Rincón, to the consulate personnel.

Clouthier is trying to weaken Labastida's capability of waging war on the state's entrenched drug mob by calling his election victory into question.

This insolence reflects the fact that he has the backing of important interest groups. One is Donald Regan, White House chief of staff. Their friendship dates from 1982, when Clouthier was chairman of the Mexican "Confederación Patronal" or big industrialists association. That was when President López Portillo decreed the nationalization of the banks, and various bank owners went to ask for help from the U.S. government to force the Mexican government to restore their ownership. One of the most assiduous of these travelers was Clouthier, who met with Don Regan, then U.S. treasury secretary.

That's clear. But does Don Regan know his pal Clouthier is sabotaging efforts to fight the drug traffickers' political power in the state of Sinaloa?