

Bush presides over anti-drug farce

by Valerie Rush

The Feb. 27 "anti-drug summit" between President George Bush and five Ibero-American heads of state concluded in San Antonio, Texas on an embarrassing note. The 25-page final declaration contained not a single concrete initiative toward defeating the drug plague; candidate Bush was unable to chalk up an anti-drug "success story" that would carry him through "Super Tuesday"; and his Ibero-American colleagues returned to their outraged countrymen with empty rhetoric and emptier pockets.

Much ado was made in the press about the "squabble" between Bush and Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori, who allegedly represented the two sides of a "guns vs. butter" fight over how to defeat drugs. Bush urged the formation of a multinational strike force and a military escalation of the war—more interdiction, more eradication, more repression—while Fujimori purportedly represented the "alternative development" approach, that of supposedly offering coca farmers legitimate economic alternatives to producing dope, through land titles, technological and financial assistance, and so forth.

But neither even mentioned the underlying cause of the whole mess: the economic austerity policies of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Wall Street banks, which launder \$500 billion in yearly revenues from the drug trade. Both Bush and his Ibero-American counterparts fully support those financial policies.

Bush's push for a military escalation was viewed with great apprehension by the Ibero-Americans: Fujimori warned of possible "new Vietnams," Bolivia's Jaime Paz Zamora and Mexico's Carlos Salinas de Gortari "absolutely rejected" any multinational interventions, and Colombia's César Gaviria dismissed what he dubbed the "Rambo" approach. And yet Fujimori's so-called "development" approach is equally insidious, for it is in essence the drug legalization strategy of the international bankers, in a Third World guise.

Legalization by any other name

None of the press coverage of the summit mentioned that the Peruvian President had just received the fulsome praise of IMF Managing Director Michel Camdessus for his merciless imposition of drastic IMF austerity dictates, which make the

possibility of "legitimate economic alternatives" a cruel joke. In fact, it is precisely such IMF policies which have *bankrupted* these countries' productive sectors, forcing them instead to produce the one lucrative product—drugs—that will enable them to continue payments on their foreign debt.

One small gain at the summit could perhaps be seen in the fact that Bush's primary objective for the summit—formation of a multilateral anti-drug strike force empowered to cross national borders—was rejected before the summit even began, by jittery governments which had been reminded by their armed forces back home (and by the recent military rebellion in Venezuela) that such blatant contempt for national sovereignty was flatly unacceptable.

However, as Mexican journalist Carlos Fazio noted in the daily *El Financiero* of Feb. 28, "History has demonstrated that the U.S. has traditionally succeeded in imposing its policies on the hemisphere, one way or the other. . . . The logic of power—the noted law of the jungle on an international plane—usually has no limits. . . . Everything therefore suggests that the U.S. will continue to insist on its new military project for the sub-continent."

'No more blank checks'

When Bush preceded the summit with an announcement that no new U.S. anti-drug funds would be forthcoming for his Andean colleagues, an angry Fujimori responded by pulling the plug on a U.S.-backed Colombian proposal for setting a *two-decade* timetable of targets and goals toward eliminating the drug trade. Progress in eradication, said Fujimori, "is directly related to the size of financial support. It is not possible to have goals if the finances are not assured."

A provoked Bush shot back, "There are no blank checks anymore, for this or anything else." Bush declared, "The responsibility of the President of the United States is to the people of the United States." On Bush's urging, the final communiqué of the summit included a determination to send delegations to Canada, Europe, and Japan to seek "closer cooperation," specifically financial, from those parts of the world newly suffering the cocaine plague.

While Bush was busy claiming "major progress" in the war on drugs, his own State Department put out its Annual Report on Narcotics Affairs which revealed that cocaine production has dramatically increased in the past year to an *officially* estimated 1,000 metric tons, or more. Even more frightening was the report that the production of opium, the raw material for heroin, had increased worldwide by 8%, with a substantial percentage of that in the Americas.

Narcotics specialists published reams of analysis before, during, and after the summit. Yet not one of these analysts, nor did the participants at the summit, raise the obvious: that cutting the financial jugular of the drug trade by hitting the international banks which launder their profits would be the simplest, quickest, and cheapest success they could chalk up in a seriously prosecuted war on drugs.