

Dateline Mexico by Carlos Wesley

'Kidnap, Inc.' expands in Mexico

Mexican politicians offer death penalty as a sop to the population, while narco-terrorists run loose.

The kidnapping and murder of businessman Reynaldo Díaz Brown has ignited a debate on restoring the death penalty in Mexico. A wealthy agriculturist from the state of Sonora, Díaz Brown was kidnapped on Nov. 28, 1995. Demands for ransom, rumored to be \$5-15 million, were received. Apparently his family did not come up with the money; his body was found on Jan. 22, bound in chains, with evident signs of torture, in an irrigation ditch into which he had been thrown, while still alive, to drown, in Obregón, Sonora.

At his funeral the next day, Sonora Gov. Manlio Fabio Beltrones called for studying the possibility of "reestablishing the death penalty." Some were willing to entertain the idea, particularly given the heinous manner in which Díaz was murdered.

Just as in Colombia, where it is the largest criminal activity after drug trafficking, kidnapping has reached epidemic proportions in Mexico. So much so, that those who can afford it are hiring private guards, in some cases virtual armies, to protect themselves. Others, *EIR* has learned, are making weekly payments as an alternative to being taken hostage. Many of the victims of this protection racket are not wealthy, but are middle-class druggists, shopkeepers, farmers, professionals, and the like.

While the idea of getting revenge through the death penalty may appeal to some, it will not work, said former state legislator Alberto Vizcarra, according to newspapers *El Imparcial* and *Diario del Yaqui* on Jan. 25. It is silly to deal with the problem as a

sociological phenomena, while ignoring its true roots: political terrorism and drug trafficking, said Vizcarra, the Sonora leader of the Ibero-American Solidarity Movement (MSIA) and one of the founders of the Permanent Forum of Rural Producers (PFRP).

Vizcarra noted that kidnappings "reached high-density proportions," starting with the January 1994 Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) insurrection in Chiapas. "The kidnapping industry has grown in the shadow of the narco-guerrilla and terrorist movement, as a tool for financing the irregular warfare they have launched against society," he said.

Evidence of this international "Kidnap, Inc." was discovered in Managua, Nicaragua, when a bunker maintained by the Sandinistas, El Salvador's FMLN, Spain's ETA, and others blew up in May 1993, disclosing tons of weapons, fake documents, and a list of millionaire potential victims, he said.

Thus, it is a farce to propose to kill criminals, on the one hand, while at the same time the government engages "in dialogue with the death cultists" of the EZLN, Vizcarra said.

At a Feb. 22 hearing of the Forum on Consultations set up to discuss the governor's proposals, Vizcarra said that unless the British-run EZLN and other narco-terrorist organizations in this international ring are gone after, there will be no end to kidnappings. There is no need for new legislation, he said. Article 22 of Mexico's Constitution already provides for the execution of kidnappers, highwaymen, and

"traitors to the fatherland under conditions of foreign invasion." All that's needed is to recognize that the EZLN is a foreign occupation force and deal with it accordingly, he said.

Vizcarra submitted a resolution, calling for the Mexican federal government to suspend its power-sharing negotiations with the EZLN, and to classify kidnapping as a violation of "national security."

In fact, the first major recent kidnapping was that of Abasalón Castellanos, a former governor of Chiapas who was taken hostage by the EZLN in January 1994. In 1995, Sonora businessman Alfredo Harp Helú, whose name was also on the list found in the Nicaragua bunker, was taken hostage and released on the payment of a ransom reportedly worth millions of dollars. Just a few weeks ago, a member of the well-known publishing family, Pérez Porrua, was kidnapped in Mexico City; reportedly the Spanish ETA is involved.

For Sonora Governor Beltrones to be advocating the death penalty is ludicrous. He shares not a few attributes with Colombia's President Ernesto Samper Pizano. The latter—a card-carrying member of the Cali cocaine cartel whose opponents are gunned down with impunity in the streets of Bogotá, and who not only dialogues with narco-guerrillas guilty of murder, but appoints them to government posts—proposed on Feb. 21 that the death penalty be applied to kidnappings and other heinous crimes in Colombia.

Beltrones, a crony of the now-fugitive former President Carlos Salinas de Gortari, has been mentioned in connection with the 1994 assassination of Presidential candidate Luís Donaldo Colosio, and "the state of Sonora has become a corridor for cocaine and heroin," headed for the United States, reported the Feb. 10 *El Imparcial*.