

National News

McCaffrey praises drug cooperation with Mexico

White House drug policy adviser Gen. Barry McCaffrey (ret.) praised Mexico's cooperation with the United States in fighting drugs, in an interview with the May 31 issue of the Mexican daily *Reforma*. He reiterated that his goal is to work "on the construction of cooperation and confidence" between the two countries as the key to fighting narcotics. "If there are two places where the language of sovereignty dominates, it is in Mexico and in the United States. And, yet, if you look at what we have accomplished in the last four years, the progress has been substantial," he said.

He took a direct hit at outgoing Drug Enforcement Administration head Tom Constantine, who has distinguished himself as a Mexico-basher: "We have to work with the government of Mexico as a very important partner," McCaffrey said; and then added that the danger of taking a meal with the retiring DEA chief is, that "Tom can't stop thinking about the way to arrest you at the end of the lunch!"

And then, the real zinger of the interview: "There is more cooperation between the United States and Mexico, than between the United States and Great Britain," General McCaffrey stated.

Congressmen lobby for Sudanese 'rebels'

U.S. Reps. Donald Payne (D-N.J.) and Thomas Tancredo (R-Colo.) and Sen. Sam Brownback (R-Kans.) were part of a delegation to meet with John Garang's Sudanese People's Liberation Army at the SPLA's camps in the south, near the Uganda border. In addition to meeting with SPLA leaders in the southern city of Yei, the delegation also visited SPLA camps inside northern Uganda.

Garang's is the leading hold-out among all the southern rebel groups, most of which have signed the Peace Agreement of April 1998 with the Sudanese government. Khar-toum is also making great progress in fence-mending with its neighbors—Ethiopia, Eri-

tre, Egypt, and even Uganda—most of which have acted at some time as havens for rebel groups.

No matter to Payne, et al. According to the June 8 issue of the international Arabic daily *Al-Hayat*, Payne has demanded that the U.S. administration help the SPLA stop the aerial bombardment by the Sudanese air force. Such aid would include providing advanced anti-aircraft weapons.

D.C. turns down private prison bid from CCA

The Corrections Corporation of America was defeated on June 14 in its attempt to land a multimillion-dollar Federal government contract to build a private prison for the District of Columbia. The projected site was Washington's Southwest quadrant, a poor section of the nation's capital, which needs economic development, not a private prison. A battle royal has been raging over the proposal, with CCA shelling out money to win political support. The proposal was defeated by an unusual combination of developers and environmentalists, and faced strong opposition from the new Mayor, Anthony Williams, who is trying to make Washington more attractive to Wall Street.

Washingtonians who break D.C. laws are housed at a special Federal prison in nearby Lorton, Virginia. In 1997, a Federal law ordered Lorton shut down, leaving at least 2,000 felons to be moved to a privately run prison by the end of this year, which must be built within 300 miles of the U.S. Capitol.

A hard-hitting exposé of CCA appeared June 11 in the *Washington City Paper*, revealing the fact that the stock of CCA's parent company, Prison Realty Trust (PRT), has plummeted from a high of \$31 a share to just \$10 a share. The collapse came in the wake of its May filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission, which revealed that CCA had been running an \$80 million deficit when it merged with Prison Realty in January. There are at least four class-action suits pending against PRT by aggrieved shareholders. The article asked the important question whether the company is financially healthy enough to build the private prison in the first place.

An impassioned editorial page commentary by Rep. Ted Strickland (D-Ohio), in the June 13 *Washington Post*, put the final nail on CCA's coffin. Strickland's district in Youngstown includes CCA's horrendous Youngstown Prison, where six felons escaped last year. Prisoners from the District were routinely brutalized there and left without adequate medical care.

Strickland is a former psychologist at the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility, and recounts the numerous reasons, from a prison official's standpoint, why private prisons are a bad idea. He has introduced legislation to stop Federal funding of private prisons. He concludes his guest editorial: "It sickens me to think that individuals sit in corporate boardrooms talking about increasing their bottom line when the commodity they are dealing with is captive human lives."

AFL-CIO's Sweeney joins China-bashing

Reflecting the AFL-CIO's seriously wrong foreign policy, the union federation's President John Sweeney announced on June 7 that he has sent letters to all members of the House and Senate, urging them to reject the renewal of normal trade relations (NTR) with China. On June 8, he delivered testimony to the House Ways and Means Subcommittee on Trade. Sweeney cites allegations of China's "continuing repression of democratic political discourse," "its intolerance for an independent labor movement, and its continued and illegal export of goods produced in forced labor camps." He says there should be no granting of NTR status (formerly known as most favored nation status) "until and unless there is material progress on protecting and respecting workers' rights."

He calls on Beijing to meet three conditions: 1) "observe and effectively enforce core labor standards," including allowing Chinese workers "to join together and bargain in independent labor unions"; 2) "free jailed human and labor rights activists"; 3) agree to "support U.S. efforts to incorporate enforceable worker rights into WTO [World Trade Organization] rules, including establishing a 'working party' on workers rights."