

Mexican Jail Strike Fails

anon.

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A group of American prisoners serving time in Mexican jails attempted to call attention to their demands for an end to torture and for action by the U.S. government by staging a nation-wide hunger strike throughout the Mexican prison system on September 7. However, the Mexican head of prisons reported that the strike was not successful and only fifty Americans and two Canadians in Mexico City jails were said to have participated.

The *Fifth Estate* was alerted to the planned protest by a letter to the paper in the last issue, but has been unable to reach the correspondent for a confirmation of the alleged failure of the strike.

At least 610 American prisoners are currently doing time in Mexican jails, most of them convicted on drug-related charges. If recent legislation passed by the Mexican congress ever takes effect, they may be granted parole or exchanged for Mexican prisoners to finish their sentences in the U.S.

Mexico's pseudo-liberal Party of Revolutionary Institutions approved the amendments which were drawn up by President Luis Echeverria this past September. Echeverria skillfully introduced the legislation just before he was scheduled to open a multimillion dollar trade fair in San Antonio, Texas, underscoring the political nature of the move. The bureaucratic chaos which constitutes the present Mexican government has been sensitive to public criticism of their decrepit prison system, over which it exerts little control.

Despite these token signs of interest, little has been done to aid Mexico's foreign prisoners. Their native governments are disinclined to press for their release or demand an end to the well-known, widespread torture practiced by their Mexican jailers, choosing instead to safeguard international trade agreements.

As usual, the U.S. government has taken only halting steps to resolve the issues of torture and release of American prisoners. The House Subcommittee on International and Military Affairs recently issued their definitive opinion on the situation by passing a lukewarm piece of legislation called the Fascell Amendment, which requires only that President Ford confer directly with the Mexican president on the issue of mistreatment.

American politicians concede that the amendment will hardly affect the prisoners directly, and will not even take effect for six months.

The Mexican government has given no further word concerning the suggested parole; and prisoner exchange cannot begin until foreign countries draft their own versions of the bill. Negotiators for the U.S. said they do not expect to seek a treaty agreement before November. In the meantime, local police continue to exercise a free hand with the prisoners.

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