

Two Face Prison For Jailbreak Plot

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1976

Three persons prosecuted for their participation in the raid last March 13 on the Piedras Negras jail in Mexico were acquitted October 1 of most of the charges against them although two still face jail terms.

Mike Hill, Billy Blackwell and Sterling Davis held Mexican prison guards at gunpoint while eleven Americans and five Mexicans fled the jail and crossed the Rio Grande border to Eagle Pass, Texas.

U.S. Attorney General Edward Levi issued the indictments following the jailbreak acceding to outraged protests by the Mexican government. All of the charges related to the possession, use and transportation across the U.S.-Mexican border of a sawed-off shotgun used in the raid.

The defendants were represented by attorneys for the Texas NORML (National Organization for Reform of Marijuana Laws) Policy Committee, Gerald Goldstein of San Antonio and Ed Mallet of Houston. Goldstein said that Mexican laws don't define the jailbreak as illegal, but allow escapees to be shot on sight. So far the Texas Attorney General has refused to accede to extradition demands by the Mexican government.

Hill was convicted on two counts of possession and exportation of the guns out of the US; Blackwell was acquitted on two counts and Davis was convicted on one of two charges related to possession of the unregistered gun. Both Hill and Davis face up to ten years in prison, with sentencing set for early December.

The jury acquitted Hill on the most serious charges even though he admitted to all the charges against him. Goldstein cited two factors: widespread publicity about the condition of the Mexican jails and distrust of the state's witness Donald Fieldon, the self-proclaimed mastermind of the plan.

"He (Fieldon) cut a deal and pled guilty to conspiracy to obtain the shotgun," Goldstein said, in an interview with the Fifth Estate, "The jury just didn't trust him. He's not a very palatable character."

Fieldon has sold the rights to the plot for \$50,000, to be written as a book and screenplay. Three of the escapees brought to testify also said that Fieldon later tried to extort money from them, threatening them with death or a return to the Mexican authorities.

The issue is hardly new, but recently Mexicans have also protested Americans holding Mexican prisoners without charge, solely for information. The governments respond by holding out promises of prisoner exchange treaties. Some people respond by doing it themselves.

An article in the November 6 edition of the *Detroit Free Press* noted that a tentative treaty for prisoner exchange has been written, but it's waiting approval by both the US and Mexican governments.

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