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TO :

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AUG 26 1971

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DIR. IBWC
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FROM :

Amembassy MEXICO, D.F.

DATE: August 20, 1971

SUBJECT :

GOM Anti-"Porra" Campaign

REF :

To: RS/R 8/21/71
79 Alberto

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SUMMARY: In recent weeks the GOM has been arresting a number of "porras," young toughs, some students, who have been used in the past to keep leftist students, and student groups in line. This crack-down is in response to widespread public demands, and also is an attempt to take some of the heat off the Government resulting from general knowledge that elements of the GOM bore responsibility for the bloody repression of the June 10 student demonstration by the "Halcones." "Porra" attacks continue but it appears the GOM, under the lead of Mexico City Regent Octavio Senties, is genuinely attempting to bring them under control.

BACKGROUND: For several years groups of student and non-student young toughs have been used by rightist elements, including administrators of preparatory schools and university faculties, and perhaps by politicians as well, to keep leftist student groups in line. The Government has given some tacit support and encouragement to the use of these groups to keep the students off balance, but they are not as directly sponsored by the GOM as were the "Halcones." All these right-wing groups called "porras," do not appear to be connected, although the "Francisco Villa Group" includes more than one gang of "porras." Their activities have included more than

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Date:

FORM 10-64 DS-323

Initials:

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Drafting Date: 8/19/71

Phone No.: 840

Contents and Classification Approved by: POL:HFMattews

Clearances:

P/R - Mr. Venable (draft)

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Mexico A-453

Page 2

merely keeping leftists in line. They have also, presumably without the approval of their patrons, terrorized students in general, demanding "protection" money. Student deaths have resulted from a number of incidents, mostly from beatings received at the hands of the "porras." Sometimes their activities have been pure vandalism. From time to time the "porras" have been decried but there had not been a concerted effort by sufficiently high authorities to get rid of them.

CURRENT CRACK-DOWN: Following the June 10, 1971, student demonstration and its bloody repression by the "Halcones," almost clearly a government-sponsored group, there began new denunciations of the "porras," their similarity to the "Halcones" being clear. Following "porra" attacks on prep schools July 13 and July 16, Senties met with directors of six such schools and asked for cooperation in getting youths to abandon violence and vandalism. Again on July 22 Senties met with 16 school directors to discuss violence in the schools. The directors, led by the director general of the National University preparatory schools, appealed to Senties for Government action to put an end to this violence. Senties called for assistance from fathers of the youths and from students and teachers to assist the Government in its efforts. That evening, Senties went on television to appeal to the citizens of Mexico City to cooperate with police and civil authorities and to adopt an attitude of civic responsibility in order to prevent violence and vandalism. He referred to his meetings with directors of the preparatory schools in an effort to end the violence in those institutions, and he called attention to the number of robberies and armed assaults in Mexico City since December 1970. One measure taken immediately by the UNAM College of Sciences and Humanities was to form brigades of its own to repel any attacks on its students or buildings.

The Federal District Attorney General's office announced August 6 the arrest of four youths as a result of their having been denounced by students and teachers at one of the city's preparatory schools. The same day the various police elements received instructions to assist any citizens and genuine students who seek protection from "porras" or other youthful vandals. Also August 6, 90 more young people were arrested after beating up three storekeepers, looting dozens

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By 8 NARA Date 4-18-02

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Mexico A-453

Page 3

of bottles of liquor, stealing a bus and driving it to Aztec Stadium, where they were finally arrested. The Federal District Government and the Federal District Attorney General's office, as well as, the city police, called for any victims of the "porras" to come forward to testify, and the press announced that a police search for additional "porras" was underway. The call was answered by more students and teachers, and on August 11 the police announced that numbers of "porras" were leaving the city, including eight accomplices of the four previously arrested. The same day 30 additional "porras" were ordered arrested, and Senties announced that the fight against them would continue. It did, as ten more were arrested the next day.

Even with all this anti-"porra" activity, not all attacks have ended. On August 14 another attack on a preparatory school occurred, but teachers and students went promptly to the office of the Federal District Attorney General, Sergio García Ramírez, to complain and attempt to indentify those guilty. An unidentified number of "porras" were arrested that day.

It is unclear exactly how many accused "porras" have so far been arrested, and of those how many are being held. Senties told reporters August 15 that the campaign would continue and be intensified, adding that such activities as those engaged in by the "porras" would not be tolerated.

COMMENT: The denunciation of the "Halcones" following the June 10 repression of the student demonstration brought forth an outcry, not only from student groups but at the beginning from the press as well. Following President Echeverría's announcement that he had instructed Attorney General Sanchez Vargas to make a thorough investigation of the affair, there was speculation shortly afterward that the report would be ready in about two weeks. This has not happened, and it is quite possible that it will never be released, at least in a believable form that clearly fixes responsibility for the "Halcones" action on the Government. The Embassy believes it quite likely that the current concentrated effort to control the "porras" is an attempt on the part of the GOM to take some of the heat off itself because of lack of a

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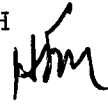
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Mexico A-453
Page 4

forthcoming Attorney General report on the June 10 events. The report has not been forgotten by the students, who are certain to bring the matter up again, but at least the GOM will be able to point out that it has taken vigorous action against other, similar right-wing groups.

It is not clear whether groups such as the "porras" will be permitted to exist so long as they confine their efforts to restricting leftist student activities. The GOM has in the past felt the need for countervailing rightist groups in the schools and universities to balance the active leftists, and it seems unlikely it will wish now to give the latter free rein. However, the "porras" are being given a strong signal to cease their outrageous behavior against students in general and the public at large.

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