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Mexico Requests Treaty With U.S. On Mexican Workers' Rights; Plans To Reduce Foreign Access To Leases In Baja California

by John Neagle

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On June 16 in San Diego, Mexican undersecretary of foreign relations Sergio Gonzalez Galvez said that his government has requested the US to negotiate a bilateral treaty safeguarding the rights of Mexican workers in the US. He also said Mexico City plans to reduce the number of foreigners permitted to sign new leases for single-family homes in Baja California state. According to Gonzalez, "We discovered that 35% of Baja California is owned by foreigners, and we are going to change that." Gonzalez Galvez made these statements in a speech at the Institute of the Americas on the University of California-San Diego campus and in a subsequent interview with Copley News Service. The last US-Mexico immigration treaty was enacted in 1951, and expired in 1964. Among other things, the accord guaranteed the rights of Mexican workers who were recruited to fill labor shortages in the US. Since then, Mexico has consistently refused official comment on US immigration policies. According to Gonzalez Galvez, the Mexican government even declined a US call for suggestions on drafting the Immigration Reform and Control Act passed by Congress in 1986. The Mexican official said the policy of official silence ended two months ago when Mexican Foreign Minister Fernando Solana met for the first time with US Secretary of State James Baker. According to Gonzalez Galvez, Solana told Baker: "Now we are willing to enter into negotiations with the United States to control this very sad process." Gonzalez Galvez said Baker's reaction "was not very positive." At the time the proposal was made, the undersecretary said, "we did not say the kind of accord that we wanted. It was only afterwards that we began to develop the idea of an accord to try to strengthen the mechanisms for the protection of the Mexican migratory force in the United States." He added that Mexico was awaiting a reply to its proposal. A US official who attended the Baker-Solana meeting, spoke with Copley on condition of anonymity. He said the Mexican proposal had surprised Washington, and had probably surprised most of the Mexican delegation, too. "Baker's reaction was not an outright negative," the US official continued, "but it was a diplomatically couched negative." Later, the official said, after Solana had returned to Mexico City, "we had a chance to scratch our heads and ask exactly what Solana had in mind...My quick conclusion...was that he was not talking about the 'big picture,' involving how many Mexicans can come to the United States per year and what sorts. He was talking about his government's concern over the welfare of Mexicans in the United States." The official said he had not heard anything more about the proposal since the Baker-Solana meeting. He said the topic would likely come up at the next conference between Baker and Solana, tentatively scheduled for early August in Mexico City. Wayne Cornelius, director of the Center for US-Mexican Studies at UCSD, said Gonzalez Galvez' comments confirmed rumors that Mexico was seeking stronger guarantees for the protection of its citizens in the US. In remarks at the seminar on the campus, the Mexican official expressed concern over violent incidents along the border involving US law enforcement agencies and Mexican nationals. Gonzalez Galvez prefaced his discussion of foreign residents in Baja California by noting that his government would reject any effort to link US and Mexican border areas in a kind of special economic zone designed to stimulate mutual economic growth. Such a scheme, he said, would

constitute a violation of Mexican sovereignty. The official continued by saying that the Mexican government was carrying out a survey of Baja California, "because we have the feeling that we have been too flexible in allowing foreigners to buy property under the so-called fideicomisos." Gonzalez Galvez was referring to the special government trusts under which foreigners can lease land along the coast or international borders. The Mexican Constitution forbids foreigners from owning land in those areas. Last month, the President Carlos Salinas de Gortari's administration doubled the lifespan of the fideicomisos to 60 years. "We are going to keep allowing foreigners to come in (to Baja California) and buy under the fideicomiso arrangement but only if it is for the purpose of hotels or condominiums, not for the purpose of private houses," Gonzalez Galvez said. "In other words, we will be much stricter under the fideicomisos." On other matters, Gonzalez Galvez said Mexico should reconsider its refusal to form a North American Common Market with the US and Canada. Next, he said heads of state of Pacific Rim nations should hold a summit to promote regional trade in an area that has "too long been in the hands of businessmen." (Basic data from Copley News Service, 06/17/89)

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