

Los Supermachos vs. Ignorance in Mexico

MEXICO CITY—

The cover of the comic book looks religious. An elderly woman in a rebosa prays to a statue of the Virgin Mary. Only the caption is unlike any ever printed before: "Little Virgin, you who conceived without sinning, teach me to sin without conceiving." This is the prayer of Doña Eme, heroine in one of a courageous series of popular Mexican comic books called "Los Supermachos."

The declaration in this special issue on "how *not* to have children" is equally as strong: "in Mexico we face a terrible demographic explosion which, if continued, will convert us shortly into a miserable nation where people die of hunger in the streets."

The publisher of "Los Supermachos," Lic. Octavio Colmenares, is using his widely read comic book to support the government's current emphasis on "responsible parenthood" as a means of slowing down a birth rate of 3.5 percent annually (which would double Mexico's present population of 52 million by the end of the century). The original printing of 270,000 was augmented first by 55,000 to meet local demand and then by an additional 10,000 at the request of the AID mission in Panama.



The comic book outlines in considerable detail the mechanics of human reproduction and various methods of contraception, listing their advantages and disadvantages. Drawings, cartoons and old illustrations add point and humor to the text. The 24-page comic lets an intelligent, well-read Indian named Calzonzin explain the subject of birth control in conversations with his fellow villagers in a fictitious rural town.

"Our society is super sexualized" and "even kindergarten students today know how children are born," the magazine says; and

proceeds on its mission of education with wit and compassion.

A subsequent issue of the weekly "Los Supermachos" is titled "La Esterilizacion Masculina" which states: "Of all anticonceptive methods known, the simplest and most effective is called by doctors 'vasectomy,' and consists of an operation on the male that doesn't last more than twenty minutes and can be performed with a local anesthetic in the office of any doctor."

The task of this particularly delicate issue is to show that the old idea of "macho"—to father lots of offspring—is ignorant and irresponsible, that the real macho, the *supermacho*, cares for the future of his country and the well-being of future generations by learning the facts about birth control.

Lic. Colmenares has worked without direct government support, although he has received a letter of congratulation from the head of the family planning office of the Secretariat of Health and Assistance. The government approach is low-key with emphasis on voluntary action, but with the help of far-seeing publishers like Sr. Colmenares, there may indeed be some hope of success in curbing population in Mexico.

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Background - LOS SUPERMACHOS

Ordered: Nov. 15, 1972 at request of Panamanian Minister of Health- Director of Maternal and Child Health Services and Director of the Population-Health Planning Division as a Responsible Parenthood Publication.

Cost: U.S. \$1,100.00 Agency: U.S. Agency for International Development

Funded: U.S. Foreign Assistance Act of 1961
Title X - Programs relating to Population Growth

TITLE X - Sec. 291.124

(c) In carrying out programs authorized in this title, the President shall establish reasonable procedures to insure, whenever family-planning assistance from the U. S. is involved, that no individual will be coerced to practice methods of family planning inconsistent with his or her moral, philosophical, or religious beliefs.

From: Randy Engel, Director
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Release: July 2, 1973

Date Mailed: June 30, 1973

BLASPHEMOUS USAID-FUNDED PUBLICATION
DRAWS COALITION FIRE

The U.S. Coalition for Life, a national pro-life research agency specializing in the population control activities of the federal government, today demanded a public apology from Dr. R. T. Ravenholt, Director of the Office of Population of the Agency for Interdevelopment for his department's role in the purchase of a "blasphemous" Spanish birth control comic book, Los Supermachos, for distribution in Latin America.

According to Randy Engel, USCL Director, the AID mission in Panama purchased 10,000 copies of the Mexican booklet in mid-November of 1972 as part of the country's "Responsible Parenthood" program. "While AID insists the request originated with the Panamanian Director of Maternal and Child Health Services and Director of the Population-Health Planning Division," Mrs. Engel stated "the fact remains the American taxpayer picked up the tab of \$1,100.00, under Title X of the Foreign Assistance Act."

"We object not only to the blasphemous cover which features a little old Mexican woman kneeling before a statue of the Blessed Mother praying

'Little Virgin, you who conceived without sinning,
teach me to sin without conceiving.'

but also to USAID's deliberate promotion of abortifacient devices, such as the IUD in Latin American countries and other developing nations, under the guise of contra-conception techniques," stated the USCL Director.

PRESS RELEASE

In addition to the issuance of a public apology from AID and removal of the U.S.-funded publication from the population control in Panama, the Coalition will seek a Congressional inquiry into the role of AID in the financing and promotion of abortion, mass sterilization and population control abroad.

If successful, the investigation of U.S. anti-life activities abroad will parallel Coalition action on the domestic scene involving the population control programs of the Office of Population Affairs, HEW, headed by Dr. Louis Hellman.