

Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

Monterrey group changing hands

A PAN member is stripped of his functions as president of one of the most important industrial groups in Monterrey.

A ripple went through the Mexican political-industrial world on the morning of Oct. 9 when news got out of the dizzying fall of the once powerful Eugenio Garza Laguera, president of the Monterrey industrial group and oldest son of the Garza Sada dynasty. The "coup d'état," as it was called by the terrorized anti-Semitic pamphleteer José Pérez Stuart, was carried out at the highest levels of the company—with government support.

The news media have only revealed that Javier Garza Sepúlveda, president of the Genter Group (self-service chain stores) and José Calderón, the powerful industrialist of that company, bought out the majority of the shares of VISA from the brothers of Eugenio Garza Laguera in an operation which amounted to 6 billion pesos. Once the sale was clinched, they called in Garza Laguera to spring on him without prior warning the news that the company was changing presidents by the will of the majority stockholders. Thus shaken, Eugenio had no recourse but to also sell off his shares.

The maneuver has everything to do with the upcoming 1985 gubernatorial elections in the state of Nuevo León, where Monterrey is located. Eugenio Garza Laguera is associated via business and family ties with the Eloy Vallina group in Chihuahua, the crowd that financed one of the electoral victories of the National Action Party (PAN) in this state in 1982. Through

the VISA group, Eugenio Garza Laguera was concentrating considerable political power in his hands and beginning to push aside his brothers within the administrative council, replacing them with his inlaws and people of the Vallina group. He had been trying to save the VISA company (it is in much financial difficulty) by getting into non-bank financing. He bought the Serfin financial house and insurance company, and had created five consulting groups to reorganize bankrupt companies. These moves were not looked upon kindly by his brothers and, it seems, they also did not care for his involvement in a risky political enterprise, the PAN.

Nationally, the PAN is making a big move around next year's elections, and is focusing special attention on trying to win the governorships in the northern states of Sonora, Chihuahua, and Nuevo León. This would constitute a virtual revolution in Mexican politics, since no party besides the PRI has held a governorship in the country's modern history—and the PRI is staunchly committed to continuing that tradition.

This has become a matter of international relations as well, because the U.S. State Department, through the offices of Ambassador John Gavin, has thrown its significant weight behind the PAN. State Department spokesmen have repeatedly argued that they merely favor democracy and a two-party system, but the Kissingerians at

State have consistently sidestepped the substantive political issue: the well-documented fact that the PAN is a Nazi-communist association advocating the policies of Hitler.

The new proprietors of VISA are known in the company itself as "government men." Javier Garza Sepúlveda, who presides over the Genter Group, is a member of the Mexican governing party, the PRI. Among other things, Garza Sepúlveda is the boss of the Astra chain of self-service markets which is expanding along the northern border of Mexico. Recently, President de la Madrid personally inaugurated in the city of Mexicali, Baja California Norte, a big Astra store filled with Mexican merchandise. The President gave public recognition to Garza Sepúlveda as an example of nationalist entrepreneurship.

Garza Sepúlveda has been backed in his expansionist policy by his brother-in-law, José Calderón, the nephew of the José Calderón who together with Isaac Garza was the 1880 founder of the powerful Cuauhtemoc Brewery. Garza Sepúlveda is married to the daughter of José Calderón, and their son, José Garza Calderón, is being promoted as the model of the up-and-coming businessman-politician. At the recent national conference of the PRI, there was a lot of buzzing about the fact that President de la Madrid arrived accompanied by a businessman: José Garza Calderón.

So, the maneuver of Garza Sepúlveda and Calderón was skillful indeed.

The same is true in the case of the Moctezuma Brewery, which U.S. banks wanted declared bankrupt, to grab its stocks, as this column reported two weeks ago. The Superior Court of Justice of the Federal District upheld foreign-investment laws and refused to declare it bankrupt, approving the moratorium it had declared on its debt to the foreign bankers.