

## Dateline Mexico by Benjamín Castro

### A spectre haunts the usurers

*The expropriations enacted by the President after his meeting with Echeverría evoke the fears of speculators.*

Just one visit by former President Luis Echeverría to Los Pinos, the presidential residence, was all it took to set off acute paranoia and delusions of persecution in the Mexican oligarchy and its party, the pro-communist National Action Party (PAN). And so, days afterward, when President Miguel de la Madrid ordered the expropriation of 7,000 urban lots in downtown Mexico City, in order to provide emergency housing and shelter for the thousands left homeless by the earthquake of a few weeks ago, these oligarchs thought they saw their worst fears confirmed.

The measure came on Oct. 11 in response to widespread criminal speculation, as urban property owners jacked up rents and sale prices for housing and land, in the face of a housing shortage made more acute by the earthquake.

Immediately, the "activists of '76" reactivated themselves. The same mouthpieces of the urban slumlords who in 1976 thought their end was in sight when then-President Luis Echeverría passed the Human Settlements Law, swung into action again.

Not one of them was missing. For example, the Monterrey Group, which organized the famous meeting of the "hooded ones" in Chipinque in 1976, this time picked as its spokesman a man with an unmistakable pedigree, Eduardo Zambrano Plant, to head the rebellion against the "new Echeverrism." (In Monterrey only certain oligarchical families, preferably urban speculators, retain the last name Zam-

brano.) In statements to the press on Oct. 12, Zambrano called the measure "absurd, arbitrary, and anti-constitutional," the same threadbare and hackneyed phrases used in 1976. Not only that, he brandished the same weapons used at that time, stating on Oct. 16 that "capital flight" would occur, given that "the administrative capacity of the government has been lost." Once again, the 1976 crowd spoke of a "loss of confidence."

The National Action Party also jumped into the arena. Jesús González Schmall, one of the leaders of the PAN, had the gall to say that the expropriation of the urban real estate lords had been "ordered" to President de la Madrid by ex-President Echeverría. Alejandro Gurza, one of the leaders of National Action in the state of Coahuila, made hysterical statements against the President of the Mexican Republic. After labeling the expropriation measure as "state-izing" ("creeping socialism"), and saying that now "confidence" has been lost in the government, he intoned that "now the President has more power than Louis XIV. . . ."

Alejandro Gurza, a member of a family of real estate tycoons in the same state, is also a top adviser to Coparmex (the Mexican Employers' Confederation), the same outfit that ran the insurrection against President Echeverría back in 1976, when it was headed up by Andres Marcelo Sada, the "top hooded one" of the Chipinque conspiracy.

The National Chamber of Com-

merce and its national president are also involved in this crusade against the spectre of Echeverría. Some of these warriors are already getting ready to negotiate for "relief," against future "state-izations" which in their delirium they think they see on the horizon. Recourse to "relief," under the Ley de Amparos, a peculiar feature of the Mexican Constitution which includes a special kind of *habeas corpus* and other provisions for relief from prosecution of the law, became fashionable during the last years of the administration of Luis Echeverría (1970-76). A lawyer for the big property owners, Ignacio Burgoa, won celebrity in those years, and has since been considered the "expert on relief law." The law's only use is to protect usurers and speculators from any corrective action by the government. It doesn't help small property owners and producers a bit; in any case, they can't afford the colossal "honoraria" demanded by "expert" lawyer Burgoa.

President Miguel de la Madrid explained his measure more realistically, saying: "The expropriation was an obligation in the face of the emergency. . . . At this time solidarity obliges us to give preference to the homeless." Responding to the urban usurers' campaign against the stability of his government he stated: "We are not seeking popularity . . . we are doing our duty."

In reality, what the "hooded ones" and their international banking friends are worried about is not this particular step, but the fact that it was taken by the man who until now has been most committed to punctually paying the foreign debt, and complying with the conditions of the International Monetary Fund and its allies among Mexico's slumlords and usurers. Uppermost in the bankers' minds is the question, what will de la Madrid declare next? A debt moratorium?