

## Dateline Mexico by Hector Apolinar

### Faction fight over drug trafficking

*For the first time in Mexican history, a judge is suspended based on charges from another branch of the judiciary.*

**O**n March 7, Attorney General Sergio García Ramírez launched a surprise counterattack on the networks protecting drug trafficking in Mexico, when he asked the Supreme Court of Justice to suspend Judge José de Jesús Taboada Hernández, as magistrate of the Unified Circuit Tribunal in the city of Torreón, Coahuila, because he released Jaime Herrera Herrera and 15 of his top lieutenants who were in jail on charges of being one of the biggest gangs smuggling drugs in Mexico.

Last July, Herrera and his gang were arrested by Gen. Rodolfo Reta Trigos, commander of the IX Military District, as heads of a top international drug ring headquartered in the state capital of Durango, with branches in Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Central America, Mexico, and the United States. The Herrera family was one of the seven that run the drug trade in Mexico.

The same day, an extraordinary plenum of the Supreme Court met to review the Attorney General's request. After a four-hour tug of war, the body removed Judge Taboada Hernández from his job, so that he can be investigated and prosecuted for collaboration with drug traffickers. The judge had behaved outrageously. At the beginning of February he was named judge in Torreón; 20 days later, on Feb. 27, he ordered the release of the Herrera gang. At this point it became obvious that the naming of Taboada Hernández in this circuit was preordained to release the Herrera gang. His orders were so blatantly il-

legal, he didn't inform the Federal Public Ministry of his decision to release Herrera.

Attorney General García Ramírez's unexpected action clearly ruffled certain magistrates' feathers. Mariano Azuela, top magistrate of the Supreme Court, told the press on March 11 that, although the action was justified to prevent the unremovability of judges from being used as immunity, such decisions must be "very thought out, cautious, to keep from spreading the fear that it will make judges lose their impartiality."

In reality, the Attorney-General's corrective action will have a positive effect on judges, to make them more rigorous and careful. Two Supreme Court decisions in the last month have been flagrantly more political than judicial; both involve the far-flung tentacles of former Sonora governor Carlos Armando Biebrich, whose machine intersects some of the dirtiest networks in Mexico. In February, Judge Mariano Azuela himself was scored in the press for his decision to exonerate Biebrich from the embezzlement charges that the government of the state had brought against him in 1976. Azuela is accused of basing his decision on his close association with Interior Minister Manuel Bartlett Díaz, also an intimate of Biebrich.

Biebrich was also the beneficiary of a second Supreme Court ruling in February, ordering that Huivulai island be returned to the wealthy Castelo family, and rescinding the expropriation order issued in 1982 by Son-

ora Governor Samuel Ocaña García. The decision to give the island back to the Castelos—one of whom, Javier, ran for mayor of an important Sonoran city on the party of the drug-linked, Nazi National Action Party—was drawn up by Supreme Court magistrate Fernando Castellanos Tena. In 1982, Fernando Castellanos Tena, at the time inspector-general in Sonora, was accused of receiving special favors from Biebrich. The press described an orgy sponsored by Biebrich and his cronies in Sonora.

Biebrich was the Castelos' lawyer in the island case, and charged a fat 100-million-peso fee. Also, Biebrich is Pietro La Greca's lawyer, in a suit which the Attorney General's office is bringing for illegal trafficking in dollars. Through their companies in Tijuana, the Grecas laundered drug money.

At the same time, José Biebrich, the former governor's brother, has been fingered as a drug runner by a former official of the Attorney General's office. Biebrich is also a close friend and admirer of former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, with whom he had contact through former Arizona governor, Raul Castro.

As far as Jaime Herrera's case goes, the situation is serious, since he counts on political backing within a sector of government, both on the state and federal level. Agents of the Attorney General are now looking into all of the Herreras' properties in the state. What they have discovered is that the capital city of the state of Durango almost belongs to him. The city is ruled by the National Action Party. Unofficially the current governor of Durango, Armando del Castillo Franco, is not far from Jaime Herrera. At the same time, Herrera controlled most of the state's "private sector" through construction companies, hotels, banks, resorts, cabarets, discos, and more.