

## Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

### The PRI party shuffle

*Gustavo Carvajal's sudden ouster is being called a 'political earthquake' by the nation's press.*

On March 17 the president of Mexico's ruling PRI party, Gustavo Carvajal Moreno, was suddenly relieved of his post and kicked upstairs to become agrarian reform minister. In his place was named Javier García Paniagua, the previous agrarian reform chief.

Many in the press here are calling the event, surrounded by waves of rumors, a "nine-point Richter scale earthquake." Though PRI presidents are not installed for set terms, the suddenness of the ouster and its timing lent the shakeup special political impact. No party president had ever been relieved before, just six months from the all-important naming of the next PRI nominee for president of the republic, when intense factional jockeying is at its height. The PRI candidate is the guaranteed winner in the 1982 elections for the upcoming six-year term.

#### Why the shakeup?

The best information I can give you at this point suggests three immediate factors, among others that are bound to come to light.

Mexican security officials, as I reported several weeks ago, are greatly concerned about pockets of instability where local hotspots are slipping from PRI control. The most important of these is the strategic Isthmus of Tehuán-tepec town of Juchitán, where the proterrorist Mexican Communist Party won local elections March 1.

A few weeks ago, labor chief-

tain Fidel Velásquez blamed the Juchitán setback on the PRI apparatus—that is, on just-purged Mr. Carvajal. More broadly, Carvajal was viewed as ill-equipped to keep the PRI apparatus in line behind President López Portillo in the turbulent months ahead.

On top of this came the sudden and startling political reappearance of former president Luis Echeverría, who broke the iron rule of Mexican politics that former presidents keep out of the limelight.

Echeverría began serializing his provocative political memoirs in the Mexico City daily *El Universal* in early March and followed with bylined articles in the weekly magazine *Siempre*.

As far as López Portillo was concerned, the move by his close friend could not have come at a more inopportune time. He acidly retorted to a question on the subject by local journalists: "Let's all have a minute of silence for Mr. Echeverría's supersonic rupture" of the political rules of the game.

Carvajal's replacement, García Paniagua, is a López Portillo loyalist who is expected to be tougher than Carvajal in whipping the Echeverría faction into line. In his first statement as PRI president, he avowed that "no shadow will be allowed to cover the president [López Portillo]," in a distinct allusion to Echeverría. But by far the most important factor in the switch may be the future of the powerful mayor

of Mexico City, Carlos Hank González. In the complex political world here, purges are rarely one-sided, and the capital erupted last week with rumors that Hank may be the next to fall.

García Paniagua certainly did little to quell such rumors when, in his politically loaded speech after being sworn in March 19, he insisted that "there will be no personal fortunes which buy posts of popular election."

Hank's personal fortune, probably the largest in Mexico, has been made almost entirely in deals consummated on the way up during his career. The liberal use of his cash in buying both press and political figures is legendary. No one missed García Paniagua's target.

Hank is hardly ceding the field gracefully. He testily told reporters that "people certainly want Professor Carlos Hank González to leave his post. But I think they will have to suffer me for the full term."

Hank's unwillingness to hand in his resignation is becoming something of a battle of wills between himself and the president. But whichever way that tug of war goes, it is clear that López Portillo's ability to keep Hank from dictating the next presidential choice has been strengthened with the García Paniagua appointment. In addition to his role as a "López Portillo man," García Paniagua brings special credentials to deal with one of Hank's favorite weapons, terrorism. He is the son of one of Mexico's most powerful modern military figures, Gen. Marcelino García Barragán, and commands strong allegiance in the military himself, a salutary barrier to Hank's efforts to usurp control from the president in these crucial months.