

## Dateline Mexico by Héctor Apolinar

### The death of justice

*The first judge in half a century has died at the hands of the drug mob; will the "web of complicity" be exposed?*

On Sept. 20, two mafia assassins murdered a federal judge from Cuernavaca, Pedro Villafuerte Gallegos. The assassins riddled him with 14 bullets, not counting the *coup de grace*. He was the third judge to be assassinated in Mexico in two centuries, and the first in 50 years.

Upon denouncing the "cowardly deed," Supreme Court President Carlos del Río declared that it would appear "these gentlemen have already declared war on us."

The assassination of Judge Villafuerte could mark the beginning of a terror campaign against judges, comparable to the ongoing drug mafia vendetta against judicial and government officials who stand in their way. In light of this danger, del Río revealed that, should it prove necessary, he would ask the authorities for bodyguards and other protection to guarantee the physical safety of the nation's judges.

Until a short time ago, the drug traffickers operating in Mexico resorted to bribery to win protection for their illegal activities. They were generally loath to seek a direct confrontation with government authorities. However, during 1986 and 1987, the drug traffickers have dared to enter into combat with those units of the Mexican army that conduct anti-drug operations nationally.

In 1986, the drug traffickers murdered an army major in the state of Sinaloa, which precipitated one of the

most intense wars against the drug trade that Mexico has ever launched. Other murders of army officers have followed.

According to police sources cited by the Mexican dailies, the assassination of Judge Villafuerte was ordered by Pedro Díaz Parada, known as the "czar of marijuana," who operated in the southeastern state of Oaxaca. One year earlier, Díaz Parada was arrested and condemned to 40 years in jail by Judge Villafuerte. But two days after his jailing, Díaz Parada escaped with the complicity of penal authorities. When his guards were arrested, they confessed to having received instructions from the highest-level government officials in the state, to allow Díaz Parada's escape. At the time, the matter was quickly covered up.

On Sept. 22, magistrate del Río appeared to refer to this shadowy event by publicly noting, "This person [Díaz Parada] even evaded jail, and I have learned that, despite an arrest warrant against him, he has been seen traveling with impunity in several cities of the country."

Asked if this was meant to suggest that Díaz Parada is operating in collusion with certain government authorities, del Río declared, "Draw your own conclusions. I cannot make conjectures. . . . What I can reiterate is the absolute repudiation of the judiciary for this unprecedented act, and I can also assure you that it will not divert us from fulfilling our duty."

Villafuerte was federal judge in the state of Oaxaca from May 17 through Nov. 18, 1986, at which point the Supreme Court transferred him to the state of Morelos—where he was assassinated—because he had been threatened by the drug mafia.

According to the Mexico City daily *La Jornada* of Sept. 23, police sources indicated that the mafia had offered Villafuerte millions to free Díaz Parada. When he refused the bribe, Díaz Parada's escape was arranged. The police sources also reported, according to *La Jornada*, that shortly afterward, Villafuerte began to receive death threats again, as did various employees of the penal court.

The state of Oaxaca itself occupies an important place in the geography of the national drug trade, given that it not only shelters vast marijuana plantations, but its territory is also used as a landing site for planes transporting Colombian cocaine northward. This has generated extensive corruption throughout the state.

In early 1986, the federal police arrested the head of the Oaxaca office of the National Security and Investigations Command, a subdivision of the Interior Ministry, for his involvement in a network trafficking in Colombian cocaine.

Referring to Villafuerte's assassination, *La Jornada* wrote in its editorial on Sept. 20, the day of the murder:

"If we want to stop the spiral [of violence] while there is yet time, it will be necessary to work rapidly, make those responsible feel the full weight of the law, and reveal and dismantle at least a substantial part of the web of complicity which, since the escape in Oaxaca, determined the final fate of Judge Villafuerte Gallegos. Otherwise, skepticism and cynicism will open the way to new crimes, and with them, do irreparable damage to the edifice of law in the Republic."