

## Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

### Hank's Grito

*So near and yet so far: the unsavory Mexico City mayor's brush with presidential duties.*

The country's independence celebrations, which occur every Sept. 15, acquired singular importance this year, among other reasons, because Mexico City's mayor, Carlos Hank González, was named to give the famous *Grito de Independencia* (Cry of Independence) from the balcony of the National Palace.

The *Grito* commemorates the call to arms issued by Father Miguel Hidalgo, parish priest of the town of Dolores, on Sept. 15, 1810. It is given each year exactly at midnight from every mayor's balcony across the country; and naturally the biggest event is in Mexico City's enormous central square.

Each fifth year of the six-year presidential term, the mayor of Mexico City is entrusted with giving the *Grito* from the National Palace, since the president leads the ceremonies directly from Dolores, a small town about 200 miles north-east of Mexico City.

Sources of mine who were at Hank's side on his big night in the National Palace tell me that his propagandistic and organizational apparatus went into high gear to give a presidential air to his appearance. One attentive observer described Hank's attitude as so "euphoric" it bordered on the megalomaniacal.

For days before the event, rumors were circulating in the back rooms that in fact the whole exercise was "psychological torture" for Hank: "so close and yet so far."

His hunger for the presidential chair is notorious—as is his inability under the constitution to assume the post because he is the son of a foreigner.

Beyond these ceremonial questions, other developments around Hank González should be mentioned. Insiders in both the public and private sectors are closely watching the chipping away of Hank's political power—and possibly his economic power—in the State of Mexico. This is the state which contains over 50 percent of the entire nation's manufacturing. It has been Hank's base of power since he served a stint as governor in the early 1970s.

The new governor there, Alfredo del Mazo, has begun a general cleanup of the state's security apparatus, which under Hank's control had often been termed an organized thug force. Public security was organized Capone-style; the police forces customarily sold protection to business firms established in the state. (Last week some sources informed me that several U.S. insurance companies with business in the State of Mexico were seeking an investigation of the former attorney general of the state, Carlos Kuri Assad. They reportedly suspect Assad of being involved in a series of arranged robberies of companies with Assad himself on the take.)

On top of this, Fidel Velásquez, the head of the Mexican Labor Confederation (CTM), publicly ac-

cused the state security forces of sowing terror among the state's workers, including a generalized practice of "kidnaping" workers in order to get a cut of their paychecks.

What is going on today in the State of Mexico is viewed as something that will shape the economic and political structure of Mexico for years to come.

The state has served as the launching point for a number of large and unexplained fortunes over the past four decades, some tied chiefly to real-estate speculation. It came to the point that some businessmen refer to a "structural" rivalry between some sectors of the Monterrey Group and the Mexico State Group.

On the evening of Sept. 14, violent disturbances suddenly broke out in the Netzahualcoyotl district of the State of Mexico, bordering on Mexico City, and one of the most populated, poorest parts of the country. The toll: 36 urban transport buses burned. The trigger: a sudden hike in fares by the private bus companies in the area, hours before del Mazo was to take his Sept. 15 oath of office. The result: del Mazo's inauguration was buried in the press, and the bus burnings grabbed the top headlines.

Everywhere it was openly rumored that Hank González was the man behind the riots, and that he'd put del Mazo on notice to expect more of the same if he continued to dismantle Hank's police apparatus.

If that was the message, del Mazo discounted it. His first act, announced in the inaugural speech itself, was the abolition of the cornerstone of that apparatus, Hank's special police cruise patrol unit.