

## Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

### Tourism mafia raises its voice again

*The gambling push has found a generous padrino in the governor of Baja California Norte.*

In early June, representatives of what is known here as the "tourism mafia" demanded that the government change the constitution to allow casinos and other gambling activities to proliferate. The *turismo* crowd, led by former President Miguel Alemán, president of the National Tourism Council, had gathered in Acapulco for their seventh annual convention, the "Turist Tianguis."

As I have reported, ever since President Lázaro Cárdenas made the prohibition of casinos and other gambling activities a constitutional mandate in the 1930s, the country's nationalist leadership has rejected the Alemán group's demands. They accurately view gambling as a foot in the door to criminal activities such as drug and arms smuggling, and therefore as a security threat to the country.

The Acapulco-based tourist industry, nonetheless, is taking advantage of the country's deep economic troubles. Several participants in the Acapulco meeting, for example, wrapped up their calls with economic arguments, claiming that casinos "will undoubtedly offset the flight of foreign revenues and tourists." Mexico, they say, can weather outside economic pressures by becoming a "great tourist attraction."

They have powerful foreign supporters. A representative of the California-based Bank of America

recently told *EIR* that if Mexico orients its economy to tourist activities and gambling, it will get the foreign credits it needs.

There is something else that is encouraging the Alemán mafia, and that is the fact that certain gambling activities are already beginning to proliferate on the northern border. Several months ago, Mafia figure Johnny Alessio, a.k.a. "the gambling czar," succeeded in setting up slot machines in some border cities. Alessio encountered resistance from the mayor of San Luís Río Colorado in the state of Sonora, who along with governor Samuel Ocana vehemently opposed the move.

Nonetheless, reliable sources report to me, a call from the Office of Entertainment—that is what it is called—in the Interior Ministry broke the mayor's resistance, and the slot machines were installed 24 hours later.

Alessio could never have won such a battle if he did not have powerful patrons among some government officials. One of those *padrinos* is the Governor of Baja California Norte, Roberto ("Bob") de la Madrid.

Since the 1970s, when Alessio inhabited a cell in some of the jails of Tijuana, he has enjoyed the protection of Bobby de la Madrid. Once he fulfilled a sentence for drug smuggling, Alessio became a "businessman." He started importing

slot machines and other goods of dubious utility from the United States.

Alessio has had other powerful *padrinos*. When he was manager of the "Agua Caliente" racetrack of Tijuana in the 1940s, Miguel Alemán bestowed a special award on him for "services to Mexico's tourist industry."

Alessio's shenanigans on the border have become a source of special concern to the federal government, because of the increasing pattern of instability in that area, including terrorist deployments, weapons smuggling, and other forms of unrest (see *EIR*, June 22).

As an expert on border studies highlighted for me recently, the government's concern over these border events was demonstrated earlier this month by the presidential candidate of the ruling PRI party, Miguel de la Madrid, (no relation to Gov. Bob de la Madrid) who made a week-long tour along the border.

Bob de la Madrid's home state is a special cause for concern. On June 15, a spokesman for the Popular Socialist Party (PPS) charged that two individuals—apparently Americans—have been distributing weapons to people in the outskirts of Tijuana, close to the border with San Diego, California. The unidentified individuals, the PPS charged, were telling people that "the government is in bad shape and the incoming one will be worse . . . in two or three months, you will need these weapons."

On June 11, several dailies here reported that federal police agencies had recently confiscated shipments of weapons and drugs along the borders of Sonora and Tamaulipas with an approximate value of \$10 million.