

Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

Reyes Heroles challenges Interior

The Education Minister is fomenting Jacobin rage at a time when civil-war potential has begun to emerge.

The education minister in the new de la Madrid administration, Jesús Reyes Heroles, delivered a speech in Puebla Jan. 15 which set off fireworks among this country's political elite.

Reyes Heroles exploited his reputation as the "great theorist of the Mexican liberal system" to present a call to arms against the industrialization policies of the two preceding regimes, those of Luis Echeverría and José López Portillo.

These governments, he charged, suffered from the "syndrome of governmental populism," which led to widespread corruption and to the undertaking of "superfluous or pharaonic investments." The answer was austerity, which "is not sadness or pessimism. In the economic area, we must do more with less." At no time did he so much as hint at any outside factors influencing the internal economic crisis.

Such a self-serving justification of IMF rule in the country has special implications in the case of the education minister.

As I mentioned in my Dec. 28 column, Reyes Heroles took high positions in both of the two governments he is now condemning. In each case, he was eventually thrown out after betraying the administration he was supposedly serving. As Isabel Arvide of *Novedades*—a newspaper otherwise firmly aligned with IMF policy—commented after Reyes's speech, "It seems that his will got the better of him, what some call 'rancor'." She suggested that President de la Madrid

hardly needed this kind of personal friction in senior PRI circles.

What caused tremors, however, was the tone and style of the speech—"a masterful lesson in politics, which might have been spoken by Mr. Secretary of the Interior," in Arvide's words. Traditionally it is only the interior minister, the custodian of the political and security interests of the nation and the second most powerful figure after the President himself, who defines the general lines of government policy in the manner adopted by Reyes Heroles.

(A leading newspaper published a cartoon showing three cabinet ministers on one end of a scale, and Reyes Heroles alone holding the balance on the other side.)

There was no direct response from Interior Minister Manuel Bartlett to this power play, but political insiders tell me they expect continuing fallout from a fight that could deeply shake the regime.

Beyond the challenge to his current position, Bartlett has historical reason not to see eye to eye with his cabinet colleague. In the first half of the López Portillo administration, then-Interior Minister Reyes Heroles had a running feud with Bartlett's boss at the time, Foreign Minister Santiago Roel. López Portillo dumped Roel at the same time he axed Reyes, in May 1979.

One of the sharpest public responses to the Reyes Heroles speech came from Gov. Alfredo del Mazo of the powerful State of Mexico. At the

beginning of his annual "State of the State" address Jan. 20, and in the presence of several cabinet ministers, other top state and federal officials, and Fidel Velázquez of the CTM workers' confederation, del Mazo followed his opening salutation with the words: "In the name of the people and government of the State of Mexico, I thank former President José López Portillo for the support, understanding, and attention he always gave to our state."

These were hardly the words of someone who was about to join Reyes Heroles's witchhunt against the previous administration. They took on added importance because the young governor had been installed in 1981 as part of a joint power play by the CTM's Velázquez and then-Planning Minister, Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado.

Reyes's dropping of any pretense of representing the "liberal," nationalist side of the Mexican political spectrum created particular consternation in left-wing intellectual circles which have traditionally viewed him as "one of their own." This awakening could further shrink the education minister's domestic base of support.

(Outside the country, bankers have expressed their confidence that Reyes is the "political enforcer" for the IMF ever since his appointment at the beginning of December.)

Perhaps the most damaging attack came from a respected left-wing intellectual and historian, Gastón García Cantú, who reminded Reyes Heroles that the last time Mexico faced such an economic crisis was during the last great world depression. Mexico's response in the 1930s was not to hand economic power to foreign interests, but rather, under President Cárdenas, a "mobilization of the majorities for a better life," said García Cantú. Failure to follow the Cárdenas example could lead "to the extreme of civil war."