

## Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

### 'A frustrated fascist'

*The battle between key unions and the education minister has reached a new intensity.*

**T**he people have a mistaken notion about the personality of Jesús Reyes Heróles. At bottom, he is no liberal but a frustrated fascist. It is unimportant to him whether workers die as long as he achieves his perverse aims. He tried to take over the oil workers' union when he was director of Pemex . . . to use it as an instrument of influence in the presidential succession fight . . . but as disciplined militants we opposed him and since then he has had an irrational hatred [toward us]."

This view of the present minister of public education was expressed by one of the most influential leaders of the powerful oil workers' union, Joaquín Hernández Galicia, alias "La Quina," in an interview granted to the weekly magazine *Por Esto*.

The sentiments of the oil workers' leadership come in response to the resurgence of a campaign to destroy the union under the banner of "ending corruption," a campaign headed up by Reyes Heróles. Reyes Heróles, who served for a period in powerful cabinet posts in both the previous administrations, also targeted the teachers' union and the CTM, the large confederation which is the backbone of the ruling PRI party, for elimination.

In previous columns I have documented the role Reyes Heróles has played in distorting Mexican history and in trying to manipulate two Presidents (Luis Echeverría and José López Portillo) into installing a Malthusian clique in government, for which he was thrown out. Today, taking advantage of a succession debate over

the post of secretary general of the oil workers' union, Reyes Heróles is once again attempting to create a schism within the union. But his shots may boomerang.

The attacks against Reyes Heróles are not only coming from "La Quina." The union's current secretary general, Salvador Barragán Camacho, took the occasion of the annual commemoration of Mexico's oil nationalization on March 18 to protest to President de la Madrid that the government was afflicted with officials who did not share de la Madrid's own ideals of the Mexican Revolution.

Nor are the oil workers the only powerful union which has run into Reyes Heróles' vendetta. On Sept. 22, the Revolutionary Vanguard Group of the national teachers' union (SNTE) celebrated its 10th anniversary in Mexico City. The event featured the entire national leadership of the union, some 6,000 (the union itself is one of the largest in Ibero-America, with several hundred thousand members), breakfasting with President de la Madrid, Reyes Heróles and other government officials. In the afternoon a street festival was held in the Zócalo, Mexico's central plaza, where the union's teachers gathered, 100,000 strong.

Upon Reyes Heróles's arrival at the auditorium, the union leaders began to hiss and boo, quieting down only when President de la Madrid entered the room. The speeches of both the secretary general of the SNTE and de la Madrid were warmly applauded, but not a single person clapped after the short presentation by Reyes

Heróles.

At the end of the meeting, a group from the Mexican Labor Party (PLM)—which has been in the forefront of attempts to rebuild a republican education program in the country—began distributing leaflets to the union leaders explaining that Reyes Heróles' resignation was imperative if the education of the Mexican people were to advance. Hundreds of teachers surrounded the PLM organizers to request bundles of the leaflets to take back to their locals around the country.

President de la Madrid, once a student of Reyes Heróles at the National Autonomous University, has so far not moved to purge him from the cabinet, though more and more "old political hands" are urging the President to do so to prevent an unnecessary and potentially fatal blow-out between the government and the unions. The President may be moving in that direction, however. In his State of the Union address Sept. 1, de la Madrid emphasized the need to turn education more toward the natural sciences and engineering. Just a few days later, Reyes Heróles went out of his way to say that his vaunted "educational reform" consisted primarily in building up the social sciences and de-emphasizing natural science.

Fidel Velásquez, the head of the CTM and probably, next to de la Madrid himself, the most powerful man in the country, has come out against the meddling of the education minister and his ally, Labor Minister Arsenio Farrell Cubillas. Asked in the second week of September if he could back up the charges of the oil workers against Reyes Heróles and Farrell, Velásquez said he couldn't confirm names, but that "there is an effort to destroy the oil workers," and it comes "from people as high as the cabinet level."