

Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

How long will Reyes Heroles last?

The new education secretary has betrayed two presidents; will he do the same to de la Madrid?

One of the most hotly discussed of the new cabinet appointments is that of Jesús Reyes Heroles at Public Education.

The enemies of one of Mexico's strongest unions, the national teachers' union (SNTE), are jubilant at master union-buster Reyes Heroles's appointment. They are extolling him as the man who can push the "decentralization" of education, as announced goal of the new administration, to the point of destruction of the SNTE and its political protector, San Luis Potosí, governor Jonguitud Barrios.

Foreign bankers are confidently claiming that Reyes is their inside man to politically keep the lid on expected mass opposition to IMF designed austerity measures now being implemented.

A professor of Mexican history and constitutional law for at least two generations, Jesús Reyes Heroles has constructed a mystique around himself as the "great theoretician" of the Mexican System and the Mexican liberal tradition of the 19th-century. Among his students are de la Madrid himself, who wrote a graduate thesis on the "Economic Thought of the 1857 Constitution" under Reyes Heroles's guidance. At least five other new cabinet appointees studied under Reyes Heroles.

There is a tell-tale trail of omission and distortion throughout Reyes Heroles's classic three-volume work, *The History of Mexican Liberalism*. It sys-

tematically misrepresents the liberalism of the great Benito Juárez during the "Reform and Intervention" period (1853-1872) as *British* liberalism, instead of what it actually was: a cousin to the anti-British *American System* of economy of Abraham Lincoln. Reyes Heroles makes no mention of the great mercantilist tradition of Mexican capitalist economy that was built up along Hamiltonian lines, out of which Juárez's economics grew.

Suffice to say, Reyes Heroles wrote Mexican history from British eyes, and politically, he has always sought to replace Mexico's republican, nationalist institutions with British-type "pluralism" and parliamentary procedures.

Thanks to erudite lies, Reyes Heroles made his way up the political ladder, eventually emerging as the "teacher of teachers," and one of the most unscrupulous backstage manipulators in the history of Mexican politics.

Since he has been prevented from occupying the presidency (his parents are Spaniards and the constitution prohibits the child of foreigners from assuming the highest office) he has insinuated himself into the position of *éminence grise* for the past two administrations and is now bidding for that position in a third.

With Luis Echeverría (1970-76), he occupied the directorship of Pemex. He was obliged to leave the post after his attempt to take personal control of the powerful oilworkers' union

failed. The face-off culminated in the assassination of "el guero Quijo," Reyes's man within the union. He then moved over to head the ruling PRI party for two years, and then the Mexican Social Security Institute for a year.

Once López Portillo was elected president and named his old friend Reyes Heroles to the supreme cabinet post of Interior Minister, certain things became clearer. During his three years at Interior, Reyes indulged his appetite for puppet-mastering to his heart's content, especially as part of complex games in collusion with the anti-republican side of the Mexican elite. He built up a gaggle of leftist "parties," who flourished with guaranteed funds from the state. He even went so far as to permit political registration of an FBI branch in Mexico, the now-extinct Social Democrat Party (PSD).

But Reyes's maneuvers and disregard for presidential policy got him into hotter and hotter water; he was unceremoniously dumped from the cabinet in May 1979.

There is another defect in the new education minister: Jesús Reyes Heroles is an alcoholic, and not exactly anonymous. It is a secret to no one that his premature aging is the result of alcohol and his own self-destructive tendencies. Former president Echeverría stated it aloud last July 4, as he went to vote in the national elections: Reyes Heroles, he said, is "a traitor, an alcoholic, and a liar."

If these are the kinds of recommendations passed on by de la Madrid's two predecessors, both of whom went into office with high personal esteem and respect for Reyes, what will be de la Madrid's reaction?

As a columnist here recently noted, involving a venerable Mexican saying, "Once a dog has eaten dung, not even burning his snout does any good."