

## Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

### The archbishop and the constitution

*A Sonora violation of the ban on church involvement in politics is daring the government to crack down.*

A several-day church retreat of some 35 priests recently took place in the violence-torn northwest state of Sonora. It was billed simply as a "review" of Mexico's economic and social situation, and an examination of the role of evangelization within it.

The site was the church of San Ignacio in Magdalena, founded by the Jesuit father, Andrés Kino, who first established missions in the inhospitable region 250 years ago.

The report of the retreat issued by Hermosillo archbishop Carlos Quintero Arce showed that something more had been under discussion. Quintero Arce declared that "the basic cause of all evils" in the country was "corruption." He ridiculed President de la Madrid's clean-up campaign, stating that at this point the whole Mexican system was not working; the time has come to change it.

The archbishop's statements read like a paid political ad for the opposition National Action Party (PAN), which has not let its "conservative"—in truth neo-Nazi—connections interfere with a blossoming formal alliance with the Mexican communist party (PSUM).

Quintero Arce is one of the most important public figures in Mexico's northwest conspiring to bring the PAN to power.

In late April 1983, the archbishop was caught in a secret meeting in Hermosillo which also included the leaders of the PAN in the state, Adalberto Rosas López and Carlos Amaya, and the U.S. State Department's deputy chief of mission in Mexico, George

High. The purpose of the meeting: to plan a PAN sweep of the state in the 1985 gubernatorial elections and make the state ungovernable in the meantime.

The archbishop's closeness to the PAN extends to the business realm: Two of the archbishop's relatives are linked to the drug mafias which the PAN has let run wild in its "showcase" city of San Luis Río Colorado on the Arizona border.

But the significance of Quintero Arce's outburst went further. The archbishop was brazenly transgressing one of the cardinal principles of the Mexican Constitution of 1917 found in Article 130: the complete separation of church and state, and the prohibition of Church involvement in political activity.

The day after the archbishop's report on the retreat was published, Feb. 24, Sonora Governor Samuel Ocaña made the issue clear: "No one must believe himself free to violate the Constitution. It is immoral for anyone with public influence to attempt to incite the population to violate the laws. . . . We Sonorans are immersed in the challenge of development. Let no one interfere or hinder [this work], let no one divide us; let all of us respect the Constitution."

That day the City Workers Union of Hermosillo took out a full-page ad in the local press, under a giant headline, "To His Excellency Monsignor Carlos Quintero Arce." The remainder of the ad was the text of Article 130.

Quintero Arce showed all the

marks of a man bent on forcing the government to jail him as a martyr. He came back in the next day's press with a letter to the editor which not only repeated his charges about government corruption but declared that "the clergy has the right to intervene and save society."

This is the language of the Cristero Rebellion of the late 1920s, when radical fundamentalist Jesuit priests whipped up a crusade against the Mexican government and attempted to make "Christ the King."

The issue is national. During the San Ignacio Church affair, the archbishop gave a two-part interview to the widely read *Excelsior* newspaper in which he went to even greater lengths to urge insurrection: "If the PRI were the expression of the political will of the people of Mexico, I wouldn't say anything. . . . [But] the political and economic system is obsolete."

Some highly placed prelates seem in agreement. Cardinal Corripio Ahumada, reached by reporters at the end of his Sunday mass on Feb. 26, was asked what he thought of three Sonora priests who had accused Quintero of indulging in "political hooliganism" and corruption of his own. Responded Corripio testily: "Those are just three poor priests shooting off their mouths."

The new national president of the PAN, Pablo Emilio Madero, has not only endorsed the Mexican Church's push to overturn the constitution, but urged that there be a national referendum on the issue of re-establishing full diplomatic relations with the Vatican.

Funny thing, the call was echoed the next day by the general secretary of the communist PSUM party, Pablo Gómez, who declared: "The PSUM will include candidates from the Church" on its upcoming electoral slates, constitution or no constitution.