

Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

Who wants the casinos?

Kissinger's "alemanista" friends are openly touting gambling as the quick way to loot Mexico and pay the debt.

The Hotel Operators Society thinks it has glimpsed the opportunity to legalize casinos in the midst of the economic crisis. Even though Mexico is now one of the hottest centers of discussion and combat against drug trafficking and its international networks, and even though everyone knows that casinos go hand in hand with the narcotics trade, for the last two months once again the discussion about how nice it would be to legalize casinos in the tourist centers has been unleashed in Mexico.

Since February, the president of the Hotel and Motel Association of the Federal District, Roberto Zapata, asked city magistrate Ramón Aguirre Velázquez, whether he would discuss the possibility of opening up casinos at least in the District. He insisted that all the arguments against this "haven't the slightest validity." He went on to declare it was utterly "false that casinos are a hotbed for prostitution and that they are economic necessities for the population, for unemployment.

"I believe," he went on, "that gambling itself could generate city, and state revenues and even public works. Well, now, I believe that without diminishing nor justifying the actions that were taken in 1934 to abolish the casinos, which in that epoch were possibly justified, today circumstances have changed, since there are regulations and systems which totally protect us from the causes which led our government in that time to take this attitude."

In 1934, then President of Mexi-

co, General Lázaro Cárdenas, abolished and constitutionally forbade the establishment of casinos and gambling in Mexico. His arguments were moral and economic, given that the casinos were basically in the hands of foreigners dedicated to corrupting the country. In Article 4 of Mexican Federal Law on Games and Lotteries it was stipulated that "no house or open or closed place can be established where betting games are practiced." Article 8 of the same law indicates that "the Secretary of the Interior shall close every closed or open locale where prohibited games or games with betting and lotteries which do not have legal authorization. . . ."

Nonetheless, there has been more than one attempt to change these articles. Now the arguments which are being given are totally "Kissingerian": that it will lead to a greater attraction for foreign tourism, but above all because a *large part of the profits which these casinos generate can be used to pay off the public foreign debt.* And, with legalized gambling in our country, so the argument goes, many of the people who take their dollars and go lose them in Las Vegas, Reno, Atlantic City, or Panama, would keep them and lose them here at home.

These are the cynical arguments of the "alemanista" mafia (so named because ex-President Miguel Alemán Valdes was the equivalent of crime kingpin Meyer Lansky in the United States), which is pressuring the Mexican government to agree to bend over even further before the International

Monetary Fund, and change Mexican law to suit its insatiable demands.

In mid-March, the debate over legalizing casinos came back in force, above all after Henry Kissinger and David Rockefeller both dropped in on President Miguel de la Madrid, and after the oil prices which are Mexico's major source of hard currency fell. The government then announced even more drastic austerity measures.

"In this respect [the debt] not only does the government have the obligation to put into motion the measures to liquidate such an enormous debt, but this responsibility must be shared among all the Mexicans. The solution is right at hand, since by the same criteria that the official sector has been authorizing for years the functioning of racetracks, pelota courts, as well as the National Lottery and Sports Betting, which are games of hazard, it should allow the installation of casinos in strategic points of the national territory.

"We make a cordial appeal to the various sectors of national activity for the government to authorize the setting up of casino, so that the profits that these turn out will be applied to paying the foreign debt. We would be astonished at the rapidity with which this debt would be liquidated, thus avoiding the shame of leaving a nation mortgaged forever to future generations," read the editorial of the magazine *Siempre* on March 30.

Facing this offensive, the Secretary of Tourism, Antonio Enríquez Savignac, said on March 18 in Mérida, Yucatán, that on the question of installing casinos "the last word has still not been spoken."

He called for "studies to be carried out, an analysis with the Interior Department to find out everything concerning the opening of gambling houses in the country."