

veritable empire of financial, industrial, commercial and agricultural interests, resented the expropriation of its banks. The head of the **Group** and one of the country's richest men, Eloy Vallina Laguera, made his feelings public on December 2, 1982: "They took a bank from me, so I'm going to take Chihuahua from them." He certainly took important steps towards that goal when PAN candidates triumphed in the municipal elections in that state's principal cities. Since then, some 1,575,000 residents of Chihuahua have been governed by mayors from the PAN.

The economic resources of the **Chihuahua Group** have worked towards establishing an electoral beachhead in Ciudad Juarez. The PAN candidate, Francisco Barrio Terrazas, was an employee of assembly-industry magnate Antonio Bermudez. Bermudez used his economic muscle to support Barrio Terrazas's candidacy in Ciudad Juarez. Meanwhile in the state capital, the PAN candidate was party standard-bearer and ex-presidential candidate Luis Alvarez, who was backed by Eloy Vallina. Both candidates won.

Nevertheless, the panorama has changed substantially

for this year's elections. Eloy Vallina, head of the **Chihuahua Group**, has abandoned his search for revenge and has returned to the Institutional Revolutionary Party. He was named state-wide Director of the Center for Political, Economic and Social Studies, a PRI think-tank. And his money now fills the coffers of the ruling party.

In Ciudad Juarez, Bermudez has also returned to the ranks of the majority party and was named PRI candidate in the city's mayoral race. His former subordinate, Francisco Barrio Terrazas, is the PAN candidate for state governor. As its candidate for governor, the PRI named Fernando Baeza Melendez, another long-time associate of the **Chihuahua Group**.

It therefore seems probable that the Chihuahua elections, despite the opposition's expectations, will have results similar to those of last year's federal elections when the PAN received 36.01% of the vote, the PRI, 56.12% and in third place, the Revolutionary Workers Party, with 2.04% of the vote.★

Pablo Hiriart

## CONCERN IN THE WAKE OF MEXICANA AIRLINE'S CRASH

*There was widespread speculation that terrorists had brought down the Mexicana jet that crashed in Michoacan. This does not seem to be the case.*

It was a conversation that presaged death:

Guadarrama: Mexico, Mexicana 940 requests permission to reduce altitude.

Control: Mexicana 940, proceed.

Guadarrama: MX 940, emergency. Mexicana 940 requests permission to return to Mexico City.

Control: Mexicana 940 proceed.

Guadarrama: MX 940 requests lower altitude.

Control: MX requests lower altitude from 280?

Guadarrama: MX 940, emergency. Request permission to return to Mexico City.

Control: MX ACC 940, 940 is authorized to descend to 200.

Right turn directly to vor (initials of an electronic radio assistance team) of Mexico City.

Guadarrama: MX ACC, Mexicana 940, Control Mexico...

Control: Mexicana 940, can you hear me!!

These were the last words of Captain Carlos Guadarrama Sixtos, chief of the crew on board Mexicana's flight 940 bound for Los Angeles, via Puerto Vallarta and Mazatlan, from Mexico City. The plane exploded 105 kilometers from Mexico City, killing all 166 people on board.

The March 31 accident shocked the entire nation. The same day, President Miguel de la Madrid ordered "a complete and detailed investigation to determine the cause of the accident" to be carried out by the Communications and Transportation Ministry.

Daniel Diaz Diaz, Secretary of the Ministry encharged with the investigation, declared that the contents of the plane's black box would clarify the cause of the accident and that a detailed report would be forthcoming. "It is an extremely sensitive matter," he stated, "and will require an analysis of all available information."

The Airlines Pilots' Union (ASPA) sent six technicians to the scene of the crash and were able to determine that human error had not been a factor in the accident.

Congress called the director of Mexicana Airlines, Manuel Sosa de la Vega, to testify after comments began to circulate, which laid the blame for the accident on inadequate maintenance,

It was Mexicana's first accident in 17 years. The last two accidents were both in 1969. The first was on July 4th, when a plane crashed into a mountainside near Monterrey. Seventy-two people died in that crash, including Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) activist, Carlos A. Madrazo and tennis player, Rafael Osuna. The other crash occurred near Texcoco on September 21; there were 18 dead and 91 survivors. Among the survivors of that accident was Esther Macias, a stewardess who later retired to marry Pilot Carlos Guardarrama. She was on Flight 940, this time as a passenger, along with her two-year old son. They died together with everyone else on board.

There are some 1500 Boeing 727s flying around the world; the one that exploded on March 31 near Maravatio,



The bodies are brought in from Michoacán. Photo by Luis Humberto González.

Michoacan, was built in 1981. It was one of the most modern planes in the Mexicana Airlines fleet.

A few days after the accident, different stories began to circulate. Some claimed that the crash was the result of a terrorist attack. Others asserted that it was the result of a mechanical failure since "Mexicana Airlines planes are not properly maintained." But, in fact, there has yet to be an official explanation of the crash.

One extra-official version indicated that there was a rapid depressurization when the plane suddenly lost altitude. People have speculated that the drop in pressure was caused by a tire exploding in the plane's belly. The tire supposedly exploded after overheating on take-off when improperly functioning brakes kept it from spinning freely. Nonetheless, no one has been able to explain yet how the exploding tire could have set off a fire.

The official silence concerning the crash has generated a great deal of mystery. The problem, then of course, is that if there are no first-hand sources of information available to the public, there is more room for sensationalism and idle speculation. That is what has happened to date in this case.

Journalists, Mexican businessmen and the League of Arab States in Mexico have all denied the stories that the crash was the product of a terrorist attack. Such versions are clearly sensationalist and have been put out by groups whose own

himself as the principal promoter of anti-terrorism." In an interview, Mr. Salcedo asked, "How can it be that there are people who categorically affirm that it was a terrorist attack when detailed findings of the investigation have yet to be released?" At any rate, even if it did turn out that there was terrorist involvement in the accident, the treatment of the event "has taken advantage of our innocence."

On six occasions in the course of the interview, Mr. Salcedo reiterated that the accident was totally abnormal. The Boeing 727 had been very carefully checked before take-off, the weather was fine and the plane's captain, Carlos Guadarrama, had been a pilot for 14 of his 36 years. In principle, he explained that there must have been an explosion. But that doesn't mean that it was caused by a bomb. There might have been some kind of prohibited cargo on board, like paint thinner or some other flammable material that could have provoked the accident.

A further problem, according to Salcedo, is that pilots, stewardesses and passengers have all fallen victim to a kind of psychosis. Almost a month after the accident happened, not even the first stage of the investigation has been made public.

The Treasurer of the Mexican Association of Foreign Correspondents in Mexico, Renso Gostoli, claimed that in general, the authorities had made their reporting very difficult.



Mexicana flight 940 after the crash. Photo by Archivo La Jornada.

interests may be involved in the matter. It is also important to remember that it is quite fashionable right now to talk about the need to combat terrorism.

The League of Arab States in Mexico coincided with Mexican official positions regarding the possible role of terrorism in the accident. The League stated, "It is criminal to attribute false terrorist acts to groups whose very existence is doubtful, maliciously confusing them with other organizations whose struggles for liberation are legitimate." The Arab League has categorically denied versions which claim that some Arab group was involved in an attack on the plane. It condemned the political manipulation of the crash by groups interested in using the tragedy to further their own ends. And it added that the real acts of terrorism in the world are being carried out by countries that want to deny entire peoples their most basic rights, as in the case of the Palestinians, Lebanese and Libyans. Finally, the League calls on people to refrain from "irresponsible speculation regarding the supposed causes of the crash."

The "premeditated insistence" on the part of the United States that the crash was the result of a terrorist attack was the object of commentary by Jesus Salcedo, President of the Mexican Association of Airport Reporters. "It really intrigues me," he stated, "especially since Reagan has appointed

As a photographer, Gostoli complained that "we were not given access to the accident site; really we were blocked from going in." The Attorney General's office put excessive security measures into effect at the site, which was guarded by federal and state detectives, armed with USL machine guns and AR-15 and M-1 rifles.

According to Jorge Kahwagi, Vice-President of the National Chamber of Transformation Industries, the officials responsible for providing complete information on the Mexicana crash must think "that we are minors. It's like parents who think that some topic is too delicate to discuss in front of their children." He ended by saying, "I think that disinformation or incomplete information is a very serious matter because it can cause alarm and because influential people can use it to make a bad situation even worse."

Despite the fact that it has yet to be made public, the official investigation is moving forward and will soon be finished. In the meantime, all Mexicana and Aeromexico Airlines planes are being rigorously checked. The only consequences for passengers have been delays at take-off, but no one is complaining about that very much since they know that it's for their own safety and the safety of their families.★

Adriana de la Mora