

“D.C. Only Hears Gunshots”

Reprinted from the *Berkeley Barb*

T. Brennan

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ALBUQUERQUE (UNS) — The mountains of Northern New Mexico's Rio Arriba County, like Ken Kesey's *Sometimes A Great Notion* Oregon, expect that they are drier, are scarce of touring campers, as two members of the Confederation of Free City States, wanted on felony charges stemming from the June 5th raid on Tierra Amarilla Courthouse, remain fugitives.

A strengthened state patrol rides the roads glancing at cars and the homes of supporters of the Confederation.

One is Baltazar Martinez, 21, who has the same type blood as Che Guevara, is armed with Bowie knife, pistol, shotgun and a shoulder strap load of ammunition. He has vouched not to be taken alive. One state officer who was previously acquainted with him said, “He is a farm boy who can sleep under a rock.”

The other, Cristobal Tijerina, is brother to leader Reies Lopez Tijerina, 40, who is awaiting arraignment in Santa Fe Prison on State Felony charges.

The organization with many of its members living in Santa Fe and Albuquerque is at a standstill. Efforts are being centered around raising bond money and providing defense expenses.

Hearings and arraignments in the two cities are attended by many of the members amidst undercover fuzz from the FBI and State. The future of the Confederation (formerly the Alliance of Federal Land Grants) rests upon the outcome of cases involving 26 of its people. It will probably be close to a year before the cases are settled.

Tijerina is hoping that his felony cases will cause the court to reluctantly rule on his claims to the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848) and at least pave the way towards acquittal.

According to members of the Confederation, some of the land claimed by them was at one time owned by Spanish people who sold it individually or jointly to Anglos and the Federal Government. Their defense to this is that the treaty of G-H does not allow for one to sell more than his home 'and belongings. Other parts of the land grants in N.M. were squatted upon by Anglos who subsequently registered with the American court of private claims by 1904.

Rubin Salaz, an Albuquerque High School teacher and supporter of the Confederation, explained to me that his grandmother had sold cheaply her part of the Sebolleta Land Grant (Seboyeta, N.M.) to a Texan at the turn of the century. In approximately 1935 Salaz's father brought suit to regain and lost. The total acreage of the Seboyeta Land Grant, now in the hands of a corporation, is 45,000 acres.

There are many Spanish who back the Confederation but who consider the favorable response of Government agencies as more valuable than the land issue.

Salaz is typical of this group. He said, “The Land Grant issue is the focal point of a social revolution in New Mexico. Tijerina is the most important person to come out of New Mexico since Kit Carson.”

Why? Because he is attempting to prevent the death of the Spanish culture and language. Salaz, concerned about the future of his three small children, complained that the Albuquerque school district recruits Anglo people in Oklahoma and north Texas.

“They come here antagonistic to (Mex., Span., Ind., Negro) are a very strong majority. Things are going to greatly change in this state within the next two years. The Spanish who are characteristically obliging to any law are waking up.”

Eugene Hill, an articulate Bilingual jack of all organizations (Pres. of the G.I. Forum and Albuquerque Luncheon Club, advisor to O.E.O.) in referring to the sudden interest Sargent Shriver has shown towards New Mexico said, “It is a sad commentary upon our society, but the only thing Washington hears is gunshots.”

Mike Jenkins, presently writing a book on Tijerina and New Mexico, was a welfare worker in Rio Arriba County (where the raid took place). He describes the county as such: “50 per cent of the people are on welfare and the high school dropout rate is the highest in the state. Those that do have land grow chilies, melons, and orchards. There are large ranches owned by both Anglos and Spaniards but the Spanish and Mexicans predominate the cheap labor force. Tijerina is bound to have support there.”

Alfonso Sanchez, District Attorney who is to prosecute 26 members of the Conference on various felony charges seems to agree. He has asked for a change of venue from Rio Arriba.

Sanchez, on June 2, the day before the scheduled meeting at Coyote, New Mexico of the Conference, had state cops passing out leaflets to motorists saying “taking property of another by force is the communist way. You are being misled. Please go home.”

A niece of Reies Tijerina, in her early twenties, talked of the gross discrimination in Albuquerque. “At the phone company as operator, she said, “you must talk English or else you get fired.”

Angered at the apathy and aversion of other Spaniards to the movement, she claims that they are content to be poor and continue going to the Catholic Church, praying for change.

There is no doubt that the treaty of G-H has been violated at least in part—especially if you consider the land specifically neither sold by the Spaniards nor squatted upon by Anglos—i.e. Carson National Forest.

Tijerina, by choosing the forest as his test ground last October was as polite as he could be. Nonetheless, treaties, titles, grants are bullshit. No man owns any land. Tijerina and the Conference do not own any land. All men have a right to use land (as if it were theirs). No man has the right to use that amount of land above his necessities which deprives another of his necessities. Man does have the right to compensation for improvements upon the land especially if these improvements were directed for the buyer.

Tijerina, no doubt senses these natural laws or principles. Tijerina and his people are economically and culturally in need of land. Since he is lacking in the numbers (150 people at Coyote is much too weak, although the organization claims 20,000 supporters) needed to petition Congress for an amount of land needed to satisfy the necessities of all the families, he has to play the Anglo-Saxon game of titles, treaties and grants to secure what he is entitled to USE by nature.

If the Confederation is not allocated land within the next year or two, it would be wise for them to quit the treaty game and play the people game. By that, it should strive to seek numbers, to attract the disenchanting and alienated dark people from the insane big cities; and to salvage the poor.

The Revolution Lives

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Reies Lopez Tijerina is in jail in Santa Fe facing charges of first degree kidnapping, a capital offense. Many of his followers in La Alianza Federal de Mercedes (The Federated Alliance of Land Grants) are still holed up in the mountains of New Mexico's Rio Arriba county.

Their revolution is not dead, as the accompanying report from *Barb's* special correspondent with the rebel shows.

The circumstances which led to this uprising are many and complex, going back to the Mexican-American War of 1848, and including a degree of poverty which led Douglas Kneeland, *The New York Times* correspondent in the area, to describe it as “Appalachia with a language problem.”

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, in which Mexico ceded what is now the American southwest, contained a proviso that all the Spanish land-grants in those areas would remain in the hands of the residents. Gradually most of that land has fallen into the hands of the Anglos. The treaty has been ignored at best.

Today, according to the *New York Times*, seventy percent of the population of Rio Arriba County is Spanish-American. Ten percent is Indian. Although the population density of the area is 4.5 persons a square mile the families live in conditions as crowded as those in Spanish Harlem.

Other figures are more overwhelming. 50.2 percent of the 5,057 families in the county have an annual income of less than \$3000. Unemployment rate 20.2 percent. 56 percent of the housing units are substandard. And the situation is aggravated by the inhabitants awareness of how they were swindled out of the better land.

Tijerina set out to remedy the situation. According to the *National Guardian's* special correspondent, James Kennedy, Tijerina spent "several years" researching the whole history of the situation before he began to act.

In the early 1960s he founded La Alianza, which now claims some 30,000 supporters in New Mexico and Colorado. According to the *Guardian* La Alianza originally intended to pursue their cause through the courts and even the UN (due to the international treaty involved). But things have turned out differently.

It began with a sit-in last fall in a national forest, once part of the Tierra Amarilla land grant—which the rebels claim was granted them in 1823. Harassment from local officials steadily increased from that date.

It is hard to make out the facts about the most recent incident the one from which stems the present charges against Tijerina. The incident has widely been reported in the established press as an attack by Tijerina and his followers on the town of Tierra Amarilla June 5th.

According to these reports, Tijerina laid siege to the town and left with a number of hostages, shot up some policemen and rescued some of his followers from jail, or (as in the *Times*) "held the village for an hour and a half, wounded two policemen and seized two hostages. One quickly escaped and the other was set free unharmed."

The *Guardian* has an entirely different version of the story. Kennedy's dispatch states the Alianza had planned a demonstration which included setting up a roadblock and the "citizens' arrest" of county district attorney Sanchez, one of the leading harassers of the movement.

It was during this arrest attempt in Tierra Amarilla that the police opened fire. A gunfight ensued, and a policeman was killed.

Following that, the rebels headed for the hills and the National Guard, complete with tanks, fruitlessly roamed the hills looking for them. As part of the hunt, Alianzista's families were rounded up and held as hostages. Many national guardsmen refused to join in the hunt and the job was turned over to the state police.

Tijerina and some of his followers have been arrested. Corky Gonzales, leader of a similar movement in Colorado, is now in New Mexico to help out the Alianza. He has exchanged letters with Tijerina and expects to spend fifty percent of his time in Albuquerque arranging Tijerina's legal defense.

The attitude of the more sympathetic Anglos may be best summed up by the "observer" quoted in the *Times*, "The trouble is these people look on Tijerina as a sort of Joshua, when what they really need is a Moses to lead them out of there." Exodus? Or Jericho?

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