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LADB Staff

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## **Mexico Requests Extradition of Former Airline Director Gerardo de Prevoisin**

by LADB Staff

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The Procuraduria General de la Republica (PGR) has formally asked the Swiss government to extradite former Aerovias de Mexico chairman Gerardo de Prevoisin Legorreta on charges of embezzlement. De Prevoisin, arrested in Zurich Aug. 6, is accused of diverting US\$72 million from Aerovias' subsidiary Aeromexico to use as collateral to obtain personal loans. De Prevoisin resigned in September 1994, citing his inability to draft a viable plan to negotiate a US\$1 billion debt owed by Mexicana, Aerovias de Mexico's other subsidiary (see SourceMex, 09/21/94).

Immediately after his resignation, Aerovias de Mexico filed a complaint with the PGR, accusing de Prevoisin of "fraudulent administration" of the airline. The complaint charged de Prevoisin with embezzlement. The PGR ordered de Prevoisin's arrest, but only after the former executive had fled the country. He was rumored to have gone into hiding in several countries, including the US, France, Monte Carlo, and Switzerland. Lawsuits were also filed in US and French courts, accusing de Prevoisin on the same embezzlement charges.

### ***Embezzled funds allegedly diverted to PRI campaign***

If de Prevoisin is eventually brought to trial in Mexico, the case could prove embarrassing for the governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). In documents presented in the US lawsuit in Sherman, Texas, de Prevoisin testified in writing that a portion of the funds he is accused of embezzling were used to finance electoral campaigns for the PRI in 1994, including the campaign of President Ernesto Zedillo.

A mid-August report in the daily newspaper El Universal said former president Carlos Salinas de Gortari may have instructed that Aerovias de Mexico be used to channel illegal campaign contributions to the PRI. In the documents filed in the Texas court, de Prevoisin said laundering the campaign contributions via Swiss banks was approved by the Aerovias de Mexico board of directors. News reports say de Prevoisin channeled US\$8 million in Aerovias de Mexico funds through his accounts at Citibank to the PRI campaign accounts at Banca Serfin and other financial institutions.

Oscar Espinosa Villarreal, then mayor of Mexico City, was said to be the main link between de Prevoisin and the PRI. In response, the PRI acknowledged receiving personal campaign contributions from de Prevoisin, but not from Aerovias de Mexico. In an interview with the Mexico City daily newspaper Excelsior, Espinosa denied acting as an intermediary for the Aerovias de Mexico contributions to the PRI. "De Prevoisin is using a smoke screen and inventing facts to help his defense," said Espinosa, who is currently tourism secretary.

Similarly, Sen. Maria de los Angeles Moreno Uriegas, who was party president in 1994, said all contributions to the PRI campaign were reported accurately to the Instituto Federal Electoral

(IFE). "There were no direct contributions from Aerovias de Mexico," Uriegas said. In a press statement in mid-August, the PGR reiterated that authorities were only charging de Prevoisin with embezzlement and not with improper campaign contributions. Documents link de Prevoisin to Raul Salinas de Gortari But the negative repercussions for the PRI may go beyond charges of illegal campaign contributions.

An El Universal report in early August said the French government provided the PGR with documents linking de Prevoisin with money-laundering operations conducted by Raul and Enrique Salinas de Gortari, brothers of former president Carlos Salinas de Gortari. The French documents said de Prevoisin sent funds via the Mexican offices of Citibank to Enrique Salinas de Gortari's bank accounts in France. Enrique then wired the money to Raul's Swiss accounts. In late July, Switzerland's chief drug prosecutor Valentin Roschacher said his office had sufficient evidence to implicate Raul Salinas in laundering drug-trafficking profits through Swiss banks (see SourceMex, 07/22/98).

Roschacher sent the evidence to Swiss Attorney General Carla Del Ponte, who was expected to decide by the end of August whether to bring formal charges against the former president's brother. Raul Salinas is in custody in a Mexican federal prison on charges of murder conspiracy in the death of former PRI official Jose Francisco Ruiz Massieu in 1994 (see SourceMex, 10/05/94). A federal judge who is examining evidence in the case is expected to rule sometime at the end of 1998 or the beginning of 1999. (Sources: The New York Times, 08/04/98; La Jornada, 08/07/98; Novedades, The News, 08/11/98; El Nacional, 08/14/98; Proceso, 08/09/98, 08/16/98; El Economista, 08/10/98, 08/11/98, 08/14/98, 08/19/98; Excelsior, 08/12/98, 08/19/98, 08/20/98; El Universal, 08/07/98, 08/11/98, 08/12/98, 08/14/98, 08/25/98; Proceso, 08/16/98, 08/23/98)

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