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Legislative Panel Clears Costa Rican Officials of Campaign Financing Charges

by LADB Staff

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A Legislative Assembly committee says it has ended its investigation of the Carlos Hank Gonzalez case, finding no wrongdoing by Costa Rican officials who went to Mexico in 1997 for a controversial meeting with Hank. In May 1997, during the presidential campaign, Partido Unidad Social Cristiana (PUSC) candidate Miguel Angel Rodriguez, former President Rafael Calderon (1990-1994), and two other PUSC leaders went to Toluca, Mexico, to visit Hank, a Mexican businessman and former Cabinet member.

The visit stirred up a scandal, especially in the ranks of the Partido de Liberacion Nacional (PLN), whose leaders demanded to know if Hank was bankrolling the PUSC campaign and if corrupt Mexican money was tainting Costa Rican businesses. Rodriguez said he was unaware of the widespread suspicion in Mexico and the US that Hank and members of his family had connections with narcotics (see NotiCen, 1997-07-03).

When The Washington Post reported last year that the US government had evidence linking Hank with drug traffickers, the Assembly turned the investigation over to its narcotics committee. The committee was asked to investigate possible connections between Hank, members of the PUSC, and Mexican business ventures in Costa Rica. During the committee's investigation, the PLN charged the PUSC members of the panel with doing nothing, while committee chair Belisario Solano of the PUSC blamed the PLN for not presenting any plan of investigation or proposal for legislation.

After two months of meetings, Solano admitted that the work of the committee had been a failure. He accused the PLN members of blocking the committee's efforts. He said the committee did not know what it was supposed to investigate and the PLN members, who demanded the inquiry in the first place, had not established any evidence to investigate. No charges against Hank in US The committee asked the US for information it had on Hank's alleged links to drug trafficking and, after a long delay, the State Department told Costa Rican Ambassador in Washington Jaime Daremblum that there were no charges pending in the US against Hank.

Before the final vote, PLN panel members tried to get the investigation extended but were outvoted by PUSC members. The vote was 3-1 because two PLN committee members were absent when Rafael Arias agreed to a session without them. The other two PLN deputies, Oscar Campos and Walter Robinson, protested Arias' action before the entire PLN legislative delegation. Campos accused Arias of negotiating a secret deal with the opposition. But Arias said he agreed to the session because none had been held in two weeks, and he said it was up to his colleagues to send substitutes in their absence.

After the vote, the PLN members tried unsuccessfully to reopen the investigation. PUSC committee member Jose Eduardo Sanchez said the PLN motion was phony because the party had plenty of

time to present evidence in the investigation and failed to do so. Assembly Deputy Justo Orozco of the Partido Renovacion Costarricense refused to support the motion. He said it was time to close the Hank case. It had been "a waste of time," he said. [Sources: Agence France-Presse, 06/08/99; La Jornada (Mexico), 09/29/99; La Nacion (Costa Rica), 06/08/99, 08/22/00, 09/23/00, 09/28/00, 09/29/00; Notimex, 06/11/99, 06/21/99, 07/19/99, 10/15/99, 09/03/00]

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