

Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

Tensions high on election eve

Opposition parties are capitalizing on the nation's economic troubles to stir popular unrest.

On June 2, a group of peasants attempting to take over rural land in the state of Puebla were received with heavy gunfire by the landowners. The ultra-radical Socialist Workers Party (PST), which led the peasants into the tragic confrontation, is now claiming that 26 people died.

As I have reported in the past, the PST, with its radical organizing in this country's most backward rural areas, has become one of the main vehicles of the powers planning to bring Iranian-style "revolution" to Mexico. As a way of pressuring the López Portillo government to "do justice" to the sacrificed peasants, the party has suspended the electoral activities of its candidates for the presidential, congressional, and local elections, which will be held July 4. The group has also let it be known that it will be arming peasants in several parts of the country, so the peasants can better "defend" themselves from the landowner violence the PST intends to provoke.

The PST's provocations are the latest in a series of volatile events which have characterized the electoral process.

Unlike previous elections, this year's race takes place in the middle of a deep economic downturn.

As any student of the "Mexican System" knows, the legendary efficiency and power of the PRI ruling party does not lie in its electoral popularity, but in its identification

in the eyes of most Mexicans with the economic progress the country has enjoyed since the 1920s. With that progress now blocked, the entire spectrum of the opposition, ranging from the Trotskyist Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT), the PST, and the PSUM left alliance to the rightwing National Action Party (PAN), are competing to exploit the post peso-devaluation fallout in the economy and discredit the PRI and stir anti-government feelings.

On June 8, for example, a PRI rally in the city of Juchitán, Oaxaca, was attacked by followers of the leftist PSUM. The confrontation ended with several people injured by firearms.

The entire political machine of the "system," that is, PRI, labor union, and government officials, is now completely absorbed in the task of not only ensuring a substantial vote for the PRI, but keeping in check the radicalized passions awakened by the opposition candidates.

In early June, local authorities in the southern state of Chiapas had to prohibit PRT presidential candidate Rosario Ibarra de Piedra from making an incendiary speech near the border with Guatemala, calling on Guatemalans to rebel against their "right-wing" military government. Over the protests of the vociferous leftist community, the PRT candidate was asked to leave the area. As I have reported, authorities here are deeply concerned

about the national security risks which would flow from a hook-up of radical Mexican groups with Central American guerrillas.

On the U.S. border, the rightwing populist PAN is taking charge of similar provocations. On June 4 a mob of 200 Panistas seized the Mayor's offices in Nogales, Sonora, on the Arizona border. They were protesting the Sonora government's disallowing of several of their candidates because of their criminal records, which ranged from fraud to arms smuggling and involvement in subversive activities with the leftist 23rd of September League terrorists. Like the PST, the PAN threatened to destabilize the shaky electoral process, by announcing that it would withdraw all its candidates unless the Sonora government reinstated the candidates. The government, after a review of the case, agreed that in one or two instances candidates would be reinstated.

These confrontations seem to meet the specifications for "civil insurrection" proposed recently by the presidential candidate of the PSUM, Arnaldo Martínez Verdugo.

The government is taking countermeasures. On June 8, the Federal Electoral Commission (CFE) rejected a request by the Social Democratic Party (PSD)—one of the "brains" behind the Iran-modeled "social revolution" plans—to change 41 of its congressional candidates. (For a dossier on the PSD, see Dateline Mexico in March 23 and 30, May 25, and June 1 *EIR*.) The CFE argued the changes can't be made three weeks before the elections, thus effectively eliminating the PSD from the congressional races.