

Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

'What's bad for them is good for us'

Mexican officials are outraged at State Department documents proposing exploitation of Mexico's economic problems.

Government officials here are well aware of two recent confidential State Department documents inviting the U.S. government to take advantage of Mexico's economic plight to get some political and economic "concessions."

One of the documents, which has been partially reproduced in the press here, appraises the current economic crisis, while the other one assesses U.S. policy in Central America.

"With the wind out of its sails, Mexico is likely to be less adventurous in its foreign policy and less critical of ours" asserts the Mexico document, which according to sources here was authored by State Department Mexico desk officials Frank Crigler and Robert Pastorino.

Most amazing is these officials' conclusion that the present Mexican crisis could be an "opportunity" to force Mexico to give up nationalist control over its economy. "Mexico," the document says, "may be willing to sell more oil and gas to us at better prices; it may ease its restrictions on foreign investment; it may be prepared to negotiate a reciprocal reduction in tariffs and other trade barriers; and it may even be willing to cooperate in managing the illegal migration problem."

A quick reading of the document makes us wonder what the differences between these proposed policies and those of the Malthusian Carter administration are?

The four points of the State Department agenda go directly to the heart

of fights that President López Portillo has had with U.S. government officials over the last few years.

On oil, Mexico closely followed OPEC's price policies and looked for diversification away from dependency on U.S. markets; on tariffs, López Portillo has consistently refused to join the free-trade system of GATT, a move which has been fiercely criticized by the United States. The reader might remember López Portillo's head-on collision with Carter's Secretary of Energy James Schlesinger over the price of natural gas.

The problem of illegal migration has been held over Mexico's head for years. Mexico's fears of a U.S. border shutdown against Mexican undocumented workers took shape this month with the approval by the U.S. Senate of the Simpson-Mazzoli immigration bill.

The Mexico City press played up a protestation by U.S. State Department spokesman Alan Romberg Aug. 17: that "I want to make it very clear that there is absolutely no anti-Mexican campaign in the United States." The official was answering a question posed by our correspondent in Washington.

Nonetheless, the State Department's motto of "what's bad for Mexico is good for us," is reiterated in its Central American paper. "While the trend of events in Central America is running in our favor," the document says, "Mexico's unhelpful role [in the area] is diminishing as that country focuses more on domestic economic

concerns."

The paper then goes on to call for stepping up "right-wing" provocations against leftist Cuba and Nicaragua, a strategy which Mexico has consistently opposed for good reason.

The document's outlook is consistent with statements by State Department officials back in February, when officials gleefully welcomed a devaluation of the peso as a signal that Mexico would be forced away from its moderating role in Central American affairs in order to take care of its economic problems.

Now, what has government officials more worried is the direct participation of Thomas Enders, the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, in this confrontationist strategy. Enders is reported to have cleared both documents.

Suspicious of Enders's intentions run high in this capital. Government officials are now circulating the two documents and pointing to their similarity with a recent ABC-TV program on Mexico which asserted that the country's economic troubles will soon lead to Iranian-style social turmoil.

Officials know about Enders's long-time association with former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, an expert in overthrowing nationalist Third World governments.

But despite the deterioration of U.S.-Mexico relations achieved by State Department officials, there is apparently still some chance of recovering the atmosphere of trust and collaboration gained during the four López Portillo-Reagan meetings of 1981. According to the daily *El Sol de Mexico* Aug. 17, recent meetings between López Portillo and U.S. ambassador John Gavin may well be in preparation for a coming meeting between the two Presidents. Perhaps relations can still improve.