

Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

Chiapas again

Protestant fundamentalists as well as Jesuits are involved, and crisis spots have appeared in other states.

On Friday, March 25, a peasant clash in the Chiapas town of Chalchihuitán left at least 11 dead and 6 injured, according to accounts in the Mexican press.

It was the bloodiest among several other such incidents. On March 29, a leader of the Popular Socialist Party (PPS) was killed in the small town of Motozintlán, and the same day a member of the National Action Party (PAN) was killed in the township of Alcalá.

In both cases, the respective opposition parties had laid claim to winning local municipal elections, and entered into conflict with local factions of the ruling PRI.

But a much more serious undercurrent is coming to the surface: inter-religious rivalry, of the sort plaguing Guatemala across the border under the regime of "born again" evangelical preacher Ríos Montt.

EIR first warned of the explosiveness of the area in June, 1980, when Jesuit-led peasants near the Jesuit center of Bachajón clashed with a second peasant group and local landowners. The toll was one dead and several wounded. The Jesuit "Theology of Liberation" infrastructure was extensive, *EIR* warned, protected by the bishop of Chiapas, Samuel Ruiz.

According to several accounts, the Jesuit-controlled "Plan de Ayala Coordinating Group" played a role in the new confrontation. But the attorney general of the state, Serrano Ornelas, stated in a press conference March 28 that, according to initial interviews

with residents, Protestant sects had made inroads in the district and had been involved in the tension.

The government first began to take action against the spread of Protestant fundamentalism in Chiapas in 1979, when it decreed the expulsion of the Summer Institute of Linguistics. The SIL, made up of U.S. "Bible Belt" fundamentalists who proselytize through translating the Bible into local dialects, entered Chiapas as one of its first "overseas" moves in the mid-1930s. Its Mexican point man was the Anglican undersecretary of education, Moisés Sáenz. Its Ocosingo "jungle camp" became the training center for over 2,000 missionaries who then fanned out in Latin America, Africa and Asia.

The 1979 expulsion decree was not enforced, however, and SIL personnel continue to work in the area today. This may finally be coming to a close, because of the "Ríos Montt model" across the border and the outbreak of violence in recent weeks. I am told that Mexican authorities are watching the situation very carefully and are determined to see that Chiapas does not turn into a replica of Guatemala, where some 20 percent of the population is now Protestant and a "Thirty Years' War" scenario of violence is taking shape.

Ríos Montt is doing his part to heat the area, with a March 27 order to close the border "to stop contraband." Some Mexicans warn that this could be a prelude to fully militarizing the

border on the Guatemalan side. A series of incursions by Guatemalan troops into refugee camps in Chiapas already have the border on a hairtrigger.

The same witches' brew is to be found in Chiapas's neighboring southern states of Tabasco, a key oil-producing area, and Oaxaca. According to recent charges printed in the political column of *Excelsior*, seven Protestant sects and denominations have made inroads in Tabasco, just to the north of Chiapas. These include Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists, the Good Shepherd church, and Presbyterians. The Juárez Autonomous University of Tabasco is reportedly in the hands of evangelicals, headed by Dr. Josue Vera Granados.

The Jesuit role in Tabasco is no less intense than Chiapas, based in the Center for Ecological Studies of the Southeast.

The situation was further complicated when several thousand peasants blockaded the grounds of one of Pemex's larger oil facilities in the Comcalcalco oil district during the third week in March. The pretext for the move was the charge that Pemex had reneged on paying compensation for lands which had been taken for the oil development program.

In Oaxaca, unpublicized clashes between Protestant sects and others have led to several deaths. The "religious soup" is thickened not only by the Jesuit influence in the terrorist-leaning "left" opposition controlling Juchitán, in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, but also by the presence of followers of schismatic French archbishop Marcel Lefebvre in towns north of the city of Oaxaca. Lefebvre's controversial visit to the area of Tlaxiaco in early 1981 almost led to riots, and his following remains active.