

Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

Operation Bloodless Coup

A chilling best-seller that threatens the president seems to be a production of the PAN and the IMF.

The same forces in Mexico which have made rumor campaigns among the middle class an effective mode of political destabilization, have taken the same technique of mass psychological conditioning into a new sphere: the pulp novel.

A case in point is the recent best-seller, *The Coup: Operation Bloodless*, by one Manuel Sánchez Pontón. The book is a portrait of a Mexican president who begins to consider a debt moratorium to deal with Mexico's economic crisis, is confronted by the army, and chooses to abandon the country rather than fight.

The message to President Miguel de la Madrid could not be clearer, nor the interests sponsoring the book: the former bankers whose holdings were nationalized by José López Portillo in 1982, the fascist PAN opposition party, and the International Monetary Fund.

Author Sánchez Pontón is a protégé of one of the most powerful bankers, Manuel Espinoza Iglesias, formerly owner of Bancomer.

The novel insinuates that all Mexico's economic troubles stem from wrongdoings of its two previous presidents. The names are scarcely disguised: Luis Iturrigarria (Luis Echeverría) and José Pérez Badillo (José López Portillo). The current president, Manuel del Cid (Miguel de la Madrid), is portrayed as mediocre and gutless.

The book begins when the military has come to give the president 24 hours

to leave the country. Del Cid decides that he wants to "avoid bloodshed"; he goes to Spain and hooks up with his good friend Pérez Badillo.

At one point in the novel he confesses to his family what he did wrong: he did not break with his predecessors, and he did not hand the banking system back to its original controllers.

In the last days of the coup preparations, the army high command meets and a leading general states: "Comrades, I have the worst of news. Iturrigarria intends to take advantage of the crisis to force President del Cid to declare a total moratorium on payments. This will provoke a chain reaction of all the other indebted nations, and they will do the same. World financial chaos will result. Iturrigarria is grooming himself as prime minister for life and will align the country with the communist bloc. When the U.S. tries to intervene they won't be able to, because they will find that Russia is already involved here." The next day, the tanks are sent out to surround the presidential residence.

After the coup, the new finance minister, Luis Pazou, (i.e., Luis Pazos, the "Milton Friedman of Mexico," son of an oligarchic Veracruz family), announces a 10-point program that begins with the return of the banks to their "legitimate owners," then proceeds with an unadulterated IMF program: drastic shrinking of the public sector, sale and liquidation of state companies, "equal treatment" for foreign capital, and guarantees of a

"free-enterprise market system." The new head of state announces the political side of the same program: the elimination of the ruling PRI party to "open up expression" for the other parties.

The PAN party views the book as its own manifesto, a sort of PAN *Mein Kampf*. A few weeks ago the PAN mayoral candidate in Mexico's fourth largest city, Puebla, the Oxford-trained Ricardo Villa Escalante, went up to Planning and Budget Minister Carlos Salinas de Gortari at a public event, and with great show attempted to present him with a copy of the Sánchez Pontón book. "You already know about it," pronounced Villa Escalera before marching off.

The irony was that Salinas, a protégé of the psychological warfare division of the Wharton School in Philadelphia, is one of the de la Madrid ministers most implicated in manipulating the corruption issue to push the country into fascism and zero growth.

The publisher of the novel, a firm called Edamex, is an old hand at psywar. In 1981 it published the best-seller *The Last Call*, written by a homosexual press stringer for the then-mayor of Mexico City, Carlos Hank González, and focused on the same theme: using the corruption issue to destroy Mexico's presidential system.

There are two powerful constraints on the success of the operation behind *Operation Bloodless*, though the book has achieved much of what its sponsors planned. First, Mexico's military remains much more strongly rooted in the Mexican system than the book wishfully implies. And, as every schoolchild here knows, the greatest hero of Mexican history is the Benito Juárez who in 1861 declared a debt moratorium against usurious foreign banking interests, and went on to defend that decision, and Mexico's sovereignty, despite all odds.