

Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

A labor call to arms

"We've had it up to here," says union federation chief Fidel Velázquez, but what's the next move?

In a statement viewed within the government as "unheard of" and "the strongest attack of its kind in recent years," Fidel Velázquez, chief of the Mexican Workers Confederation (CTM), warned on Oct. 28 that either the government and its ruling PRI party reverse its austerity course, or the labor movement would begin to act independently of the party.

The CTM is the official labor wing of the PRI; it has roughly one-fifth of the seats in Congress, and forms the strongest base the PRI has. Without the CTM, the PRI is finished.

Velázquez told 2,000 leaders of the CTM in Guadalajara, who interrupted the speech of their veteran leader 32 times for applause, that "the PRI lacks fight . . . it has no reply to the labor movement. It never supports us in any strike or salary demand. . . . If the PRI were to put forward and defend the aspirations of the CTM, it would immediately win the allegiance of millions of workers, who are now in the PRI out of discipline."

Velázquez called for a purge of two PRI organizations which he charged were being used against the CTM, the National Revolutionary Women's Association, and the National Youth Movement.

Several times the labor chief pledged that he would "not take the country into adventures," but at the same time "It may be that we have to change tactics. . . . If we wished to get ahead of the current economic situation, we would have to fight head-on, and we could create a powerful

and serious social situation. . . ."

The semi-official government paper, *El Nacional*, blacked out the speech. The press most actively seeking a break between the government and labor, *El Universal* and *El Heraldo*, played it up.

On Oct. 20, the government had decreed gasoline price hikes of 25-30 percent. On Oct. 31, price hikes were authorized for eggs, rice, and milk of an average 20 percent. The same day the guaranteed base price to farmers for grains, which had not been adjusted since May, was increased only 20 percent—far below the cost increase for the same period.

But the CTM leader's challenge was not only based on the intolerable level of workers' sacrifice under the current IMF program (a roughly 50 percent decline in real wages over the past year). Velázquez is acutely aware that political forces inside the Mexican system aligned with the IMF have made the gutting of organized labor their first priority.

One signal was the statement of Alfonso Martínez Domínguez, PRI governor of Nuevo León, who declared on Oct. 27 that the PRI should pay less attention to organized labor, and more to "unorganized groups of peasants and workers who are suffering more."

The governor, connected *sub rosa* to the IMF's surrogate party in Mexico, the PAN, targeted the powerful CTM-allied oilworkers union to begin a union-busting campaign, backed by left-wing, Jesuit-infested outlets such

as *Proceso* magazine and neo-Nazi outlets such as *Impacto*.

The sudden resuscitation of the Authentic Party of the Mexican Revolution (PARM) from the land of Mexico's political dead on Nov. 1, All Soul's Day, provided a glimpse of the master orchestrator behind the union-busting crusade. The PARM was established by the PRI in the late 1940s as a plaything for Mexican generals eased out of the real corridors of power. By the late 1970s those generals had largely died out, and with them, the party.

But on Nov. 1 one Carlos Cantú Rosas held a press conference to announce the reappearance of the PARM with one plank: "The nation demands men who will fight against the labor corruption which is sinking the country in mud."

Education Minister Jesús Reyes Heróles, as interior minister in 1976-1979, directed the PARM as part of his "Political Reform" operation; he pulls the strings to this day, insiders report.

Adolfo Gilly, a protégé of Reyes operating under a Trotskyist label, declared on Nov. 2 that it was Peronist union corruption that doomed the Peronists in the Argentine elections, and that powerful labor groups constituted the same problem in Mexico.

Velázquez is waiting to see what signals he gets, public or private, from the government. He has scheduled big labor summits for the middle of the month, and is preparing to negotiate the annual minimum wage adjustments at the end of the year. What happens if the government does not respond? At that point, a labor break with the government may be inevitable, and the only question will be whether Velázquez leads it or surrenders the CTM to anti-government labor forces ready in the wings.