

Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

An unusual business convention

A turn toward the PAN party among Coparmex leaders has factionalized the business association.

The outgoing president of the Mexican employers' association, José María Basagoiti, said to the 34th national convention of Coparmex (Confederación Patronal de la República Mexicana), which took place March 8-9 in Mexico City, that "Coparmex should be the agency dedicated to shaping men and businessmen."

The convention was the culmination process of an effort to transform Coparmex into the coordinating body for all "intermediate organizations" in Mexican society, an effort that has its roots in the Atalaya meetings organized by the Legorreta family's Banamex under the banner "*Mexico en Libertad*" after the 1982 nationalization of the Mexican banking system.

Basagoiti had the idea of transforming the association's bylaws to formally integrate into it various other groupings, such as DHIAC (Desarrollo Humano Integral, A.C.), a proto-fascist organization linked to the opposition party PAN (National Action Party).

He failed to formally achieve this objective, but, for the first time in Coparmex's history, representatives of several "intermediate societies" were invited as special guests, such as the National Association of Ford Distributors, which financed many of the PAN electoral campaigns last year and has provided members to run as PAN candidates, e.g., in Mexicali, Baja California.

Indeed, although many of the businessmen present do not sympathize with the PAN, the March 8-9 gathering was an organizing meeting

in support of the PAN's efforts to undermine the Mexican state. The group that has long controlled Coparmex is the main Mexican base of Henry Kissinger in his effort to avert the creation of an Ibero-American common market and frustrate the strategy of the Contadora Group in Central America.

In Mexico, a very important segment—essentially those industrialists represented in the National Confederation of Chambers of Industry (Concamin)—are viewing Ibero-American integration more and more as the unique option for ending the economic depression.

The most remarkable statements at the Coparmex convention came from the lawyer for the nationalized banks, Ramón Sánchez Medal, and the former president of Coparmex and University of Georgetown graduate José Luis Coindreau.

Sánchez Medal argued that post-revolutionary Mexican governments have abused the power to amend the Constitution of 1917 beyond all limits, in order to create a totalitarian state. For many in the audience, this echoed U.S. Gen. Paul Gorman's warning at the beginning of March that Mexico is on the verge of left-wing totalitarianism, and potentially the U.S.A.'s greatest problem abroad.

Coindreau called for the active participation of businessmen in politics, describing—but not identifying—the PAN's program as the strategy to follow. The major cause of concern to many businessmen there was his statement that it is necessary to end the myth that the Mexican political

system is the best in Ibero-America: "Sixty years of political stability doesn't make it better than other countries that have experienced military interventions in politics." Nations under military takeover, he underlined, "have gained as much or more material progress, and enjoy as much or more liberty."

Coindreau's disclaimer was that he was speaking as an individual, not as a Coparmex spokesman. Some of the attendees said, however, his statements were "in poor taste."

As a senior official of one of the most important chambers of industry told me, the group that controls Coparmex is the most willing among the private sector to allow foreign creditors to seize state firms in lieu of debt payment. In the opinion of this industrialist, "only those who don't want to see, can't see that they are using the PAN as the means to take over the government, with the aid of foreign creditors, to whom they have offered their good offices to change the law" in order to sell out national firms including the state oil company, Pemex.

Before the Coparmex conference, a nationally respected industrialist from Monterrey, Nuevo Leon—Eugenio Clariond, vice-president of Concamin—gave a series of lectures at the Monterrey Technological Institute and the Social Union of Entrepreneurs (USEM) urging businessmen to look southward, given the pressures coming from the North. "If we can't trade with the North," he said, "and this is the case for all Latin American countries, we can develop our productive business trading among us Latin Americans." Clariond has been a participant in meetings organized by ALADI, the Latin American Integration Association, tending toward the creation of an Ibero-American common market.