

# Mexican government tries to behead labor movement on eve of elections

by Héctor Apolinar

**Editor's Note:** *Mexico's presidential elections, held every six years, will occur on July 6. As EIR has reported in a series of recent articles (see especially the June 3 and June 10 issues), the 1988 elections will be a turning point, coming in the midst of an economic catastrophe accentuated by the current drought. The incumbent President, Miguel de la Madrid, has acceded to international creditors' demands to pay the ballooning debt by dismantling Mexico's drive for industrialization, which, under his two predecessors, had depended on channeling the country's oil revenues into productive investment.*

*For the first time in nearly 50 years, the outcome of the elections cannot be confidently predicted. The candidate of the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), Carlos Salinas de Gortari, is being challenged by PRI dissident Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, the son of Mexico's most beloved nationalist President, the late Lázaro Cárdenas, who is appealing to a deep mood of discontent in the PRI's labor and peasant mass base. In addition, a programmatic focus for a return to economic sovereignty and high-technology vectored growth is being provided by the campaign of Marivilia Carrasco, the leader of the Mexican Labor Party.*

On the eve of the most controversial elections in half a century, the Mexican PRI's official candidate for President, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, is on a collision course with Mexico's powerful and influential labor movement. As budget and planning secretary for the De la Madrid administration, Salinas presided for five years over a strategy of wage-gouging and deindustrialization designed to convert Mexico into a Hong Kong-styled bankers' paradise based on cheap labor. Indeed, Salinas's primary efforts have been directed toward breaking the power of Mexico's unions, and his greatest accomplishment has been the halving of labor's purchasing power over the last five years.

Now, ironically, Salinas is forced to turn to these same unions for the votes which have always won elections for the PRI in the past. Without those votes, Salinas will in all likelihood still win the presidency, but without the majority that has traditionally given credibility to the PRI's claims to leadership in Mexico. Fully aware of the power it wields, the PRI-affiliated Mexican Labor Confederation (CTM) has issued an ultimatum to candidate Salinas, demanding a major turnabout in his economic program if he wants to receive a clear mandate to rule.

If the labor movement does not win its demand, or if it acquiesces to Salinas's empty promises, Mexico—once a prime candidate for the status of newly-industrialized nation—will accelerate in its tragic slide into bankruptcy and chaos under Salinas's promised austerity regime. The United States, in turn, will experience first-hand the effects of an "Iran" on its southern border.

## The oil workers speak out

Labor's ultimatum was presented May 17 by the politically powerful leader of the Revolutionary Union of Oil Workers of the Mexican Republic (SRTPRM), Joaquín Hernández Galicia, one of the pillars of the CTM. He put the facts of life to Salinas very succinctly by reminding him, "If you don't change things in your campaign, only [CTM president] Don Fidel [Velázquez] and I will vote for you."

Hernández Galicia also told Salinas that many unions affiliated with the PRI were expressing their discontent with the party and its government for "five years of looting." Said Hernández, "The people are irritated by so many [price and rate] increases and by the [wage freeze] pact, which is an assault. . . . The only thing this government knows how to do is manufacture taxes. There is no doubt we have been looted, badly administered again. And history would judge us if we kept our mouths shut, showing ourselves to be

pusillanimous.”

The general secretary of the SRTPRM, Salvador Barragán, followed up Galicia's warning with one of his own. On May 18, he called on Salinas de Gortari to expel from the ranks of the PRI “the multimillionaires who often have encysted themselves within the government, to preserve the interests of [Emperor] Iturbide, of Maximiliano [Hapsburg], of the Porfirians; and they camouflage themselves among us as ‘revolutionaries,’ to confuse us with their phraseology.”

Barragán is known to have been referring to Treasury Secretary Gustavo Petricioli Iturbide, a descendent of the man who failed as Mexico's Emperor, and to Pedro Aspe Armella, Salinas's successor at Planning and Budget, whose ancestors were insiders of the Porfirio Díaz dictatorship against which the Mexican Revolution erupted in 1910.

### Irregular warfare against labor

Labor's warnings have triggered a political earthquake. Immediately, in reprisal for speaking out, Galicia Hernández was made the target of a series of press slanders by de la Madrid's press secretary, Manuel Alonso. But at the same time, the bankers' forces represented by Salinas have begun an “irregular warfare campaign” against the union movement nationwide, intended to decapitate the CTM by wresting power from veteran CTM president Fidel Velázquez.

One such effort was made in mid-May, in the state of Guerrero, leading to an armed brawl that marked the first major incident of pre-electoral violence. At least 12 trade unionists were wounded, two of them by bullets, when Salinas's cohort Nezahualcóyotl de la Vega—also the general secretary of the CTM-affiliated union of radio and television workers—provoked a physical confrontation with Guerrero CTM chief Sen. Filiberto Viguera Lazaro, known for his loyalties to the national CTM leadership.

De la Vega, in turn, is said to have been deployed by Guerrero Gov. Francisco Ruiz Massieu, a brother-in-law to the PRI's presidential candidate. Ruiz Massieu is reportedly slated for the Attorney General's post in a Salinas administration. One CTM loyalist and supporter of dissident presidential candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, told the press that Gov. Ruiz Massieu was “behind the whole movement” to overthrow Senator Viguera.

The battle for control over the Guerrero labor movement was ended—at least for the moment—when the “old man” himself, CTM Secretary General Fidel Velázquez, intervened. On May 20, he convoked a special meeting of the state CTM to warn de la Vega's followers, “We don't want traitors and submissive ones to hide in our ranks, and much less to block the development of the CTM union movement.” Then, Velázquez went after Guerrero's governor, saying that to solve “this internal problem, the state government would have to stay out of this affair, as I have asked Francisco Ruiz Massieu to do.”

It is worth noting that both Ruiz Massieu and Nezahual-

cóyotl de la Vega are directly tied into the organized crime networks around the Televisa media empire, founded by former Mexican President Miguel Alemán, built up with the help of gangster Meyer Lansky, and now owned by Alemán's son.

### In defense of sovereignty

It is no coincidence that the oil workers union has taken the lead in labor's mobilization against Mexico's decline.

## ‘The Bazdrech plan’

Carlos Bazdrech, the fascist theoretician, published his plan to eliminate the CTM in the May issue of *Nexos* magazine. He proposes that Salinas de Gortari impose the “second phase” of Miguel de la Madrid's economic reforms, i.e., “internal opening” of the economy to “eliminate privileges and restrictions . . . to promote support and control of the ‘corporative’ social base of the government.”

Bazdrech admits that this policy “would tend to be carried out at the cost of the [government's] social base or the leaders who supposedly control it.” Bazdrech, of course, assumes that the unions would fight his plan, but cynically asserts, “their knowledge of their weakness would bring them to discipline themselves to the decisions.” The Bazdrech Plan reveals the motive for the systematic campaign against the country's unions.

Bazdrech is representative of a key part of the government. He is a protégé of Leopoldo Solís, the president's chief economic adviser and designer of much of his financial policy. Solís—a member of the Inter-American Dialogue, which calls for “selectively” legalizing narcotics—has a powerful influence on Salinas's team through Manuel Camacho Solís, considered Salinas's political brains and probable Interior Secretary in a Salinas government.

Camacho Solís, now Ecology and Urban Development Secretary, wrote a book saying that there would only be “democratization” in Mexico when the CTM is destroyed and Fidel Velázquez dies. On the other hand, Bazdrech is chief adviser to Treasury Undersecretary Francisco Suárez, the man directly in charge of negotiations with Mexico's foreign creditors. The latter's father, Eduardo Suárez, represented Nazi financier Axel Wenner Gren's companies in Mexico.

Right now, Bazdrech is amplifying his plans at Princeton University, thanks to Fulbright and Ford Foundation fellowships.

The SRTPRM has long been the bulwark against the government's efforts to "privatize" Mexico's most vital national industry, namely, its oil, which is understood to be the key to a national industrialization and modernization effort. Pemex (Petróleos Mexicanos) was given a monopoly on oil exploration and exploitation by President Cárdenas in 1938, when he nationalized the industry.

The "privatization" of Pemex was especially sought after by Mario Ramón Beteta, its former director and the current governor of the State of Mexico. Beteta turned over some of Pemex's operations, like parts of its oil fleet, to his political cronies, but remains protected from punishment for this and a huge number of questionable business practices by his role in helping President Miguel de la Madrid make his way to the top.

Beteta's conduct is not fortuitous. The Beteta family closely collaborated with the Nazi "fifth column" in the 1940s. In particular, Mario Ramón's uncle Ramón was one of the darlings of Nazi spy Hilda Krueger, according to several U.S. intelligence reports found in the National Archives in Washington.

Beteta's privatization efforts have been carried on by his successor at Pemex. On May 4, one of the oil workers leaders, Alfredo López Ramos, accused current Pemex director, Francisco Rojas, of trying "to minimize" the union, during celebrations for the 50th anniversary of the oil nationalization, and of harboring "illusory dreams" of factionalizing the union by attacking "our organization, morally headed by Joaquín Hernández Galicia." López Ramos warned Pemex executives, "Nobody will be able to make the oil industry into booty, because its workers will never permit it."

Hernández Galicia himself asked the weekly *Impacto* of May 26, "How could it be said on March 18 [the anniversary] that Pemex will keep being the nation's patrimony, when at the same time they are planning to hand it over" to private interests?

### **Assassination attempts**

The oil workers union has earned the hatred of many vested interests in and out of government. In years past, there were several assassination attempts against Hernández Galicia, all of which he escaped. In his May 17 interview, he warned that it could happen again: "I warn my enemies that a lot of them will get blown away first. Also, I protect myself."

Hernández Galicia, it seems, possesses confidential reports concerning a planned hit. In the daily *El Universal*, June 6, reporter Marco Antonio Vázquez Espinoza revealed that a May 30 assassination attempt against federal deputy and head of oil workers local 30, Emérico Rodríguez had failed. He wrote that the assault was "to shut up and discipline those who have not complacently subordinated themselves to politicians or officials who wanted to make the powerful union into their accomplice in deviations" of company funds.

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## **Documentation**

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*Mexican oil workers' chief Joaquín Hernández Galicia feels strong enough to talk straight about Mexico's problems, as shown in the following quotes from his Jan. 5, 1988 message to his union.*

We could never understand how, by making more expensive the things the people need, not to live, but to survive, inflation is to be stopped. . . .

Every day, every month, the same thing has happened for five years: the same formula of increasing public service charges and taxes, covering it with phrases: "adjustments, strategies, recoveries, reconversions, schemes, conjunctures." We have been given clear proof that the formulas and their results have been the opposite of what was promised. Only a peaceful people like the Mexicans would put up with so much. But, will we go on putting up? . . .

We would be bad off, but not so bad off, if the economic measures were different, as we were promised at the beginning of this government. Austerity was for the people, and the benefits, real juicy benefits, were for the bankers, who once again looted Mexican savers. . . .

Sure, we are unhappy. And not only unhappy, but also irritated. The famous 15% [wage increase] was not enough even to pay transit fare increases. And what went up was not only fares, but all the products consumed by a nation on the edge of misery, indebted perhaps for more than 50 years, with millions of men without work, with millions of children without food. . . .

The workers' discontent with what's happening, could go right past us. Even though they are told that there are more painful measures, that the government is in serious financial straits, that external and internal circumstances oblige devaluation and price rises, they will never understand if they see that the sacrifices have not been equal, that the bankers and the millionaire caste have made more succulent deals at the cost of tightening the people's stomachs even more, that government officials live better than the prosperous men who manage the stock markets, industries, and businesses. There is no doubt: We have been badly administered once again.

History will judge those of us who remain silent as weak and pusillanimous, and those of us who speak up defending our children, our families, our Mexico. . . .

Five years of failures with the same as always. . . . We must change our path. . . . The path must not be misery, as it has been; the change must be toward salvation. We have been manipulated by pure phraseology for many years. It is time for us to mark the path, as it is marked by the Constitution: the state at the service of the people and not the people at the service of the state. . . .