

Dateline Mexico by Hugo López Ochoa

Cárdenas fills the Zócalo

The nationalist movement that has rallied to Cárdenas is now a major challenge to the ruling PRI apparatus.

More than 300,000 Mexicans filled to overflowing Mexico City's historic central plaza facing the national palace, known as the Zócalo, for the final campaign event of National Democratic Front (FDN) presidential candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas. In his address to the enthusiastic crowd, Cárdenas reiterated his proposal to suspend payment on the foreign debt "under the current International Monetary Fund conditionalities," and to redirect Mexico's economic policy.

"The reconstruction of the nation is unpostponable," said Cárdenas. "The speculative economy, controlled by an oligarchy associated with and dependent upon multinational capital, must be transformed immediately into a productive economy which gives priority to investment, to the development of companies with Mexican capital, the generation of employment and the equitable distribution of social wealth."

The multitudes cheered when the candidate evoked the image of his father, Gen. Lázaro Cárdenas, the beloved President of Mexico from 1934 to 1940, and symbol of Mexico's battle for national sovereignty. "The remembrance in the collective memory, has decisively influenced the popular response to my campaign," he said, and went on to denounce the betrayal today of his father's nationalist policies. "The people and history do not forgive. The current regime is going to pay on July 6—the day of the presidential elections—for its mistake of having surrendered to interests both foreign and harmful to the interests of

the Mexican people."

And leaving no doubt as to whom he had in mind, Cárdenas denounced the "modernization" campaign of ruling PRI party candidate Carlos Salinas de Gortari, as "the new face of fascism." For the first time in his campaign, Cárdenas spoke openly of the "clear coincidences" between the proposals of the PRI and those of the Nazi-communist National Action Party (PAN).

The leader of the Mexican Workers Confederation (CTM), Fidel Velázquez, who previously had refused even to mention the Cárdenas campaign, has now publicly acknowledged that "Cuauhtémoc is undoubtedly the second force" in the country, after the PRI. A war of polls was fought throughout the month of June, in an attempt to focus the voters' attention on competition for second place between the PAN and Cárdenas's FDN, not on the contest for first place between PRI and FDN.

A Gallup poll gave 56% to the PRI, 23% to the FDN, and 19% to the PAN, results which were released in late June *although the poll itself was conducted back in March!* Following the spectacular close of Cárdenas's campaign in the Zócalo, a poll by Univisión gave 38% to the PRI, 29% to Cárdenas, and 26% to the PAN's Manuel Clouthier. Another poll, by the National University of Mexico, gave first place to Cárdenas in Mexico City.

Fear of the possibility of a last-minute avalanche of votes in Cárdenas's favor led Urban Development and Ecology Minister Manuel Camacho

Solis, intimate of Salinas de Gortari, to state June 16 at a San Diego, California conference, "We retain the support of the country's principal organized forces. We can count on the constitutional Armed Forces."

Cárdenas himself referred to Mexico's military, during his Zócalo speech. Commenting on the possibility of electoral fraud at the polls, Cárdenas said, "In the ranks of the Armed Forces, the problem is being actively discussed. The Army of the Revolution cannot break with the constitutional order. The people are confident that the Armed Forces will be the principal guarantor of legality."

The government of President Miguel de la Madrid can no longer hide the fact that division in PRI ranks is widespread, the result of its economic austerity policies. It is an open secret that the most powerful nationalist machines in the country, to be found principally among the trade unions, have maintained a formal allegiance to the PRI, but expect to gain maneuvering room if Cárdenas succeeds in getting second place.

This is already occurring. On June 21, Jorge Sánchez García, the new president of the Labor Congress which represents Mexico's most important trade unions, told President de la Madrid, "The Mexican people have reached their limit; we cannot pay the foreign debt at the expense of the nation's backwardness and misery, because it is a constant threat to social peace." Sánchez added that the President would have the full support of the workers if he were to make "this great decision."

But the President continues to be deaf to the warnings. On June 22, he responded to the workers, "I have always believed, and continue to believe, that a [debt] moratorium would endanger the nation."