

Mexican vote leads the revolt against the IMF

by Robyn Quijano

Mexican voters mobilized to kick the International Monetary Fund out on July 6, when they handed the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) a stunning defeat. The PRI's loss to ex-PRI leader Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, who left the PRI last year after President Miguel de la Madrid hand-picked his unpopular Harvard-trained budget minister, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, as the PRI candidate, is the first defeat for the party since 1929.

Ironically, it is not as much a defeat for the PRI, as for what the PRI has become over the last six years under the dictatorship of the IMF. The day after the election, when it was clear that Cárdenas was winning with a relative majority, he commented "The IMF must surely be considering new approaches to the foreign debt problem."

International bankers held their breath, hoping that the PRI machine which the U.S. Eastern Establishment had pledged to dismantle since then-President Jose Lopez Portillo nationalized the banks and threatened a debt moratorium in 1982, would somehow save them from the nationalist Cárdenas. The Eastern Establishment has long played the game of attacking any nationalist forces in Ibero-America that might buck the IMF for "human rights violations" or lack of "democracy." But now, the Mexican elections, followed by the upset victory in the Argentine primary of Carlos Menem, supported by the traditional wing of Peronism, who also campaigned against the IMF, has created a quiet panic. Democracy, it seems, has said no to the IMF.

While the PRI has refused to admit they lost the presidency, the population has equally refused to accept to 40-year-old technocrat, Salinas de Gortari, as their President. "The issue was poverty," a PRI leader from Mexico City said. "Salinas promised another six years of de la Madrid's economic policies. The population stood up and said they won't tolerate that."

Salinas was President de la Madrid's top economic hatchetman, and the author of the policy that has reduced workers' buying power by nearly 50% over the past six years. His policies cut agricultural investment by 50%, setting up drought-stricken areas for starvation. Under de la Madrid and Salinas, Mexico was the world's "model debtor," a nation whose people were put through a meatgrinder to satisfy the appetite of international usury.

Nearly half a million stood up for Cárdenas in the *Zocalo*, Mexico City's central plaza, on July 17, in the first mass rally of the *Cardenista* movement's mobilization for the recognition of the Cárdenas victory. Cárdenas message is that there is still time to impose the rule of law, and respect for the vote and for the constitution. He has also continuously stressed that his mobilization will be without violence, and warned against provocateurs. The other major opposition party, the PAN, has already started violent provocations including a physical assault by Manuel Clouthier, the PAN's presidential candidate, against President de la Madrid that ended with the presidential guard raising their weapons to shoot.

In a televised address on the same day, Cárdenas said, "Our fight is on political terrain, and not that of electoral figures. . . . The people have disqualified the election. . . . It is necessary to mobilize the population . . . to avoid provocation and demonstrate always that we are the majority." "Mexicans know they voted for Cárdenas," stated the ad that his National Democratic Front (FDN) ran in the press calling for the mass rally. The half million in the plaza proved who won the election.

Electoral alchemy

It took the government nearly a week to cook up the vote allies to give PRI candidate Salinas 50.36% of the vote. The anti-PRI mood in the nation was so evident in the streets, that

even the U.S. press reported that while the PRI worked their "alchemy," nationalist Cárdenas, who ran on a program to end the IMF austerity regime, and pay only a small portion of the nation's export earnings for debt service, "might" actually have won.

Cuauhtémoc, son of Mexico's favorite President, Gen. Lazaro Cárdenas, swept Mexico City, which comprises over 15% of the nation's electorate, by 2 to 1. Cárdenas was given an official 31.2%.

Cárdenas' FDN coalition made their own tallies, which gave Cárdenas 38.3% to 32.69% for Salinas, without taking into account the basic PRI fraud tactic of giving peasants dozens of already marked PRI ballots, and sending them from voting place to voting place. Nor did those figures take account of the hundreds of incidents in the countryside in which ballot boxes in heavily *Cardenista* districts were simply stolen.

Cárdenas gave a report on "preliminary information" from election exit polls, which give the FDN 54% of the total vote of 12 Mexican states. In Mexico City, the PRI received only 24% of the vote, and the candidate of the pro-IMF National Action Party (PAN) got 17%, according to FDN figures. In the areas where the PRI stole the vote massively, protests have already been launched and the population, rather than being demoralized by the PRI declaration of victory, remains mobilized.

In Mexico City, where the FDN machine was able to safeguard its vote, FDN senatorial candidates Efigenia Martinez and Porfirio Munoz Ledo were leading 6 to 1 in hundreds of districts. The PRI "gave" the FDN the two Senate seats for Mexico city and Michoacan, Cárdenas' home state. How it came to do so, however, only demonstrates what is really at stake.

On July 9, the head of the PRI in Mexico City demanded a recount of the vote on the absurd premise that Cárdenas votes had been counted more than once since four different parties had backed Cárdenas. Cárdenas held an emergency press conference at 3 a.m. the next morning to denounce the move and claim victory. A brawl ensued within the PRI between the hard-liners who had predicted that Salinas would get 60% of the vote, and the technocrats who thought they should please look a little more democratic. A PRI official on the Federal Election Commission said of the Mexico City recount, "It's absurd. What do you want, a civil war in the Federal District?"

Brawl inside the PRI

Cárdenas, who split from the ruling PRI party in October 1987, drew some of the PRI's most important nationalist leaders to his side. His platform called for "recovering our economic sovereignty" and rejecting the banks' demand for payment of Mexico's \$100 billion foreign debt. While many of the 'democratic current' left the PRI with Cárdenas, many more nationalists that sympathize with his program and hate the Harvard-trained technocrat stayed inside. It is that faction

which will cause trouble for Salinas by forcing him to modify his IMF program, or put their weight behind Cárdenas and his popular mobilization aimed at disqualifying the Salinas presidency.

Cárdenas has set his sights on organizing the House of Deputies, which will convene in September to officially vote in the new President. That chamber will have 500 deputies this year, a majority of which will still belong to the PRI. If a groundswell of support for Cárdenas' victory emerges in the next month, another faction of the PRI could split out of the party.

Ex-President Jose Lopez Portillo, responding to reporters' questions about why "many of your former collaborators" are working with Cárdenas, said jokingly that one isn't married to a party. "Like the song says, this pact is not with God."

Unionist for Cárdenas

Pro-government columnists complained that the leader of the powerful oil workers' union, Joaquin Hernandez Galicia, had instructed his members to vote for Cárdenas. Whether or not this is true, Hernandez Galicia himself had told Salinas de Gortari only a few weeks before that, even should they wish to, labor leaders would be unable to convince the rank-and-file to vote for the PRI unless the PRI changed its policy. The states of Tamaulipas and Veracruz, where the petroleum workers are a major force, were lost to Cárdenas. As the early vote totals came in, it was clear that the trade union machine that was counted on to deliver the big vote for the PRI didn't come through. The PRI later grabbed both states, but the fact that the unions went for Cárdenas is established.

The trade union machine was a particular target of the Salinas technocrats, and many trade union candidates were set up by the PRI in districts that the PRI planned to lose. Ecology Secretary Manuel Camacho, a top Salinas aid, expressed satisfaction that the trade union candidates had lost. While octogenarian Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) boss Fidel Velasquez has closed ranks behind Salinas, most of the base and many of the bureaucrats would openly bolt to Cárdenas in the next weeks. Salinas's program has so devastated workers' living standards, that only the most brutal party discipline could keep labor within the PRI ranks, unless Salinas offered some rather large and fast concessions.

Arturo Romo Gutierrez, education secretary of the CTM, who lost his bid for the Chamber of Deputies in Mexico City, was quoted in the press saying that the country is experiencing a "different reality, a formidable experience that the PRI should value for all it's worth, toward overcoming old procedures and ways of doing politics, modernizing and radicalizing itself, fully expressing what the working class thinks. In a word, being more revolutionary." This was clearly understood to mean more like the Cárdenas movement. Voters "are demanding a decisive historic turn in the path of the revolution," he concluded.