

Dateline Mexico by Héctor Apolinar

The PRI and terrorism

The terrorist rural group Peasant Torch has been invited to enter the ranks of the ruling PRI party.

A deep discontent is spreading in the ranks of the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) because its national leadership, headed by secretary general Manuel Camacho Solís, is on the verge of making official the entry of the terrorist organization Peasant Torch (*Antorcha Campesina*) into the PRI.

Torch national leader Aquiles Córdova announced Aug. 14 that his movement's entry into the ruling party was "a matter of days," since the negotiations with Camacho Solís and with national PRI president Jorge de la Vega Domínguez were going well. "We have been met with understanding and comprehension" by the close collaborators of President-elect Carlos Salinas de Gortari, who had been the official PRI candidate, said Córdova.

Peasant Torch has taken part in armed battles and assassinations of political opponents in the state of Puebla. The Trotskyist Independent Peasant Organization blames Peasant Torch for the murder of at least 80 of its followers. The armed clashes between the two bands have also led to the death of several Torch leaders, including the sister of its national leader Aquiles Córdova.

Peasant Torch has also gotten into fights with the National Peasant Federation (CNC) and Independent Peasant Organization (CCI), both affiliated to the PRI, for which reason it has been dubbed in the regions of Puebla, Tlaxcala, and Veracruz the "Shining Path of Mexico," after the savage Peruvian drug-trafficking terrorists.

Peasant Torch's radical Maoist tendency and "socialist-communitarian" methods of organization—also similar to Shining Path's—have turned it into one of the most feared groups in Mexico. Its black reputation has forced its leadership to conduct a campaign to refurbish its image.

During a recent demonstration in Mexico City, Aquiles Córdova denied that his group was the "Shining Path of Mexico," and its members assassins. Its leaders insist, however, that "Antorcha must exist, and we will defend it to the death."

Peasant Torch states that, despite the accusations of assassination thrown against it, not one of its members has ever been criminally charged. Even so, those in the know suggest that this is because they are well protected by former Puebla governor Guillermo Jiménez Morales, the current head of the PRI bloc in the Mexican Chamber of Deputies.

Peasant Torch represents some 800,000 peasants in 22 Mexican states, and its main headquarters can be found in the Puebla mountains. It was founded in 1974 by radical students and teachers from the Autonomous University of Chapingo (Maoist), who operated out of the ultra-left and pro-terrorist National Federation of Bolshevik Organizations, which is known for its participation in armed confrontations with other leftist groups.

On June 28 of this year, Peasant Torch held a demonstration of 60,000 in central Mexico City, to support the presidential candidacy of Carlos Salinas de Gortari, whom the Torch de-

scribed as "the only one capable of carrying forward . . . the historic development of the nation."

The mobilizations in support of Salinas have been well-financed, with resources that the organization clearly doesn't have on its own.

Private researchers have discovered that the rapid growth of Peasant Torch stems in large part from the help it has received from the government's Department of Agricultural Technical Education. Dozens of graduates of the University of Chapingo have been employed throughout the country by the Department, giving Peasant Torch organizing and recruitment opportunities.

One of the most interesting angles that certain serious researchers into Peasant Torch have turned up is the relationship it maintained with Puerto Rican terrorist William Morales, who was illegally freed from jail by the Mexican government just before the July 6 presidential elections.

According to rumors circulating among political circles, the PRI intends to bring Peasant Torch into its ranks to replace the CNC as the official peasant wing of the party, and install it as a shock force.

The key question is why the PRI would want to replace the CNC with a band of pro-terrorist anarchists who could easily spin out of control of the party hierarchy. The only explanation is fear that the CNC base and the majority of its regional leaders might openly defect to the ranks of the opposition presidential candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, who was defrauded of victory in the July 6 election. It is a fact that the peasantry is the layer of Mexican society most brutalized by the austerity regimen imposed by President Miguel de la Madrid, but *designed* by Salinas de Gortari.