

## Dateline Mexico by Cruz del Carmen de Cota

### 'Modernization' or destruction?

*The Salinas government has committed itself to a program of 'modernization' which threatens to bury the economy.*

On May 18, Pétroleos Mexicanos (Pemex), the pivot of the Mexican national economy, announced that it will proceed with plans to "modernize" the sector. In this case, "modernization" consists of gutting the labor force: 40,000 permanent and temporary workers are to be fired, and 11,000 technicians and professionals reclassified as management personnel, the latter step serving simply as a cover for stripping Pemex's technical staff of their union rights.

Pemex also announced that modernization requires that the company continue its so-called "maintenance program." That program has already caused serious damage to Pemex installations, a columnist for *El Sol* reported on May 23.

"Reports obtained by this columnist" from Pemex technical personnel, "reveal that replacement parts needed for the [oil] plants are not found in the warehouses of the company. . . . Together with this, another serious problem has appeared: the maintenance experts themselves are being fired, replaced by young administrators," *El Sol* warned.

Such cutbacks have already led to disaster. At San Juan Ixhuatepec, a refinery and storage facility blew up and killed more than 400 workers—an accident resulting from deficiencies in its installation.

The Pemex announcements demonstrate that the Salinas government's "modernization" campaign is nothing but a cheap way to cannibalize the nation's labor force and industrial capacity, in order to generate a few dollars more for debt payments. Such chiseling of Mexico's productive apparatus

was fought tooth and nail by the former head of the Oilworkers Union, Joaquín Hernández Galicia—until he was jailed by the government last January on hoked-up "corruption" charges. The cutbacks vindicate Hernández's charge that foreign bankers had ordered him out of the way, to permit them to dismantle Pemex's industrial plant without resistance.

The new general secretary of the Oilworkers Union, Sebastian Guzmán Cabrera, imposed by the government, has proven incapable, however, of convincing union workers of the benefits of the modernization plans. Pemex Section One, headquartered in Tampico, Tamaulipas, is in the forefront of the opposition to Guzmán Cabrera. But Cabrera also has few friends in Sections 34 and 35 of the Federal District, or in Section 30 of Poza Rica, where a recent confrontation between opposing factions left 68 injured.

Next on the chopping block is Mexico's teachers union, along with the Oilworkers Union, one of the largest in Ibero-America. In April, Salinas's government succeeded in driving out the teachers' traditionalist union chief, Jongitud Barrios, using much the same methods as against Hernández.

Barrios was purged after the teachers won a 25% wage hike (higher than the 10% ceiling which the government has ordered on all wage contracts), after nearly a month-long strike. The new general secretary imposed by the government was Elba Ester Gordillo, an old collaborator and friend of President Salinas. She already is attempting to force out representative leaders in such key centers

as Michoacán, Guerrero, Chiapas, and Oaxaca, and replace them with her own people.

In a recent press conference, businessman José María Alverde, a leader of the National Chamber of Commerce of the Federal District (Mexico City), outlined how far the anti-labor policies of Salinas's "modernization" program are to go. The new Federal Labor Law, he said, "includes the hiring of hourly workers, with which a new labor class will be created, that of temporary workers."

"Many workers will have to remove their leaders. . . . There must be adjustments to the new reality of present-day Mexico in labor matters . . . including a return to the use of apprentices in industry and commerce. . . . One can learn a trade at the work place with little income, but always increasing one's personal training," Alverde stated.

The project to turn back the clock on labor policy—forcing it away from the model of independent and sovereign national development and toward an integrationist project with the United States—has yet to find much resistance among those handfuls of traditionalist leaders who remain in union posts. The Mexican Workers Confederation (CTM) itself has abandoned any pretense to the nationalist program which once guided it. On the new Law of Foreign Investment, the CTM apologized, "The government found itself obliged to open up to foreign investment, since the national capitalists do not want to invest in productive areas and what the country needs is employment."

The editorial in the weekly magazine *Siempre* was most apt in summing up the government's latest moves: "Mexico has entrusted its fate to a group of usurers to whom the hunger and misery of the people mean little or nothing."