

Dateline Mexico by Carlos Cota Meza

Mexican vote fraud breaks new ground

The order is out: Stop the nationalist opposition to Salinas, with everything from vote fraud to automobile crashes.

Even seasoned journalists and political observers in Mexico, who have witnessed every brand of sophisticated vote fraud over the years, were stunned by the ruling PRI party's performance during the Nov. 11 local and state elections. The elections had been widely billed in the national and international media as a "laboratory of democracy" for the regime of Carlos Salinas de Gortari, Bush's favorite in all Ibero-America.

Referring to the brazen vote fraud, a columnist for the daily *La Jornada* reported: We saw it, but we still can't believe it. In the populous State of Mexico, for example, the PRI claimed 119 of 121 municipalities and all 34 seats in the state legislature. Pre-election polls had shown the opposition PRD party to have a strong majority in that state.

The PRI's strategy boiled down, in most cases, to making sure people did *not* vote, since they rightly feared that the opposition PRD and PAN candidates would sweep them from office.

The operation began in late October, in the local elections in the state of Coahuila, where "Operation Mad Rat" was put in place. This consisted of altering the order of the polling stations where citizens were to cast their ballots. Internal PRI documents referred to the operation as "Induce Abstentionism." The resulting chaos was such that not even the state's governor himself, Eliseo Mendoza Berrueto, was able to find his polling station, and he scurried around like a "Mad Rat" looking for it in a 25-block radius.

In the Nov. 11 elections in the states of Mexico and Hidalgo, "Operation Induce Abstentionism" was so successful that only 10% of the registered voters cast ballots.

In the State of Mexico it was called "Operation Carrousel," whereby the computerized voter lists were padded with phony names. Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, who was robbed of the presidency in late 1988, and the PRD obtained the program codes of the State Electoral Commission 48 hours before the election, and called for the postponement of the elections on the grounds of planned "cybernetic fraud." They had discovered that almost 16,000 names, perfect homonyms, were multiply listed on the lists of registered voters. They also discovered 60,000 voting credentials for nonexistent voters, which had been distributed among PRI loyalists who could be identified by a small emblem which they wore on their lapels. The "carrousel" consisted of these squads being transported from polling station to polling station, voting at each one in turn.

All of this is preparatory to the federal elections scheduled for August 1991, in which the entire lower house of Congress will be reelected, along with half of the Senate. It is clear that, were there to be clean elections, the PRI would lose its majority in the lower house, which would virtually guarantee a full congressional review of the validity of the 1988 presidential elections, in which it is widely believed that Salinas actually lost the popular vote to Cárdenas.

One of the darker ironies of the

PRI's electoral fraud was that it had the blessing of the usually oh-so-democratic Bush administration. It was the U.S. ambassador to the Organization of American States, Luigi Einaudi, who reportedly insisted that that body *not* send observers from the Inter-American Human Rights Commission to observe the Mexican elections—contrary to their practice in almost every other Ibero-American country. And the Establishment media, such as the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Journal of Commerce*, have lectured Salinas de Gortari that his praiseworthy "economic revolution" of International Monetary Fund austerity must now be complemented by a "political revolution," consisting of eliminating all opposition from the political landscape by whatever means necessary.

In the course of the campaign in Hidalgo, a plot to assassinate Cárdenas was discovered and defused, according to the state leadership of the PRD.

More recently, there was a strange automobile accident involving Sen. Porfirio Muñoz Ledo, the PRD's candidate for governor of Guanajuato. Late one night on the highway, a car with its lights off jumped into Muñoz Ledo's lane and hit his car. Muñoz Ledo and members of his family and entourage sustained serious, but not fatal injuries.

Federal Congressman Vicente Fox, the PAN's candidate for the governorship of Guanajuato, also had an auto accident. In the middle of the city of León, a pickup truck ran a red light and crashed into his car. An unidentified pedestrian was killed in the incident.

Manuel J. Clouthier, the PAN presidential candidate in the 1988 elections, died in 1989 in a suspicious car crash on one of the country's highways.