

## Dateline Mexico by Carlos Cota Meza

### Bush and Salinas share destinies

*After three years of praise for the "Mexican miracle," policymakers are talking about a replacement for Salinas.*

The magazine *Siempre* devoted a recent editorial to the observation that "the destinies of Salinas and Bush are one. We might even go so far as to predict that the fate of the first, his administration's place in history, depends upon the uncertain future of the other."

The severe economic instability of the United States, the resurgence of regional conflicts around the world, and the demands of the U.S. citizenry for its government to pay some attention to accelerating domestic problems, has ironically placed the Salinas government in a serious political quandary. President Carlos Salinas de Gortari is not only being referred to as a weakened politician, but his replacement is already being sought—with three years remaining in his term!

Suddenly, in late October, the London *Financial Times* uncorked Manuel Camacho Solís, the mayor of Mexico City, as the most viable successor to Salinas, describing him as "a natural pre-candidate for the presidency." And in early December, the *Wall Street Journal* presented Finance Secretary Pero Aspe Armella as a potential candidate, in an extensive interview attributing the "success" of the Salinas economic model to Aspe, as the "brains" behind it. Curiously, the Mexican media have chosen not to publish that interview.

Hoping to allay these pressures, the Mexican government organized a rapid-fire succession of international events, bringing in "world-class personalities." One such event was Henry Kissinger's appearance in Mexico City in late October, where he report-

edly was paid \$100,000 to say that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) had to be signed before the U.S. presidential elections in November 1992. Next came former President Ronald Reagan, who, it is said, was paid \$80,000 to say the same thing. Both spoke before forums organized by the well-endowed Universidad Anahuac.

Former chief of the White House Council of Economic Advisers Martin Feldstein and 1981 Nobel economist James Tobin addressed an event organized by the Mexican Institute of Financial Executives at the ocean resort of Cancún, where the two insisted that the U.S. elections would not interfere with the NAFTA negotiations. It is not known how much they were paid.

Mexico's Banco Mercantil invited down Massachusetts Institute of Technology economist Rudiger Dornbusch, who was Pedro Aspe's professor at MIT. It is said that Dornbusch was paid \$17,000, and that what he said in his presentation landed like a bucket of cold water on the head of his former disciple. Apparently, he just didn't agree with government projections on inflation control, and said that both Aspe's exchange policy and the economic stabilization program as a whole "will have to be revised in the short term." Certain circles are even saying that Dornbusch lost the consulting job he had had at the Finance Ministry.

After such a visit, the scene moved to the United States, where the Mexican-American Chamber of Commerce, the Conference Board, and the Mexican Foreign Trade Business Co-

ordinating Agency organized a seminar entitled "Investing in Mexico in the Nineties. Investment Opportunities and Strategies within the North American Free Trade Agreement."

All went well for the organizers of the event, until it occurred to Delal Baer, an analyst for the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington and an adviser to George Bush, to suggest a substitute for Salinas de Gortari.

Baer said, "Even if Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas were candidate in 1994 and won the elections, he could not reverse course; his administration would have to go with orthodox policies, just as Presidents Carlos Andrés Pérez of Venezuela and Alberto Fujimori of Peru had to." But he didn't stop at that. He also suggested that a possible PRI presidential candidate might be Jesús Silva Herzog. "It might be that he would win, but he could not erase the policies implemented thus far."

It is public knowledge that Silva Herzog, the finance secretary during the last phase of José López Portillo's government and during half of Miguel de la Madrid's subsequent term, and designated "1984 Man of the Year," is now kept as ambassador to Spain because his presence irritates Finance Secretary Aspe, Trade Secretary Serra Puche, and chief presidential adviser Joseph Marie Cordova Montoya, among others.

That the CSIS should propose Jesús Silva Herzog, whom Citibank's John Reed once called the "Black Pearl" of international finance, as a PRI presidential candidate, implies a serious crisis of confidence among Mexico's young ruling elite. Indeed, the message is very clear: What is important is the success of the program, and *not* of the men who implement it—even if that man should be Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas himself.