
Mexico

Farmers demand debt moratorium

by Hugo López Ochoa

During a national conference on Jan. 25-26 in the city of Guanajuato, 400 farmers, researchers, and government officials from 21 states called for a moratorium on payment of Mexico's foreign debt, as well as on current agricultural debt and arrears held by small and medium-sized businesses. They also called for an end to the "autonomy" of the Bank of Mexico, the central bank. Other points in the final resolution included a call for the state to resume its role in directing the economy; establishment of fair, guaranteed prices for farmers; a balanced policy of tariffs to protect production; and declaration of food self-sufficiency as a national priority.

These were among the points proposed to the conference by Jaime Miranda Peláez, president of the Cajeme Agricultural Credit Union in Ciudad Obregón, Sonora, and president of the Permanent Forum of Rural Producers (FPPR). Excerpts of his speech follow. The FPPR is the agricultural movement which organized the famous tractorcades which shook Mexico during the second half of 1993. They took on a lower profile in 1994 due to two factors: For most Mexicans, resolving the political crisis generated by the British-inspired insurgents of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) became a higher priority. And the peasantry received direct assistance from the government through such programs as Procampo, whose purpose was to align sectors of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) for the August 1993 presidential elections. But the explosion of the Mexican debt bomb has completely eliminated this "assistance" and once again sparked the mobilization of rural producers.

Delegations from Baja California, Chihuahua, Sonora, Sinaloa, and Durango approved the entirety of the document presented by Miranda Peláez, while other delegations approved its major points. His presentation received a standing ovation during the conference plenary, and moderator Dr. Gabriel Baldovinos de la Peña, director of the Postgraduate and Research Division of the School of Agriculture at the Autonomous University of Morelos, described it as "patriotic and revolutionary."

A new deal for agriculture

The environment at this conference, opposed to economic liberalism, was defined at the very outset. In his speech

on "introduction and goals," Héctor Samuel Lugo Chávez, undersecretary of agriculture, forestry, and fishing of Guanajuato state, said that "agriculture requires a New Deal . . . such as that established by [U.S. President Franklin] Roosevelt in 1932 in response to the Great Depression of 1929."

The conference resolutions were published on Jan. 30 in full-page ads in the dailies *La Jornada* and *Reforma*, including the seal of the government of Guanajuato state as well as that of the Guanajuato Council for Agricultural Modernization which sponsored the conference. That same day and the next, legislators from all parties, economics columnists from the national media, as well as other prominent personalities called for a declaration of debt moratorium.

Like many other statements made in the rest of Ibero-America, Miranda Peláez's speech used the authority of economist Lyndon H. LaRouche to define the nature of the Mexican crisis. "We should recognize," he said, "that our crisis is a reflection of what such prominent economists and international statesmen as Lyndon LaRouche identify as a process which threatens to disintegrate the world financial system."

Alberto Vizcarra, an FPPR coordinator, presented three dramatic graphs published by *EIR-Resumen Ejecutivo* magazine, which proved that banks' involvement in the super-speculative derivatives markets is at the heart of the speculative bubble which is bringing down the world financial system. He also demonstrated that Mexico's foreign debt is unpayable. "There is no reason for Mexico to die along with the bankrupt neo-liberal system," Vizcarra said. "Anyone who looks for 'niches' to survive" within the framework of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) or the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), "which were stillborn," he emphasized, "is either ingenuous or a traitor," alluding to LaRouche's frequently used metaphor that "it's no longer a matter of looking for the best stateroom on the *Titanic*, but of boarding the lifeboats."

Farmers responded angrily when they noticed the omission of several key points from the final resolution. But fortunately also removed from the document were all references to the malthusian concept of "sustainable agriculture" presented by such academics as José Luis Calva of Chapingo Agricultural University.

The impact of the Guanajuato resolutions was such that the president of the Northeast Peasant Alliance, Juan Leyva of the ruling political party, the PRI, proposed that Miranda Peláez be named spokesman of the southern Sonora farmers, to make the same proposal to three federal deputies from the congressional committee on Finance, Trade, and Agriculture. On Jan. 31, Miranda Peláez put forward the same proposals to 300 rural producers and leaders of the 80 agricultural organizations of southern Sonora, and recommended to the deputies that a committee of producers officially present their viewpoint to the national Congress.