

The Specter of Egypt Haunts Mexico Food Crisis

by Dennis Small

March 2—“Freak frosts” which swept the Southwest of the United States and northern Mexico in early February, wiped out agricultural production on about 600,000 hectares in Mexico, including about 4 million tons of corn, which is close to 20% of national production. The majority of this occurred in the state of Sinaloa, which produces 27% of the country’s corn, with neighboring Sonora also suffering major devastation. What this means is that, in order to maintain Mexico’s meager level of consumption of corn, the most vital staple in the Mexican diet, Mexico will have to increase imports by 3 million tons—from 8 million in 2010, to 11 million in 2011.

But that extra corn simply doesn’t exist, even in Mexico’s main source of corn imports, the United States.

Ironically, the area most affected by the frosts is precisely the region of Mexico that would most benefit with the development of the NAWAPA (North American Water and Power Alliance) biospheric engineering project, and its complement, the Mexican PLHINO (Northwest Hydraulic Plan), which are at the center of the LaRouche movement’s programmatic organizing on both sides of the border.

At heated policy discussions in Ciudad Obregon, Sonora, on Feb. 12 and 18, which included a half dozen federal Senators and Congressmen in gatherings of 100 or so representatives of farming organizations and political activists, LaRouche associate and leader of the Pro-PLHINO of the 21st Century Committee, Alberto Vizcarra, sharply focused what was at stake:

The entire world is in the throes of a mass strike process against the international financial policies which have devastated the economy, creating food shortages along with soaring prices of essential products. Like Egypt, Tunisia, and other countries ear-

lier this year, Mexico is now facing that reality.

Over the last 30 years, ever since José López Portillo left the Presidency of Mexico in 1982, all protection of the country’s food production capabilities has been systematically dismantled. Great infrastructure projects such as the PLHINO were abandoned; scientific research and technology were scuttled; credit for the countryside evaporated; parity prices and subsidies for technological inputs were slashed; and the entire concept of food security was sacrificed on the altar of British globalization and free trade. Worst of all, Vizcarra stated, was that the physical economic concept of *water-to-produce-food* was replaced with the monetarist dogma of *water-to-make-money*.

Under the official National Water Commission (Conagua)—which is, today, run by allies of Prince Philip’s nazi World Wildlife Fund—this criminal *idea* has dictated national policy. The PLHINO has been sabotaged with the sick argument that a cubic meter of water is more profitable if used in the swimming pool of a luxury hotel, than as irrigation for a hectare of corn or wheat.

“This was the same policy implemented in Egypt,” Vizcarra warned the angry gathering, where a country which in the past was a major grain producer and even exporter—like Mexico—was driven to food scarcity and chaos. “Mexico is following the same path,” he stated, “by allowing the subversion of the basic concepts which are the foundation of any nation’s successful existence. The idiotic policy we have followed, that it’s cheaper to import food than to produce it in the country, is now forcing those who hold that view to eat *money*, since we’ve run out of food. We should keep a close eye on what they defecate,” Vizcarra concluded amidst laughter.

The specter of Egypt was also front and center, in an



Alberto Vizcarra, leader of Pro-PLHINO Committee, shown here, addressing a rally in Sonora, March 5, 2010, told a gathering of farm organizations, political activists, and elected officials in February, that Mexico faces the same food crisis as that which triggered the recent upheavals in Egypt, Tunisia, and elsewhere.

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unusually sharply-worded demand for an about-face in national food policy, presented by Congressman Francisco Rojas, the powerful head of the PRI party's congressional grouping, in a Feb. 22 opinion piece published in the daily *El Universal*. Headlined "Food Emergency," the article denounced speculation on world markets as a major cause of food price inflation, and warned that Mexicans face the "imminent threat of shortages and hunger."

Rojas also warned that Mexico should learn the lessons of Egypt, "where unemployment, along with high prices and shortages of food, contributed to the recent social revolt." He added that Mexico had made a terrible mistake of abandoning its historic policy of food security. "Mexico imports more than 40% of the food it consumes, because the country's food security was left to the mercy of the world market, which offered better prices. Rojas concluded correctly that "food dependence is suicidal."

López Portillo's SAM

Food self-sufficiency, or "food sovereignty," was one of the hallmark policies of President José López

Portillo, although Rojas does not mention him by name. In 1980, López Portillo—who collaborated throughout his Presidency with American physical economist Lyndon LaRouche—launched the Mexican Food System, or SAM, whose basic tenets were elaborated in a March 1, 1980 document.

"It was determined that self-sufficiency can be achieved in corn and beans by 1982, and, by opening up new land to cultivation, firm steps can be taken to achieve it by 1985 for the other basic products where there are deficits," the document stated. This was to have been done by promoting technological change, parity prices, and other dirigist policies: "We must subsidize, through inputs, research and extension programs, technological change at the level of the farm, which will rapidly increase the productivity of the land.... These are areas where a subsidy of inputs (above all, fertilizer) will encourage technological change."

As *EIR* reported in a June 20, 2008 article on the SAM: "Had Mexico stuck with López Portillo's policies over the last 25 years, it would be a different country.... Corn production would today exceed 34 million

tons, rather than the 19.5 million tons produced in 2006. Not only would the country be self-sufficient in corn, but per capita consumption would be 30% higher than it is today. As for beans, production would be 3 million tons, nearly three times what it is today, as would per capita consumption.”

Instead, the British imperial bankers imposed their dictatorship on Mexico after López Portillo left office in 1982, and destroyed national production of corn, wheat, beans, rice, and other staples. For example, per capita production of corn has fallen by 15% since 1982, and bean production has plummeted by 51%—leaving the country defenseless in the face of “natural disasters” such as the recent frosts.

Today, 47% of all Mexicans (some 50 million out of 110 million people) live under the poverty line, with 18% enduring extreme poverty, which is sometimes referred to as “food poverty”—i.e., people who regularly go hungry. The head of the National Peasant Federation (CNC), Gerardo Sánchez Garcí, on Feb. 8, reported that the price of the essential market basket has risen by 70% over the last decade, while wages have plummeted by 26% during the same period.

In 2011, the worldwide hyperinflationary collapse has accelerated, leading in Mexico to a January jump in food inflation at an annualized rate of 4.5%, including a whopping increase of 218% in the price of limes, a key staple in the Mexican diet. The accelerating crisis represents a dangerous threat to Mexico’s social stability, Sánchez warned, asking why President Felipe Calderón hasn’t taken steps to prevent “food riots.”

Although Mexico has not yet witnessed Cairo-style protest demonstrations, the pot is simmering and could boil over at any point.

On Jan. 31, a large protest march against Calderón’s economic policies occurred in Mexico City. The march to the capital’s central plaza—the Zócalo—which included tens of thousands of peasants and farmers, as well as urban workers, denounced high food prices and scarcity of basic staples. Agustín Rodríguez, secretary general of the National Autonomous University’s (UNAM) employees’ union, who has given joint webcasts with Lyndon LaRouche, spoke, and demanded that the federal government guarantee people’s right to food, and sufficient food production, to meet the population’s consumption needs.