

Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menendez

Where does Mexican labor stand?

They're almost powerful enough to pick a president, but who the labor federation's own next president will be is still a matter for speculation.

Around of agitated political speculation was kicked off in Mexico by the Tenth Annual Congress of the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), held in Mexico City April 21-23. President José López Portillo himself explained why in his inaugural speech: "The CTM is historically, politically, and ideologically the most powerful grouping in my nation."

The Mexican President was not engaging in hyperbole. The CTM—and its veteran leader of 40 years, Fidel Velásquez—has for decades been the backbone of institutional life in Mexico, organizing popular support for each administration and exercising a powerful influence over the selection of the PRI party presidential candidate, the guaranteed victor in Mexico's presidential elections every six years. Those who are today trying to second-guess the PRI's selection for 1982 have taken note of the fact that it was Fidel Velásquez who first gave public word that López Portillo would be the 1976 presidential candidate for the PRI. *The Wall Street Journal*, for example, went so far as to state in a March feature: "Presidents came and presidents go, but Fidel Velásquez stays."

Thus, what attracted most attention in this capital was not so much the expected reelection of Velásquez to a sixth term as Secretary General of the CTM, but rather the list of possible successors to

the octogenarian labor leader that emerged from the conference proceedings. The CTM succession question for years has been a subject of heated political maneuvering in which many forces—both domestic and foreign—have tried to have their preferences prevail.

Some have argued—as the *Wall Street Journal* did in the cited article—that there is *no one* capable of replacing Velásquez, and that with his death Mexico will be vulnerable to institutional destabilization. A well-placed Mexican trade unionist consulted by *EIR* dismissed this argument as "wishful thinking."

Who is in the running?

For many observers of the Mexican labor scene, the most surprising development at the CTM conference was the fact that the well-known labor spokesman and President of Mexico's Senate, Joaquín Gamboa Pascoe, didn't even land a post on the CTM Central Committee. Gamboa Pascoe has been mooted as a possible successor to Velásquez. Knowledgeable insiders explain that Gamboa Pascoe's problem is that he is not well-liked within the labor movement.

Also much-noted was the naming of the leader of the oil workers union, Joaquín Hernández Galicia ("La Quina"), as President of this year's CTM conference. Although he is not now Secretary General of the oil workers—the nation's most

powerful union both politically and economically—he did hold that post twice in the past and is now the "eminence grise" of the union. No one becomes Secretary General of the union without his approval. In the period leading up to the CTM conference, Hernández Galicia announced that the oil workers union would be placing half of the \$100 million that they now have invested in stocks and properties to aid in the development of the Mexican Agricultural System, recently announced by the federal government. This was widely read as a strong endorsement of the economic policies of the López Portillo administration.

Hernández Galicia, like Gamboa Pascoe, did not win a position on the CTM Central Committee—a fact which some ascribe to the factional warfare between the two contenders to the Secretary General post.

A third candidate sometimes mooted in labor circles is Blas Chumacero, one of Velásquez's oldest collaborators and closest advisers. Chumacero surprised the conference by delivering an unexpected paean to the Mexican Armed Forces as the defenders of the nation's constitutional institutions, but age and other factors converge to rule Chumacero out, in many observers' ranking.

When all was said and done, it was old Fidel Velásquez himself who stole the show and reaffirmed his total control of the CTM. In his keynote speech he called for radicalizing the CTM's demands; nationalizing the food processing and pharmaceutical industries; and called on labor to participate fully in the nation's economic decision-making process.