

The Partido Laboral Mexicano versus Jorge Castañeda

by Timothy Rush

“Among the Mexicans, it became evident that the guidelines were set by the president himself and by the Foreign Relations Undersecretary, Alfonso de Rosenzweig, despite all the efforts of the somnolent and disheveled Foreign Minister Castañeda to place himself in the front row, and of the shadowy director of U.S.-Mexico bilateral relations, Andrés Rozental, to move out in front of the caravan . . . to opportunistically genuflect before Richard Allen and Edwin Meese.”

This is the devastating portrayal of Jorge Castañeda and his step-son Andrés Rozental, drawn by a leading reporter for the Mexican daily, *Excélsior*, Fernando Meraz, in his coverage of the Jan. 5 border meeting between José López Portillo and Ronald Reagan.

It reflects the intense dissatisfaction with the foreign minister within leading Mexican circles, a dissatisfaction catalyzed in recent weeks by a public campaign for his ouster launched by the Partido Laboral Mexicano (PLM—Mexican Labor Party).

The PLM kicked off the campaign Dec. 19 with a charge that the foreign ministry duo wished to undermine the Reagan-López Portillo visit and foment a U.S.-Mexico face-off in El Salvador.

Three major dailies covered the PLM denunciations in succeeding days, and *La Prensa* ran a photo of PLM Secretary-General Marivilia Carrasco talking to Luis Farías, president of the Mexican Chamber of Deputies, on the steps of the Congress during a rally where the PLM hanged Castañeda in effigy. The caption reported that Mrs. Carrasco was informing Farías about the PLM campaign to oust the foreign minister.

Resounding confirmation of the PLM charges came through 10 days later, when Castañeda provocatively decided to terminate fishing treaties with the U.S. and called in Rozental to give the news to the U.S. press for maximum sensationalist play-up abroad on the eve of the Ciudad Juárez meeting.

↗ A columnist for the daily *El Sol*, Armando Rojas Arévalo, termed Castañeda's action “traitorous” and tartly observed that “for some members of the cabinet, concretely Sr. Jorge Castañeda, it seems that foreign

communications media are more important than national ones. Castañeda went over the head of the president's press secretary and his own press secretary . . . He decided to leak the news through Andrés Rozental to the *New York Times*.”

Castañeda's friends

There's an old Spanish saying, “If you want to know who a man is, find out who he hangs out with.” Mexican political circles have been taking careful note of who is leaping to Castañeda's defense.

The most profuse defense of Castañeda came from Roberto Jaramillo Flores, secretary-general of one of the Maoist left sectlets, the PSR. Jaramillo fulminated to an *Ovaciones* reporter who interviewed him inside the Congress building as the PLM rally proceeded outside: “Those . . . those people are CIA. How is it possible that they attack the very best the cabinet has to offer?”

Manuel Buendía, a Jesuit-trained muckraker who currently writes for *Excélsior*, took up the cudgels for the beleaguered foreign minister the day before the border meeting. President López Portillo, in his meeting with Reagan, should follow Benito Juárez, said Buendía; it was Juárez who “knew how to victoriously confront foreign imperial forces.” For this task, the President is fortunate “in being able to count on the counsel and advice of a new and excellent Minister of Foreign Relations, Jorge Castañeda, over the past 20 months.”

Buendía particularly hailed Castañeda's action in breaking off the fishing treaties; this is a salutary “aperitif” to the meeting, he announced.

The fishing issue was not mentioned by either López Portillo or Reagan in the cordial border meeting the next day.

It was not the first time Buendía and Castañeda had teamed up. In mid-1980, Castañeda used Buendía as a journalistic funnel for diatribes against the two leading statesmen of the European Monetary System forces, France's Giscard d'Estaing and Germany's Helmut Schmidt. Castañeda arranged the hatchet jobs on behalf

of Willy Brandt and other friends in the Socialist International, whose "Brandt Commission Report" is a factional attack on the EMS contracted directly by the World Bank/IMF apparatus.

Castañeda, in a mid-December magazine interview, became the laughingstock of Mexico for denying any connection between the Brandt Report and the World Bank; knowledgeable Mexicans are fully aware that World Bank President Robert McNamara launched the study and personally selected Brandt to head it.

Castañeda's insistence on the same occasion that the Brandt Report and López Portillo's World Energy Proposal were the "same thing" earned him another round of sharp PLM attacks. *Excelsior* writer Miguel Guardia turned over his Jan. 6 column to quotations from a PLM release which termed Castañeda's comparison "absolutely false" and the Brandt program "genocidal."

Speculation is rampant in some quarters that these attacks are taking their toll on a man already well-known for a drinking problem. The PLM placard which drew most guffaws—and rueful smiles—on the steps of Congress last week was one showing the foreign minister sharing a drink with his "best buddy," and a man hardly less well known for excessive drinking—"Willy Brandy."

Mexican politics through most of the country's postrevolutionary history. It has done so by the time-honored technique of . . . reaching accommodation with important sectors of Mexican society. . . .

This is a subtle and adaptive form of politics which has the primary weakness of blurring policy lines and thus making it difficult for the country's leaders to set clear directions and override parochial interests. It can be expected that Mexico will suffer greater dangers from this weakness as the combination of oil wealth, and a rising population confront it with the need for faster economic development and . . . social change. It could learn something from Iran on this point. . . .

The tough problem lies in the area of regional security.

The Baltimore Sun, Jan. 7, 1981: "Reagan: Across the Rio Grande"

Mexico's population, now 68 million, is likely to double in two or three decades. . . . Trade between the two countries will have a survival aura, with oil and natural gas flowing north . . . and U.S. grain moving south to alleviate chronic nutrition problems.

In concrete terms, this might appear a nice complementary fit, but it is not. Psychology enters in—the Mexicans with their sense of historic grievance, the Americans with their assumption of superiority. The potential for abrasion is so great that it will require high statesmanship to keep relations constructive.

The Journal of Commerce, Jan. 7, 1981: "Reagan At the Bridge"

. . . Mexico is a revolutionary country. . . . But, despite its name, the PRI—until lately at least—has been anything but revolutionary. In a country where 10 percent of the population earns 40 percent of the income, where horrendous urban slums abut gleaming new skyscrapers, and where abject rural poverty is endemic, the party represents a cozy arrangement between the government and the privileged. . . .

Mexican Communist Party spokesman Raúl Jordán in statements to the Jesuit-influenced daily *Uno mas Uno*, Mexico City, Jan. 7, 1981:

[The meeting]

Ronald Reagan, which was to strengthen his own image abroad. . . . It offers nothing for the improvement of relations between the two countries. . . . Under Reagan's regime, relations will the course set during recent years.

The PCM feels it is necessary to denounce the statements made by Reagan in Texas [referencing the situation in El Salvador—ed.]

tionist and aggressive attitude, which should be totally rejected by the Mexican government.

DOCUMENTATION

Sour grapes in the U.S. press

Not everyone was pleased with the outcome of the Jan. 5 meeting between Ronald Reagan and Mexican President José López Portillo in Ciudad Juárez. Those who weren't are opposed to Mexico's dirigist industrialization program—which could lead Mexico down the "Iran" route, they warn—and to any truly cooperative relationship between the two nations.

What follows are their "sour grape" expressions of disappointment and their rage at Mexico's continued commitment to becoming a fully industrialized public.

The Wall Street Journal, Jan. 7, 1981: "The Juárez Rendezvous."

The Partido Revolucionario Institucional, or PRI, which Mr. López Portillo represents, has dominated