

## Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

### An alliance in the Caribbean?

*Mexico has rebuffed Venezuela's diplomatic package, but a joint oil pact was strengthened.*

President Luis Herrera Campins of Venezuela paid a visit to this capital over the first week of April to meet with President José López Portillo. Given the two countries' prominent position as the hemisphere's oil giants and their increasing political and economic influence in the troubled area of Central America and the Caribbean, the meetings got wide coverage both here and in Caracas.

Judging from statements made by President Herrera and from the joint communiqué, it is clear that the Venezuelans are making a move to lock Mexico into a special version of "regional" approach to crucial problems in the Caribbean area, such as oil supplies and the bloody El Salvador situation.

Mexico has repeatedly rejected the kind of regionalism being promoted by Venezuela's Christian Democratic government on the basis that it would pull the continent away from joining forces with advanced-sector nations in pursuit of a worldwide economic recovery. The Venezuelan "regional" approach has also irked the Mexicans' sense of commitment to full principles of national sovereignty.

This time the Venezuelan government came to Mexico City retooled with an "anti-imperialist" rhetoric to which some officials here, especially in the foreign ministry, are known to be very *aficionado*.

President Herrera, who in the

past has portrayed himself as anti-Soviet, told the press that Latin America should form a bloc to counter the "other imperial" bloc, the United States, "because we are still weak countries."

While thumping for "Latin America for the Latin Americans," the Christian Democratic president nonetheless used his stay in Mexico City to meet with Klaus Lindenberg, a personal aide to Socialist International chief Willy Brandt.

In their final communiqué, Mexico and Venezuela committed themselves to strengthen the San José Accord, an arrangement to supply oil to poorer countries of the area on preferential terms. Haiti and Belize (which is set to get independence from Britain later this year) were added to the list of beneficiaries. Other countries already in the deal include El Salvador, Nicaragua, Panama, Costa Rica, and the Dominican Republic.

Both countries will also do feasibility studies to build a refinery in the Caribbean to process crude oil.

Although President López Portillo repeatedly said he sees this accord as a model of reasonable economic solutions for the ravaged area, the deal forces Mexico to coordinate with Venezuela on energy policy, an area which Mexico has always preserved as a purely national question. The deal corresponds in effect to the Brandt Commission's calls on the South to form regional defensive pacts against the North. The Herrera government

has in fact pursued two equally bad tracks simultaneously: The Brandt Commission approach, and Anglo-American schemes to turn Latin America into a strategic fuel and minerals reserve controlled from London and New York for international financial warfare.

The Mexicans have shown an "Achilles heel"; nonetheless, contrary to U.S. press reports, President López Portillo clearly drew a line on extending the oil pact into a political pact, particularly in terms of Central America. Reading the *New York Times* accounts of the meetings, I was once again appalled at seeing the kind of lies their correspondent here, Alan Riding, pours into that paper. In an April 9 article, Riding quotes some of his friends in the foreign ministry to say that Mexico and Venezuela had "offered their *joint* good-offices to help find a settlement to the bloody dispute" in El Salvador—my emphasis.

I went to review Mr. López Portillo's statements and the final communiqué's provisions on El Salvador, and I found that once again Riding had put in the Mexicans' mouth the policies that he himself has been promoting.

In fact the final communiqué includes Mexico's insistence that there be no "foreign intervention" in El Salvador and never mentions any "joint" Venezuelan-Mexican mediation there.

Despite their increased commitment to the San José Accord, government sources here continue to signal their mistrust of Venezuelan intentions. Venezuela's disappointment was expressed this week by an editorial in *Diario de Caracas* complaining, "Mexico does not view itself as a Latin American nation."