

Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

Master plan for destabilization

The Jesuits are attempting a new Church-state confrontation at a very delicate political moment.

Radical Church layers are leading a new and audacious destabilization effort against the Mexican government and its economic development programs. So far the success is minimal—on the surface. But knowledgeable circles are concerned because the Jesuit forces involved have explicitly stated their intention of intervening in the current presidential succession fight. Any political activity by the Church is strictly forbidden by Article 130 of the 1917 Constitution.

In mid-May the Mexican Episcopal Conference, taken over by the Jesuit-directed Theology of Liberation forces a year ago, released a new "master plan" of operations. The document states that "democracy is only a theory" in Mexico. "There is a monopoly of power; apathy, and frustration. . . . Justice is bought and sold, [and] there is abuse of power and the privileges of wealth. Corruption is generalized and violence institutionalized."

Spokesmen for the Conference broke every rule of the system by directly commenting on who should be the next president. The government of López Portillo has been "against the people," stated; the next president must have "charisma" and address himself to the people's needs.

The bishop of Oaxaca, Monsignor Bartolomé Carrasco, made it clear that the real target was not "lack of democracy" but, rather, the government's modernization

plans. Addressing a subgroup of the Episcopal Conference convened to assess the growing strength of the Liberationists in Indian areas, Carrasco stated that the great enemy of the Indians and poorer farmers is the government's effort "to resolve the crisis in agriculture with greater production" based on "intensive exploitation of natural resources, above all energy." This "alienating" approach leads the Indians to "lose control over their work and production."

It was just a year ago that 'Liberationists' in the Church first challenged Article 130. The issue is one that instantly aroused passions here—the fight between Mexico's republican elites and antidevelopment forces in the Church dominated Mexican history for most of the post-Independence period, and the prohibition against political activity by the Church is a keystone of Mexico's constitutional order.

This time around, a wave of repudiation of the Episcopal Conference's stance was led by the head of the lower chamber of Congress, Luís M. Farías, who declared that Congress will investigate infractions of Article 130. "The views of these churchmen are just a bit provocative," he added, they "may be getting in deeper than they think."

A day later the secretary general of the Conference and a leading Jesuit protégé, Monsignor Genaro Alamilla, denied that the Conference had ever criticized the govern-

ment: there was no new master plan, but only a variety of plans "which are discussed each year in internal debate." Surely someone came across some old plan and divulged it with "bad intentions."

But the Jesuit offensive was just as quickly raised to a new brazen height. Father Francisco Ramírez Meza, director of Catholic Documentation and Information, threatened that "if Article 130 were currently applied to its full extent, as well as other [constitutional provisions] regarding the clergy, there would be social unrest. The people would not accept such an attitude." He added that priests can talk about the succession any time they want to, and any other political topics as well. For now, "these statements will be of a personal nature and not in the name of the Catholic Church of Mexico," but "sooner or later," Article 130 must be overturned *de jure* as well as *de facto*.

A new wrinkle on the situation comes from the southern border region of Chiapas. There Liberationist bishop Samuel Ruiz—who helped direct a bloody peasant shootout a year ago in a town adjacent to the regional Jesuit headquarters of Bachajon—is charging that the government persecutes Guatemalans and other Central Americans fleeing violence in their home countries.

Recreating the alignment which brought radical Jesuit priests and the Mexican Communist Party together in marches on the Basilica of Guadalupe in April 1980, the Communist rector of the University of Puebla has sent an urgent telegram to Interior Minister Olivares Santana backing up Samuel Ruiz's appeal.