

## Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

### Behind the Michigan meeting

*López Portillo doesn't like "trilateralism," but he likes the trend in Central America even less.*

The Sept. 17-18 trip by President José López Portillo to meet Ronald Reagan and Pierre Trudeau in Grand Rapids, Michigan, is being viewed here as one of the trickiest and most difficult moments of diplomacy in recent Mexican history.

The sudden decision of López Portillo to attend the inauguration of the Gerry Ford library in the company of the U.S. President and the Canadian prime minister, after previous indications that Mexico was not interested, came one week after the Mexico-France communiqué urging a negotiated solution to the El Salvador fighting.

It is clear that one of the top items on López Portillo's agenda will be to explain the Mexico-French move personally to Reagan and attempt to pull him away from Alexander Haig's control of U.S. policy in the region.

On other occasions López Portillo has made it more than plain that a tripartite format was not acceptable to Mexico—it smacked too much of the North American Common Market idea which Mexico has formally and repeatedly rejected. But this time around it looks like López Portillo decided the urgency of meeting directly with Reagan outweighed the drawbacks of the "Common Market" taint. Though not highly publicized, Reagan is meeting privately with López Portillo the evening before the ceremonies.

A high-level Mexican govern-

ment source gave me this picture of the Mexican thinking a few days before the summit:

"Reagan is boxed in in terms of the El Salvador situation. He has no alternative but to accept the suicidal course of Alexander Haig, and launch the Vietnamization of the region, or pull back and accept the negotiated political solution as proposed by Mexico. We believe it is possible Reagan will accept the latter in order not to destroy his relation with López Portillo."

But Central America will not be the only item López Portillo brings with him. A commentator for the state-controlled Channel 13 television here revealed over the weekend that the Mexicans plan as well to raise the Volcker policy of high interest rates and the Oct. 22-23 North-South summit in Cancún. The Mexican government doesn't want to wait until October, I am told, to present directly to Reagan their deep concern over what the Volcker policy is doing to the economy here and worldwide. López Portillo referred directly to these negative effects in his State of the Union address Sept. 1, calling the current interest rates "absurd."

While not hiding these major points of divergence, Mexico is at the same time underscoring its goodwill toward the Washington administration. The unusual warmth and prominence accorded George Bush's visit to Mexico for our Independence Day celebrations

Sept. 15-16, on the eve of the Grand Rapids get-together, attests to this.

Mexico's Aug. 28 call with France for Salvadoran opposition elements to be included in peace negotiations was fiercely criticized by Venezuela and several other Latin American nations as "interventionism." Mexico has responded by reiterating that its position is not intervention, but rather a call to conscience: either a political solution is found based on negotiations, or a process of Vietnamization leads the region into a holocaust of genocidal proportions.

It is significant that at the same time that Mexico took its joint action with France, the Mexican press revealed that government officials are studying what they view as the "genocide doctrine" of the Carter administration's *Global 2000 Report*. And Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes took to the pages of the *New York Times* two days before the Michigan meeting to stress that the Mexico-France resolution "offers the United States a way out of the swamp" of a situation in which "genocide has become an everyday occurrence."

So if Mexico is "intervening" anywhere, maybe it is intervening into the United States. José Luís Mejías, a well-read columnist for the Mexico City daily *Excelsior*, drew the careful distinction that exists in fact between Reagan and other elements of his administration in a recent column. "We must not fall into the trap of attacking Reagan for everything," he wrote, "because Reagan is being pressured by Haig, the technocrats, the hawks, and the Pentagon." In effect he notes, the Mexico-France proposal is directed at offering support to Reagan.