

Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

The new PRI shuffle

The sudden naming of Ojeda Paullada to the PRI presidency should soothe some institutional sore spots.

With the unveiling of Planning Minister Miguel de la Madrid as the ruling PRI party's presidential candidate Sept. 25, it was assumed that the officials of the party itself would be shaken up to respond to the needs of the campaign.

Thus there was less than total surprise when a few days later rumors swept Mexico City that PRI president Javier García Paniagua was being moved over to the Interior Minister's position, and Interior Minister Enrique Olivares Santana, over to the PRI. Olivares is known as a conciliator in the party and has held many PRI posts.

However, the change never took place. And when García Paniagua and his leading PRI officials were re-affirmed in their posts at the Oct. 9-11 PRI national nominating convention for De la Madrid here in Mexico City, it looked as if he had weathered the storm.

Yet a hurricane struck three days later, whose suddenness stunned even veteran PRI-watchers. In classic Mexican fashion, delegations of PRI leaders from around the country suddenly began congregating at the offices of Labor Minister Pedro Ojeda Paullada around noon on Oct. 14, acclaiming him as the party's new leader.

By late in the afternoon García Paniagua's resignation had been announced, and late in the evening his new post confirmed: the Labor Ministry being vacated by Ojeda. It was a big step down for the man

brought in six short years to the powerful PRI post and even consideration as a presidential candidate. And the circumstances of the shakeup just two days after García's confirmation in a full party congress, were humiliating.

The man chosen to head the PRI during the campaign period, Pedro Ojeda Paullada, was ironically De la Madrid's principal contender for the presidential nomination. He was the leading candidate of what is known here as the "politico" current of the party, as distinct from the "technocrat" side which has moved up more through government bureaucratic positions. De la Madrid is associated with the "technocrat" wing.

The naming of Ojeda Paullada to the most important spot during the campaign (next to the candidate himself), with a good shot at entering De la Madrid's cabinet thereafter, clearly brings these two wings of the party together. Particularly significant are Ojeda's good relations with the well-organized and politically active labor movement, under the direction of Fidel Velásquez. The union chief has shown an unusual degree of public unhappiness with the De la Madrid candidacy; and the full integration of labor into the campaign is viewed as a priority by party strategists.

Ojeda's appointment thus does strengthen the PRI party apparatus at a juncture when destabilization campaigns by both right and left

are under way. It is therefore ironic that one of the factors which may have worked to Ojeda's disadvantage in the final weeks of the presidential race was the word reportedly put out by some circles close to the Reagan administration that Washington viewed Ojeda as potentially too much a "leftist." The concern apparently derived from Ojeda's service in the cabinet of former President Luis Echeverría, whose populist style earned him that reputation in the U.S.

Those circulating this line certainly were forgetting what Ojeda *did* as Attorney General under Echeverría: carry out the world's most successful drug eradication program to date, in close coordination with U.S. narcotics enforcement officials. Some observers here suggest that the "leftist" label was sent Washington's way deliberately by Mexican influentials involved in the drug-tourism-casino nexus, in order to damage the chances of their old nemesis.

The coverage of Ojeda's appointment in the handbook of left-Jesuit journalism, the daily *Uno Mas Uno*, should remove any remaining doubts on this score. *Uno Mas Uno*, committed to making Mexico ungovernable in a "pluralist" era, heaped contempt upon Ojeda as "a man of the system."

Under Ojeda in the PRI presidency, three close De la Madrid collaborators were moved in to complete the PRI shakeup. The man to watch here: Manuel Bartlett, the PRI's new secretary-general. As I mentioned last week, Bartlett's political past, unlike Ojeda's, places him in Malthusian currents of the party just as growth and population issues move to the fore again.