

Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

De la Madrid's advisers

The cards are on the table regarding who's pushing a suicidal "go slow" course to avoid a "doomsday scenario."

New York's *Journal of Commerce*, a long-time opponent of Mexican industrial growth, has done everyone a service by laying out publicly, for the first time, a strategy to take over the De la Madrid presidential campaign and use it as a club against President López Portillo's growth commitments.

The problem, says columnist Gordon Mott writing in the Nov. 23 edition of the *Journal*, is that López Portillo remains wedded to the "full-steam-ahead philosophy" which has brought Mexico record growth rates for the past four years.

This conflicts with what "financial experts and foreign economists" have decreed for Mexico: speeded up devaluation of the peso, cutbacks in federal spending, decline in overall growth to half the current 8 percent; and "tight controls" on the money supply.

That is to say; collapse the economy.

De la Madrid can be brought into line, asserts the *Journal*: "his economic policies are believed to favor a moderate growth pattern." But unfortunately, "there is no indication Mr. López Portillo will permit the candidate to have any say in the economic planning over the next 14 months."

How to break López Portillo? The *Journal* threatens that "reduced confidence by foreign bankers . . . might spur devaluation fears . . . creating a situation of capital flight."

If López Portillo hangs on, he will only be handing his successor "a recession worse than the one in 1976," and "the economy would essentially have to be brought to a grinding halt." However, concludes the article, "If Mr. López Portillo agrees to start the economic slowdown now by writing a conservative budget for 1983, the doomsday scenario might never be realized." The 1983 budget debate, the *Journal* coyly adds, "is due for release next month."

What makes the *Journal* scenario anything more than wishful thinking is the unfortunate fact that there is a group of close De la Madrid advisers who are saying the same thing.

I'm talking especially about Carlos Salinas de Gortari, the 33-year old Harvard-trained "whiz kid" whom De la Madrid named to head the PRI party think tank, IEPES, for the current campaign.

At every opportunity Salinas has been stressing the need to "consolidate" Mexican growth, and to "invert" the current model. Instead of "quantitative" measures of growth, the country must look more to enhance its "quality of life." Among the IEPES director's favorite methods to do this is slashing Mexico's population growth.

Joining with him in a top IEPES position is Enrique González Pedrero, current head of the Free Textbook Program for the Education Ministry and one of Mexico's most rabid Malthusians and environ-

mentalists. He is a close associate of Mario Moya Palencia, the former Interior Minister who launched a national publicity crusade around the slogan, "Let's make ourselves less." González Pedrero's most recent book is a polemic against industrial advance entitled, "The Wealth of Poverty."

This kind of imported Club of Rome ideology naturally is not going over particularly well in substantial sectors of the country. The group around PRI president Ojeda Paullada is reportedly working on more growth-oriented programmatic proposals.

And far from weakening on this front, López Portillo is showing signs of toughening up measures to deal with the economic warfare promised by the *Journal of Commerce*.

The Mexican Foreign Investment Commission ruled the second week in November that for the first time foreign real-estate offerings in the country must clear all transactions with the Commission, "with the object of avoiding a flight of capital by that route."

The question is: how much do Salinas de Gortari and Co. speak for De la Madrid? The candidate's own speeches have recently given a nod toward the "slow-growth" crowd, and De la Madrid has not been reining in Salinas's antics. Ironically, this has played to rave reviews in the left press here—another example of how "left" and "right" is not the issue on development questions. But no one should forget the lessons of 1976, when the "go slow" forces similarly thought they had López Portillo "under control"—only to be assailing the same López Portillo today as a growth fanatic.