

Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

The 'greening' of the PRI

Environmentalism has made inroads into the camp of the presidential successor, Miguel de la Madrid.

Last week I reported on the impetus that nuclear-energy development received in Mexico with the Feb. 15 announcement that a nuclear test center will be built in the state of Sonora. Governor Ocaña and Nuclear Institute head Dalmau Acosta made the good news public, and promised continuity of the nation's overall nuclear project (an ambitious 20 gigawatts by the year 2000) into the 1982-88 administration of Miguel de la Madrid.

But is continuity assured?

The pro-nuclear crowd is not invulnerable inside the ruling PRI party, nor in the powerful inner circle of advisers around De la Madrid. In fact, on Feb. 13, just two days before the Sonora announcement, the PRI think tank IEPES held a major national campaign meeting with candidate De la Madrid in the oil-producing state of Campeche, whose theme was the defense of the ecology from the "assaults" of modern industry.

If Ralph Nader had been master of ceremonies he couldn't have created a "greener" political environment.

The organizer of the event was Carlos Salinas de Gortari, a kind of Mexican Ralph Nader—with the difference that Salinas wields the great power of being one of candidate De la Madrid's most trusted advisers, and the head of the IEPES think tank.

The 33-year-old Harvard-trained Salinas set the tone of the

gathering from the outset. "What good is it for a mother to have a job, if her son is nursed with DDT-contaminated milk? Or what good is it for a worker to have a permanent job, if the water he drinks when he goes home contains lead and mercury, that cause irreversible mental damage?"

Picking up the battle cry of Mexico's anti-progress left, Salinas blamed Pemex for exploiting the environment by developing Mexico's oil too rapidly. "Perhaps we should cut a few points off the growth rates of certain sectors, such as petroleum, whose disorderly growth causes damage to the ecology and to the quality of life."

Salinas closed by calling on the PRI to take up the banner of environmentalism, and to make it for the first time in the party's history a central plank in its electoral platform. He was seconded by the entire high command of Mexico's environmentalist movement, who had been invited to the gathering to voice their views.

Fernando Césarman, one of the founders of the Mexican ecology movement and the man who coined the phrase "ecocide," gave his blessing. Arturo Gómez Pompa proposed that specific legislation be adopted to defend the environment. And Manuel López Portillo, the President's cousin who is the Subsecretary for Environmental Improvement in the Health Ministry, also spoke. He is known in Mexico

as one of the strongest proponents of population reduction, and for endorsing and distributing the Carter administration's genocidal *Global 2000 Report*.

Candidate De la Madrid replied by opening the door wide to the environmentalist cause. "We cannot accept the responsibility of bequeathing our children a garbage heap for a country," the candidate declared. "We Mexicans are gradually poisoning ourselves."

One journalist subsequently reported that De la Madrid had actually been moved by Salinas's grandstand hysteria: "I was frightened by the fact that even mother's milk is contaminated by insecticides," the PRI candidate is reported to have said.

Whether or not De la Madrid actually uttered these words, the fact of the matter is that the entire Mexican ecology movement received a bright green light from the IEPES gathering, and has stepped up its organizing since then.

As the leftist columnist Granados Chapa put it: "Yesterday the PRI took its first formal step to convert itself into a Green Party."

Mexico's "greenies" were further encouraged by remarks made four days later by De la Madrid at another IEPES symposium, in which he repeated his earlier statements in favor of reducing Mexico's rate of population growth.

"Demographic policy is now an accepted national demand, and it is indispensable that Mexican society, through the state, establish criteria for modulating population growth." De la Madrid went so far as to call for "popular consultation" on the possibility of legalizing abortions in Mexico.