

Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

Ferment in the trade unions

A 100,000 person support rally for dissident teachers is part of a major test of the union leadership.

Every observer in this capital agrees that the labor situation is becoming increasingly unstable, and that in the short term we will see some major conflicts on the union front.

This is not only because the so-called left and other political groups are becoming very active, but because within the Mexican political elite there is an ongoing battle to decide if the trade unions will be sacrificed as a political force in the current economic crisis being imposed on Mexico by the international banks.

There is no doubt that many bankers are disappointed by the recent wage-increase declared by the federal government, which goes as high as 30 percent for those earning the minimum salary.

Government circles are seeing this wage increase as vital to "buy stability" during the current electoral period, which ends in presidential elections July 4. The parties competing with the government's PRI party from both left and right are saying openly in every corner of the country that the economic crisis is the best ally they have at this moment. They are counting on the dissatisfaction of the electorate with economic conditions as the key factor weakening the PRI in the elections.

There is another factor working against the stability of the labor unions.

In the middle of March, for ex-

ample, Mexico City was the scene of one of the biggest demonstrations of recent years. More than 100,000 people from a potpourri of left groups demonstrated in front of the Interior Ministry against the current leadership of the national teachers' union the SNTE. The SNTE, which is not affiliated with the official PRI trade-union confederation, the CTM, but is closely allied to the government on its own, is the largest individual trade union in Latin America.

Starting three years ago, a left-wing coalition including pro-terrorist guru Juan Ortega Arenas, a variety of Jesuit-led groups, several Trotskyite sects, and the Mexican Communist Party (now PSUM), banded together to try to overthrow Carlos Jonguitud Barrios, governor of the state of San Luis Potosí, whose faction has been in power in the union for the past seven years.

The left-wing forces are only the front-end elements of a more powerful coalition of *right-wing* forces, headed by former teacher Carlos Hank González (now mayor of Mexico City); former governor of Hidalgo Manuel Sánchez Vite (who controlled the union before the Jonguitud Barrios era), and Enrique Olivares Santana, current Interior Minister and, like Hank, formerly a teacher himself. The group, known as *los profesores*, is the "money factor" behind the left-wing mobilization.

Two weeks after the demonstration, the Interior Ministry agreed to an opposition demand for new elections for leadership in some SNTE locals, a victory for the left. Nobody doubts that Jonguitud's forces are the majority of the union, but through pressures, demonstrations, occupations of SNTE offices, and support within the government, the left dissidents are increasing their capabilities.

At the same time another important trade union, the telephone workers, has come close to being taken over by the same combined "left" and "right" operations. Sources tell me that the board of directors of Telefonos de Mexico is following a policy of promoting left-wing radical upsurges within the union as a method of destroying it.

The company, nominally owned half and half by private businessmen and the government, is in reality run by ITT, the Troyet family, and the Vallina interests. All of them are represented by the head of the company, Emilio Carrillo Gamboa, son of one of Mexico's filthiest zero-growth ideologues, Antonio Carillo Flores, who was Mexico's Foreign Minister at one time, and today is chief Mexican representative of the funder of the American environmentalist movement, the Aspen Institute.

The company, I am told, supported the seizure of the national offices of the trade union by left radicals last month and later tried to legitimize them as the new leadership of the union. But longtime CTM leader Fidel Velásquez smelled that this was threat to his control of the CTM as a whole, and stepped in to keep the current leadership in power.