

Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

The PAN's inroads in Chihuahua

Once again an American consul is caught conspiring with the PAN in the party's separatist thrust in the North of the country.

The National Action Party (PAN) won its largest victory ever in local elections in the northern states of Chihuahua and Durango July 3. The PAN got the mayoralties of nine cities in Chihuahua including the capital, Chihuahua city, and Ciudad Juárez on the U.S. border, as well as 9 of the 21 seats in the state assembly. It also won Durango city, capital of the same state.

Political circles here have reacted in shock. The elections are a major strategic victory for the PAN's long-cherished plan to overthrow the one-party "Mexican System" of government which stems from the 1910 Revolution and has guided this country's political stability and economic development for 60 years. More immediately, the elections are a dangerous gain for the PAN's separatist campaign for the northern states of Baja California Norte, Sonora, Chihuahua, and Nuevo Leon.

As in Sonora earlier this year, a U.S. consul was caught *in flagrante delicto* aiding the PAN's separatist ambitions. According to *Excelsior* columnist Manuel Buendia July 1, the U.S. consul in Ciudad Juárez, William Tinsley, aided the PAN's mayoral candidate, Javier Barrios Terrazas, with financial resources, and various American-style electoral paraphernalia never seen before in Mexican elections.

According to PRI spokesmen, a combination of local Catholic Church representatives—loyal to the Inquisitorial tendency of the Church which

plagued this country in past centuries—PAN leaders, the U.S. consulate, and oligarchical groups passing as "businessmen," were the main force behind the PAN victory in Chihuahua.

This grouping of forces closely follows the "Sonora model." As the reader may remember, there was a widely reported meeting of U.S. consular and embassy officials in Hermosillo, Sonora with PAN and Church leaders in late April.

Tinsley and Barrios Terrazas have managed to gain similar notoriety. During an interview July 7 with the daily *El Nacional*, Barrios Terrazas had a nervous collapse. The Panista was then reportedly rushed for medical treatment to the American side of the border by none other than Tinsley. The consul subsequently became the only source of information on the state of the candidate's health and whereabouts.

PRI senator for Chihuahua José Refugio Mar denounced Tinsley, Ciudad Juárez Bishop Manuel Talamas, and Chihuahua Archbishop Adalberto Almeida July 8 for their "blatant intervention" in the elections. The Mexican constitution of 1917 firmly prohibits involvement of the Church in political affairs.

A most prominent feature of this campaign which has the national press puzzled is the enormous amounts of money spent by the PAN. When the PRI-controlled union of water distributors went on strike in Ciudad Juárez, the PAN managed to contract private

tank-cars to distribute water in poor sectors lacking a water system. The PAN candidate in the city of Chihuahua, Luis Alvarez, bid for the vote of women enraged over price-hikes by campaigning in open-air markets and offering to pay for their purchases. The National Civic Women's Association, a PAN "pots and pans" front, played a key role here.

In the wake of the Chihuahua political shockwave, a growing number in the PRI are rethinking even the short-term viability of the International Monetary Fund economic program which is devastating the country. As the PRI candidate for mayor of Ciudad Juárez put it, "the economic situation defeated us."

This recognition has already unleashed a debate in the PRI with the press rumoring that some heads may soon roll. Labor boss Fidel Velázquez, the key anti-IMF figure in the PRI, told the press July 12 that what the party needs is more a change of policy orientation than a change of men—a clear hint at the need for mobilizing the PRI in an anti-IMF campaign.

Although the PRI candidate in Ciudad Juárez has not conceded defeat yet, PAN candidate Barrios Terrazas has already announced that one of his first government actions will be to bring in retired military to run a revamped local security apparatus. His statement has raised the highly-charged issue of potential PAN collusion in efforts to bring a Pinochetista element of the military to power.

Meanwhile, the U.S. publicity company which ran the Chihuahua campaign for the PAN has already moved to Baja California Norte, where, according to PAN president, Abel Vicencio Tovar, the PAN has a good chance of winning its first governorship in September elections.