

## Dateline Mexico by Héctor Apolinar

### IMF agent handed humiliating rout

*The Oil Workers Union has not been intimidated by the propaganda campaign against it.*

**T**he commemoration of the 48th anniversary of the Oil Expropriation on March 18, was the scene of a political confrontation with great repercussions between the leaders of the Oil Workers Union of the Mexican Republic (STPRM), and the political group around Mario Ramón Beteta, director of the national oil company Pemex. Beteta, who has designs on the Mexican presidency, if he succeeds in gaining a cabinet post as Secretary of Semi-State Energy, Mines, and Industry, is one of Mexico's top agents for the International Monetary Fund policy of gutting industry to keep up debt payments.

The backdrop for the March 18 incident goes back to January, when the head of the oil workers union, José Sosa, gave a tough speech in front of President Miguel de la Madrid. Sosa then accused the Pemex management of spending more on paper-shuffling than on capital investment, which policy has caused serious deterioration in the Pemex industrial plant. The speech ended with the now-famous phrase: "If Pemex sinks, you will sink, Mexico will sink, and we will all sink."

After this speech, the "President's friends," headed by Planning and Budget Secretary Carlos Salinas de Gortari, orchestrated a campaign of denigrating the union. The rumor was spread through political circles that President de la Madrid had taken speaking rights away from the union leaders. It was said that they got the cold shoulder from the President,

leaving them with no political backup.

During the anniversary ceremony, the union was expected to adopt a docile attitude in the face of this propaganda assault. Exactly the opposite occurred. In an auditorium filled with thousands of oil workers and before the President, the cabinet, and Mexican Workers Confederation chief Fidel Velázquez, José Sosa accused the Pemex administration of having tried to "break us up, to take over for themselves the legal and economic structure not only of the company, but of the nation's key industry."

The arrow was targeted against Jesús Reyes Heróles (who died exactly one year ago), who as director of Pemex and later as education secretary, tried to break the union. Sosa also called on Mario Ramón Beteta to abandon his overbearing "I am in charge here" attitude, and to back a harmonious working relationship with the oil workers.

The Pemex director could not hide his displeasure over the speech. The thousands of oil workers present applauded and cheered their leaders Sosa, Joaquín Hernández Galicia, and Salvador Barragan Camacho, dozens of times, but Beteta only got applause at four points in his hour-long speech. And when he said that Pemex's falling revenues due to the drop in oil prices, would necessitate "reducing our current spending and taking painful measures of adjustment," the workers booed. The significance of the workers' attitude toward the Pemex head,

can be inferred from the fact that Mario Ramón Beteta is considered one of the mentors of the administrative (as opposed to political) career of President de la Madrid.

Beteta's clout lies not in his apparent friendship with the President, but in his relation to a Ramón Beteta who was treasury secretary under the organized crime-linked late President of Mexico, Miguel Alemán Valdez.

According to U.S. military and naval intelligence documents from Mexico, dated 1941, the elder Ramón Beteta was a Nazi agent in Mexico. He was put on the famous "Black List" of enemies of the United States. Today, the Beteta clan is backed by a powerful business and political group headed by Antonio Ortiz Mena, director of the Inter-American Development Bank, and Carlos Hank González, a big investor in industry with business ties to Pemex, and chief of an important political-economic group inside the ruling PRI party.

The oil workers' actions were labeled "overbearing display of . . . power" in the editorial of the pro-communist paper *Unomasuno*, which added: "Embodying doubtless one of the most backward forces of our system, yesterday's performance by these leaders as well as the certainty that neither their base nor any other power can actually unseat them, is not very inspiring."

But this "overbearing display" may be one of the few protections for Mexican sovereignty left. Beteta's great-uncle violently opposed the 1938 Expropriation carried out by President Cárdenas. But at the commemoration ceremonies, Beteta said, "No one should ever forget that, starting from Lázaro Cárdenas, oil is, forever, Mexico's and no one else's." Even from him, it was a clear denial of rumors that Mexico will pay its debt by giving up sovereignty over its oil.