

Dateline Mexico by Hugo López Ochoa

A Pyrrhic victory?

No one in Mexico is willing to bet a dime on how long the "unity" of the PRI around Salinas de Gortari will last.

Many analysts are asking themselves how long President Miguel de la Madrid and his protégé, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, are going to be able to keep up the current economic policies of austerity and submission to the dictates of the International Monetary Fund, in light of the splintering of the much-touted unity of the ruling PRI party following the nomination of Salinas as presidential candidate for the 1988 elections.

The opposition to his candidacy surfaced the same day, Oct. 4, that the PRI announced the nomination. Fidel Velázquez, the veteran national leader of the Mexican Workers Confederation (CTM), which constitutes the principal base of support for the PRI, abandoned the platform where the candidate held court to receive the well-wishes of various party sectors, while thousands of PRI members, traditionally so disciplined in these matters, also walked out.

Another powerful labor leader, Joaquín Hernández Galicia, political chief of the powerful petroleum workers union, announced that he would withhold his position on the next President of Mexico, until meeting with him. Bitter confrontation between the oil workers and Salinas de Gortari has been a constant for the past five years.

President de la Madrid was able to impose his decision in Salinas's favor, thanks to an alliance with the political machine identified with former President Luis Echeverría, whose base of support is among the peasantry who

make up the National Peasant Confederation (CNC). It was with the support of these same peasant bases that Echeverría was able to deal a severe blow to the drug trafficking interests through "Operation Condor" in the mid-1970s. Now, that muscle is being leveraged elsewhere.

For the Echeverrista machine, the primary danger lay in the possibility that current Interior Minister Manuel Bartlett, who represents those very interests expropriated under Echeverría, would impose himself as the candidate, arriving at the presidency in the midst of PRI division and chaos. Given the prevailing political conditions, President de la Madrid succeeded in forcing the grumbling labor leaders to accept Salinas's candidacy at the last minute.

However, now Salinas de Gortari finds himself in the ironic position of having to preside over the long-awaited "economic recovery" promised by de la Madrid. At least, this is what the President announced Sept. 1, when he gave his second-to-the-last state of the union address. De la Madrid announced an era of sustained, but "moderate development," based on a strategy in which the crucial factor will be the \$15 billion in reserves that Mexico scraped together by exporting everything, including the kitchen sink.

The "economic recovery" and "democracy," are the two cards that Salinas is playing, in his desperate bid for PRI unity around his candidacy. It could be that he is only thinking of

Hong Kong-style assembly lines for exporting cheap manufactures, or selling more bankrupt companies to the creditors, or slave-labor jobs in the countryside. But the fact is that these are not what the peasant and labor leaders, without whom he would not have won the nomination, are proposing.

In a meeting with CTM leaders Oct. 7, Fidel Velázquez demanded "freedom" for the labor movement, and approval for a new federal labor law whose basic content was expressed Oct. 13 by CTM Congressman Alfonso Reyes Medrano: "It is necessary to formulate a new development plan, and restate the alliance between the state and the workers." This was necessary, he said, "to prevent foreign monopoly capital and national oligarchical groups from derailing the process of our social revolution, which has cost so many lives."

More importantly, in an Oct. 8 meeting with the peasantry's CNC, one of the agrarian leaders most identified with Luis Echeverría, Augusto Gómez Villanueva, told Salinas de Gortari, "It is urgent to capitalize the countryside . . . [by] incorporating new technologies to increase its productivity." Another agrarian leader said, "Interest rates are the primary obstacle facing agriculture." He also said, "We should take advantage of the irrigation systems and water basins with which the nation is endowed."

As of this writing, the Mexican stock market has suffered a collapse in volume of 15% in only nine days, after a brief Oct. 5 intervention by the government to halt a dangerous speculative rise following the news of Salinas's candidacy. The controllers of the stock market announced Oct. 6 that they would no longer permit the slightest intervention from the government in the speculative "free market."