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## Mexico

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# Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas: Can he fulfill his father's legacy?

by Hugo López Ochoa

More than 100,000 Mexican farmers gathered between Feb. 11 and 14 in the northern state of Coahuila, to demonstrate in support of dissident presidential candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas Solórzano. He is the son of Mexico's nationalist President, Gen. Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40), who established the foundations of modern Mexico. The candidacy of his son is backed by a coalition of political parties organized in the National Democratic Front (FDN).

It is the first time in this entire electoral period that a candidate of the opposition has succeeded in gathering more supporters at a campaign event than were drawn, in the same region and during the same week, by the official candidate of the ruling PRI party, Carlos Salinas de Gortari. It is not really all that surprising. The region in question is known as La Comarca Lagunera, which until a few years ago was one of the most productive agricultural areas in the country, but is now in ruin.

Coahuila is already being referred to by Cárdenas's supporters in the Mexican press as the "Waterloo" of the PRI party, which has ruled Mexico since 1929. This doesn't necessarily mean that Cuauhtémoc, who walked out of the the PRI in September 1987 as part of a group known as the Democratic Current, will win the presidential elections come July. But his candidacy is serving as a magnet for a growing number of PRI dissidents, primarily within farming layers, who oppose the government's policy of submission to international usury. There are also important labor union locals, which have stated that their rank-and-file will vote for Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, in the aftermath of the decision by leaders of the Labor Congress (which represents the principal unions affiliated with the PRI) to abandon the fight for economic justice and suspend a general strike planned for last Dec. 15.

### The fruits of treason

The general strike had been announced with great fanfare in order to pressure President Miguel de la Madrid into im-

posing total exchange controls, suspending the monetary measures decreed Nov. 18—principally the 50% devaluation of the Mexican peso—and allocating only 10% of oil export income to payment of the foreign debt.

But President de la Madrid decided instead to continue to capitulate to the international bankers. He imposed a shock program euphemistically called the Economic Solidarity Pact (see *EIR*, Jan. 22, 1988), which thrust the economy into a hyperinflationary spiral and is driving the population toward a level of generalized starvation not seen since the era of the continuous civil wars that plagued the nation from 1910 to 1930.

If any part of the nation reflects the ruin to which Mexico has been reduced under the dictates of the International Monetary Fund, it is La Comarca Lagunera. This region had become the dairy center of the nation, as well as an important producer of fodder, grains, and cotton. Today, it is in urgent need of major hydraulic projects to compensate for the exhaustion and salinization of ground water. But the De la Madrid administration condemned that region to disappear as a modern agricultural center under the "adjustment" requirements of servicing the foreign debt.

This has left local producers facing the burden of a nearly 200% increase in electricity costs, as well as rising prices for medicines, imported fodder, and other vital inputs, while fixing "guaranteed prices" to the farmer at below the cost of production. In 1987 alone, 250,000 dairy cows were slaughtered by farmers to get liquidity to maintain the remaining 80,000—all that was left of the dairy herds.

The president of the Cattleman's Union of La Laguna told *EIR* recently, "It appears that efficiency is prohibited and effort penalized." The majority of the farmers, under the best of conditions, work only half the year. Unemployment is horrifying, and family life in the area is disintegrating under the combined impact of drug addiction and religious cults.

But it is not simple discontent which has brought the farmers of La Laguna to rally around Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas.

## Who is Cuauhtémoc?

The 54-year-old Cárdenas was PRI governor of the state of Michoacán from 1980 to 1986, and before that held various posts within Mexican officialdom. In 1986, Cuauhtémoc and several PRI political figures—headed by former party president and ex-ambassador to the United Nations Porfirio Muñoz Ledo—formed a group within the PRI to publicly oppose deals with the IMF. The Cárdenas-Muñoz Ledo group dubbed itself the Democratic Current.

Among other things, the Democratic Current came out publicly in favor of adopting the economic strategy of Peruvian President Alan García—limiting debt service payments to 10% of export earnings. This catalyzed tremendous political ferment within PRI ranks. Following the choice of former Budget Minister Carlos Salinas de Gortari as the official party presidential candidate in September 1987—an unmistakable signal that the same disastrous economic strategy would be followed for another six years—Cuauhtémoc, Muñoz Ledo, and the rest of the dissident faction abandoned the PRI.

Cárdenas's presidential candidacy is supported by a coalition of parties which, at the end of 1987, founded the National Democratic Front (FDN). The FDN is made up of three registered opposition parties: the Authentic Party of the Mexican Revolution (PARM), the Popular Socialist Party (PPS), and the National Cardenist Party (PNC). But the potential of the political movement that has coalesced around Cárdenas does not stem from the parties, each of which is relatively insignificant in forces. The strength of the FDN comes from the enormous popularity of the Cárdenas family among Mexico's farmers and workers. Cuauhtémoc's father, Gen. Lázaro Cárdenas, is to Mexican 20th-century history what Jawaharlal Nehru is to India, or Juan Domingo Perón to Argentina.

General Cárdenas's 1934-40 administration established the basis for the social stability and economic development of Mexico. Without receiving a penny from the international banks—and also without handing over a peso of debt service, because “first comes the development of the nation”—Cárdenas succeeded in achieving economic growth rates of 8% a year, through dirigist control of internal credit. By means of extensive agrarian reform, he freed Mexican agricultural production from the historical problem of the *latifundio*.

It was precisely in La Comarca Lagunera that Cárdenas carried out one of the most spectacular experiments of his agrarian reform. Before decreeing land expropriations, Cárdenas armed the peasantry and formed “peasant militias” to defend themselves from the armed thugs in the pay of the latifundists. Once the land distribution was completed, a great ceremony was held at which the peasants “exchanged their rifles for tractors,” to begin the task of producing wealth for the nation.

Those 100,000 farmers of La Comarca Lagunera, many of whom personally knew the elder Cárdenas, clearly see in Cuauhtémoc a hope for restoring the policies of the general.

Or, as one journalist put it, “Lázaro Cárdenas to vote against the PRI.”

Lázaro Cárdenas also nationalized the Mexican oil industry in 1938, which became the backbone of the industrialization process in Mexico as well as the nation's principal source of export revenues. Oil workers and the technicians who handle Mexico's oil technology are, in the majority, dyed-in-the-wool *cardenistas*. Not accidentally, it has been the oil union which has consistently presented the most open opposition to the IMF policies of the present administration, and various of its locals have already publicly announced their intention to vote for Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas.

Cuauhtémoc has also received impressive support from professional associations linked to the National Polytechnic Institute (IPN), the great center of scientific and technological training founded by Lázaro Cárdenas. The IPN was founded not only to enable Mexico to achieve technological independence for its oil industry, but also to serve as the seedbed for scientific cadre for such high-technology industries as Mexico's embryonic nuclear industry. In fact, 40% of the technicians and operators of Mexico's first commercial nuclear plant at Laguna Verde, Veracruz come from IPN.

For the first time since he began campaigning, his mother Doña Amalia Solórzano joined the Coahuila leg of Cuauhtémoc's tour. In the town of San Francisco de Arriba, Doña Amalia and more than 20,000 farmers welcomed the candidate. Said the widow of General Cárdenas, “They invited me to La Laguna to appear at this event. It is not the first time I have come; I accompany you every year, so that this is nothing new. Now my son has come here, and I am with him 100%!”

Doña Amalia is known throughout the region from the decade of the thirties, when her husband organized the peasants in the region and equipped them with land, machinery, and the necessary credit to become modern-day farmers.

## Like father, like son?

Will Cuauhtémoc be able to fill the shoes of his father? This remains to be seen. His links to the environmentalists, who have violently opposed the Laguna Verde nuclear complex, raise serious doubts about whether he truly understands the legacy of his father. As governor of Michoacán, Cuauhtémoc opposed the installation of an experimental nuclear plant in that state.

Undoubtedly, the FDN could garner sufficient votes to put quite a scare into the PRI. But its challenge is far greater. Unlike the separatist National Action Party (PAN) financed by bankers and drug traffickers, or the Mexican Socialist Party (PMS) and Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT) controlled by Moscow, the Cardenista FDN has the potential not only to capture the dissident PRI vote but also to programmatically influence the PRI into changing government economic policy, toward one of growth and continental integration.