

Dateline Mexico by Héctor Apolinar

U.S. loan kills democracy in Tabasco

The state election exposes a dictatorial regime, which holds power in Mexico through fraud and thuggery.

The U.S. government gave a \$3.5 billion emergency loan ostensibly to assure a "peaceful" transition from one Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) administration to the next. The money, however, was used to assassinate Mexican democracy and the majority will of the citizenry.

We are not exaggerating, nor do we want to cause pangs of conscience among the U.S. taxpayers who are footing the bill for the bailout of Mexico; the facts speak for themselves, in dry and sometimes violent language.

The assassination of democracy took place in the state of Tabasco, Nov. 9, during the elections there for all state and city offices. Two political organizations fought it out in the elections: the incumbent PRI and the National Democratic Front (FDN). The PRI had everything going against it, as was widely known. Opposition FDN gubernatorial candidate López Obrador is extremely popular. He won the admiration of many members of the PRI party while its state chief until 1984. When he left the PRI for the FDN, López Obrador stressed that during the Miguel de la Madrid administration, the PRI had betrayed its former patriotic principles favoring Mexico's economic and social development and had handed the country over its foreign creditors.

A few weeks later, López Obrador's example was followed by Darvin Ballina, the state chief of the National Peasant Confederation, to which most of the state's farmers, the majority of the voters, belong. From that time on, it was clear the PRI would lose the elections.

Furthermore, the PRI's candidate, Salvador Neme, had been nominated despite huge opposition inside the PRI itself. Neme represents a group of businessmen associated with ex-governor Leandro Rovirosa Wade, who have gotten rich thanks to millions of dollars worth of contracts with Pemex, the state oil company, which has some of its richest oilfields in Tabasco. Everyone in politics knew Neme had been foisted through wheeling and dealing by Miguel de la Madrid and the nest of Pemex contractors who did not want to lose their juicy prebends.

PRI members were ordered to vote for Neme. The government was willing to pay whatever was necessary to guarantee that he at least had the appearance of winning. It also sent Carlos Rojas Gutiérrez, the brother of Pemex director Francisco Rojas, as the PRI's secret agent in the state. He went with Pemex money to buy consciences and votes at any price. Alleged PRI President-elect Carlos Salinas also dispatched his friend Roberto Madrazo, known to be Neme's top enemy, as the PRI's official representative in the state.

On Nov. 9, tension in the state reached the boiling point. The PRI deployed squads of goons to various parts of the state. Army troops from three neighboring states provided an intimidating display of force in the streets of Tabasco's towns. The PRI ran a libel campaign in the press, accusing the FDN of trying to provoke violence during the elections. Many voters stayed home.

That night, the PRI proclaimed itself the victory in every contest. It

claimed to have won 81% of the vote, while saying López Obrador's FDN got only 18%. All the media painted the vote as "the FDN's debacle." It tried to give that impression not only in Tabasco, but all over the country. The highest level of the government had ordered the FDN, which had possibly defeated Salinas in the July 6 presidential elections, to be "smashed" in Tabasco.

The Goebbels-style trick, however, backfired when the PRI was forced to admit that the 81% of the vote it was claiming was based on the count of only 378 out of 1,062 polling places. The PRI proclamation is ridiculous. It wanted to make a propaganda "coup," to give the impression of a PRI victory. The next day it came out that only 38% of the 680,000 registered voters voted. Thus, even if the PRI candidate had won fairly, he would have only had a minority mandate.

The vote fraud was worthy of a dictatorship. Only 8,000 of the 17,300 FDN poll watchers were given credentials. The government violated election laws by refusing credentials to anyone who had not lived two years in the precinct. And the 8,000 were issued in the state capital the night before the election, too late to get them to the rural areas.

On election day, the PRI sent brigades of voters to vote at one poll after another. Where it knew the FDN would win, it refused to allow thousands of voters to cast their ballots or stole the ballot boxes, etc. The next day, the Pentacostal minister who leads the oil workers' union in the state was shot to death; the authorities have not lifted a finger to find the murderers. Insiders speculate it was retaliation for the union not having tried to stop its members from voting FDN.

The U.S. loan financed these atrocities.