

Dateline Mexico by Carlos Valdez

Tourism and casinos to pay the debt

The Salinas "recovery" plan is to convert Mexico's economy to tourism and casinos to create jobs and pay the debt.

There is no longer any doubt that the Salinas government's "master plan" for creating 1 million new jobs as pledged is a dangerous fraud. Under the farce of "modernizing" the country through "structural change" and "competitiveness," Mexico's President intends to replace the existing industrial base with tourism and casinos, the kind of "pollution-free industry" that should warm the hearts of the fake environmentalists everywhere.

On June 12, an article on "The Recovery of the Mexican Economy" appeared in the Spanish magazine *Política Exterior*, under the byline of Carlos Salinas de Gortari. The Mexican President argued in the article that society is witnessing "the end worldwide to a development style that made the state the sole motor of economic systems." Salinas warned that, as a result, "the state is obliged to revise structures, redefine means of economic action, and clarify the direction it will follow." The problem of a country's growth, concluded Salinas, is not the burden of the foreign debt but rather resolving "our structural problems."

The structural changes he has in mind were first made explicit at the end of 1988, when Tourism Secretary Carlos Hank González confided to representatives on the Commission of Tourism that his "cherished dream" was to pay the foreign debt with the profits of the tourist industry. His dream did not stop there. As Tourism Secretary, Hank has now announced that Mexico must create 1 million new jobs through tourism, which "generates more employment per peso than

any other investment."

In his closing address to more than 1,000 travel agents from all over the world attending the 14th Annual Tourist Fair "Acapulco '89," Hank said "without a doubt, the most serious problem in the country is the need to generate jobs—1 million positions a year. If we have so many human motors, so many creators of wealth, the important thing is to make them produce." Hank never explains what kind of wealth such jobs are intended to produce, leaving it to the imagination of an audience accustomed to supplying "services" to jaded tourists.

Hank continued: "But creating these jobs requires money, capital which is insufficient in the country. And since there are also insufficient credits, one must invite foreign investors to bring in their money." Joking that there is no danger of reviving colonialism with such an open-door policy, Hank added, "The dollars they bring will remain in the country, because it is impossible to carry off hotels, much less the land they are built on."

President Salinas elaborated on the "structural changes" he intends to carry out, to make Hank's dream a reality. In his inaugural address to the Tourist Fair, Salinas announced that he would give "an unprecedented push to this sector." Red tape would be cut through, he promised, and priority would be given to direct foreign investment in the sector. He promised to engender a new attitude toward tourism which would make Mexico the best host in the world.

He also said that in Mexico's new era of modernization and change, he

was resolved to create the infrastructure that will make of tourism "a priority activity for change." He stressed the important contribution of tourism to economic development, to employment, to the stimulus of other industries and services, and to the generation of foreign exchange.

As an example of what could be achieved in this last area, Hank announced that the preliminary results of the Tourist Fair were that \$800 million worth of anticipated sales had been negotiated in only four days. Hank's "master plan" is to bring 10 million tourists to Mexico in the course of Salinas's six-year term, which would generate an estimated \$5 billion of foreign exchange each year. He also announced that "the federal government will invest \$3 billion for the construction of 50,000 new hotels rooms across the country."

Although Hank added that there were no plans "in the near future" to open casinos—which, in any case, is strictly prohibited by the Mexican Constitution—it is widely known that he is in fact the chief lobbyist for bringing casinos into the country. Hank's links to the casino project were detailed in a June 11 column in the daily *El Universal*, written by journalist Juan Bustillos. According to Bustillos, Hank "dared to take the decisive step" by attending a March 2 meeting where former Tourism Secretary Guillermo Rossel, also the former governor of Hidalgo state, presented Hank with a 120-page tourism plan for the six-year Salinas term "which considers the installation of casinos on the coasts and borders."

Bustillos notes that one of the "stellar" moments of the meeting was when "Tourism Secretary Carlos Hank González spoke of the need to find a legal means for both satisfying the need for casinos and not violating the Constitution."