

Dateline Mexico by Carlos Valdez

Cananea dispute splits government

The closing and denationalization of the big copper pit is creating havoc inside the regime.

President Carlos Salinas de Gortari's Aug. 20 order to close down Mexico's biggest copper mine has sped up the political crisis he began Jan. 10 by jailing Joaquín Hernández Galicia, the nationalist leader of the oil workers union. The Cananea open pit is the source of 3% of the world's copper. But, for Mexicans, it is the birthplace of their labor movement in a 1906 strike, repressed with the help of police brought in from Arizona, 25 miles to the north. That strike movement inspired worker participation in the 1910 Mexican Revolution, which overthrew the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz.

Salinas's impudent deployment of army troops to intimidate the Cananea miners and his plans to sell off ownership of the mine to foreign mineral speculators aroused historical memories here. Mexicans are inevitably brought to sense a parallelism between the "Porfiriato" and the Salinas regime.

Thus, the mobilization of miners and nationalist leaders to save the mine is provoking fissures inside the hitherto disciplined Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). The weekly *7 Cambio*, which reflects the thinking of government circles, concluded in its Aug. 28 editorial, "The closing of Cananea could become the detonator not only of a social revolution like the one at the turn of the century, but the first split inside Salinas's cabinet."

Why did Salinas go into a flight forward for something which quite predictably polarized the Mexican polity against him? On Aug. 31, the Cananea miners' union local president

charged, "the bankruptcy [of the Cananea Mining Company] is part of the commitments made by the federal government to the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to reprivatize some public enterprises and to offer our labor force to foreign capital. In our case, its intent is to destroy our labor contract and our union, in order to sell the company to Mexican or foreign private capital."

Cuahtémoc Cárdenas, the man who really won the 1988 presidential elections but was defrauded, went to Cananea Aug. 26. There he called for a "Front for the Defense of Sovereignty" to defend national interests "which have been damaged by the Cananea conflict." Amid cheers from the miners, Cárdenas stressed that "only two Presidents of the republic have dared to send the army to Cananea: Porfirio Díaz in 1906 and Carlos Salinas de Gortari in 1989." He added: "Porfirio Díaz was at the service of foreigners, just like the current government, which has improperly used the armed forces in frank and open violation of Article 129 of the Constitution."

Cárdenas said the Front for the Defense of Sovereignty would be formalized Sept. 4 to "reverse the regime's mistaken economic measures." He judged that the government's declaring the mining company bankrupt "unmasks its basic plan to give away the country's material goods, strategic resources, and its politics to foreigners, with the use of force and the most brazen disregard for the rights of workers and citizens. A dependent totalitarianism is closing in

on the country."

The new nationalist movement is expected to split off chunks of the ruling PRI party. PRI president Luis Donaldo Colosio was sent by Salinas to Cananea to try to cool out the political crisis. Using a chartered jet, he beat Cárdenas there. He promised the miners they would get their severance pay if they would only accept the bankruptcy and denationalization of the mine. The miners hooted at him and almost kidnaped him, until he promised to end army occupation of the mine.

President Salinas dropped his mask and baldly told the Confederation of Workers of Mexico annual conference Aug. 25 that the Cananea closing was part of the "agreement in principle" his regime signed with its creditor banks. He insisted "there would be no reversal" of the denationalization program. He warned, "We know the value of what we have done and we will not allow what we have achieved with the renegotiation of the debt to disappear."

Salinas showed who his prime constituency is by contracting the Fleishman-Hillard investment consultants to coordinate events around his Oct. 5-6 visit to New York, including a special session of the Council of the Americas, chaired by David Rockefeller.

The daily *El Dia*, run by a PRI senator, warned that "the social tension is reaching limits which, for the health of the republic, should not be crossed." The Cananea miners threw into the trash can the photo of the President of the Republic which traditionally adorns the offices of official unions. And 6,000 workers at the steel complex named for President Lázaro Cárdenas—who nationalized Rockefeller's oil companies in 1938—went on a short but total strike against the denationalization of the Cananea mine.