

Dateline Mexico by Héctor Apolinar

Violence against Cárdenas's PRD

The ruling PRI is employing dirty tricks—including murder—to stop the opposition from replacing it in power.

On Jan. 29, a group of congressmen from Mexico's leading opposition party, the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), presented the Carlos Salinas de Gortari government with a list of 56 party members who were assassinated during 1989, the majority of which cases have yet to be solved by government authorities. Last December alone, 21 PRD members in the states of Michoacán and Guerrero were murdered by the thugs of political grouplets associated with the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI).

The wave of assassinations followed state elections in Guerrero and Michoacán held in early December, in which the PRD won by a landslide. However, state authorities, in coordination with the Salinas government, refused to recognize the PRD's electoral victory in a desperate attempt to keep the PRD from taking over the governorships of those states. In Michoacán, the PRD managed to force the government to recognize its election victories in more than 50 cities, including the state capital, through a series of mobilizations of thousands of its followers. During the protest rallies and marches, however, violent and sometimes armed confrontations occurred which left several dead. Despite this, PRD followers were not intimidated and the mobilizations escalated.

PRD leader Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, whose presidential victory in 1988 was stolen, was barely able to restrain his followers from resorting to violence themselves. Although the

state government is now acknowledging many of the PRD's local victories, it is still holding on to the state government. Current PRI Gov. Genovevo Figueroa was not even chosen by vote, but was appointed to replace his predecessor, who had resigned the post.

Groups linked to the PRI in Michoacán have used a leftist group of shock troops known as Antorcha Campesina (Peasant Torch) against PRD sympathizers. Antorcha surfaced in Mexico's political life among the poorest layers of the Mexican peasantry, organized by such radical leftist groups as the National Federation of Bolshevik Organizations, which went down in history for their armed actions toward the end of the 1970s. The ideologues of Antorcha Campesina were educated at the University of Chapingo, which is controlled by the Rockefeller Foundation.

In Guerrero, the situation is also highly tense. In last December's election, the PRD won overwhelmingly, but state Gov. Francisco Ruiz Massieu only recognized the PRD's victories in nine cities, which triggered explosions of violence and protest demonstrations throughout the state. Ruiz Massieu asserted that he would not recognize an election victory under pressure, but his advisers have privately commented that "We didn't win a thing."

To accept the PRD's triumph in Guerrero would be a major blow to Ruiz Massieu's political career. In view of his personal association with President Salinas de Gortari—he is

the President's brother-in-law—Ruiz Massieu is considered a possible presidential contender in the future.

At the same time, Ruiz is hoping to use the conflict as justification for militarizing the state and for generalized repression against the PRD's state and national leaders—including Cárdenas—as the first step in preventing the PRD from any chance at a future presidential bid.

On Feb. 9, the national Army patrolled the state's most important cities, while 20 armored cars plus 50 anti-riot vehicles of the military police stationed themselves alongside the government building where Ruiz gave his "state of the state" report. Political circles in Mexico City were heard to comment that the Army, in fact, wanted nothing to do with the state's internal political situation, out of fear of triggering a guerrilla outbreak in the state. During the 1960s and 1970s, Guerrero was the center of the most famous guerrilla movement in the country.

PRD policy is explicitly opposed to the guerrilla "option" to which the party is being pushed. During a tour of Colombia, Cárdenas declared Feb. 8 that "Neither I nor the PRD are going to become guerrillas." His statement was in response to a question as to whether his movement would go underground if the government continues to deny its electoral victories.

Cárdenas declared that the PRD is in "frontal opposition to the government" due to its "economic policy of neo-liberal and monetarist recipes." We oppose, he said, "the hegemonic pretensions of conditioning our sovereignty."

During Cárdenas's lightning visit to Bogotá, he met with Colombian President Virgilio Barco and the presidential candidates of that country, including Liberal Party front-runner César Gaviria Trujillo.