

Dateline Mexico by Carlos Cota Meza

Mexican people hostile to Bush's war

Without being "experts" in international affairs, citizens have reacted strongly against the Persian Gulf war.

The demonstrations of university students, housewives, children, teachers, and others in Mexico City that have occurred at the U.S. embassy, as well as the meetings which were held in front of the district government offices in the city, have called for peace in the Middle East, but they have gone beyond such generalities to exhibit a strong and explicit repudiation of the actions of the U.S. government.

In various cities, there have been marches and meetings with citizens and their children dressed in white, "against the U.S. war." In Guadalajara and Monterrey, the two largest cities after Mexico City, there have been giant ecumenical demonstrations headed by Catholic, Jewish, and Muslim religious leaders. Together, they have prayed for peace.

By Feb. 21, impromptu media polls picked up a strong current of sympathy for Iraq, with a generalized belief that the war could have been avoided and that negotiations could have achieved an Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait, but that the United States forced war upon the world.

There is no doubt among most people that the war is over petroleum, and that Mexico is immersed in this strategic conflict. A doubt, and a fear, is in the air, as to what could happen to "our oil," since no one believes that the government of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari will defend Mexican sovereignty in the face of the manifest U.S. appetite. Most of the print media editorials have attacked the

Mexican government's mistaken foreign policy. In its Feb. 5 editorial, *El Sol de México* ridiculed U.N. Secretary General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, who shamelessly stated that he was keeping his "fingers crossed." *El Sol* stated that "from the outset of the conflict, he has done nothing but keep his fingers and even his arms crossed, and the results are evident."

On Feb. 6, *Unomasuno* editorialized that "by indiscriminately bombing civilian targets in Iraq's cities, causing the deaths of women and children, the multinational forces led by the United States are committing the *crime of the century*."

On the same day, *El Universal* noted that the exposure by Radio Baghdad and U.S. military sources that 35 Iraqi cities had been bombed "again put on the table for discussion the question of whether the multinational forces led by the United States, by taking military action which appears designed to wipe out the Iraqi population, have complied with the U.N. Security Council's mandate or whether they have violated it."

In its Feb. 9 editorial, "King Hussein: Friend of the Truth," the daily *Excelsior* reported that foreign correspondents "have testified to the terrifying magnitude of the damage suffered by Iraq's civilian population as a result of the bombings."

"After having denounced the cruel and unbridled air campaign against Iraq, Jordan's King Hussein, a long-time ally of the United States, is more a friend of the truth than the White

House. . . . To the voice of the Jordanian monarch is added that of Pope John Paul II who has expressed his anxiety over the conflict's dramatic evolution."

The influential magazine *Siempre* analyzed the Free Trade Agreement which Mexico will sign with the U.S. and Canada in the context of the war and U.S. foreign policy. "It's no secret that the United States hopes to guarantee its energy supply through its victory in the Persian Gulf war," *Siempre* says. "The coercion exercised by the United States to obtain more oil has brought Mexico to a delicate crossroads."

"The moment will arrive in which [Mexico] will have to make a decision," the editorial warns. "Mexico runs the risk of being devoured by the U.S. energy drama—scarcity of reserves and high demand—if it fails to learn the lesson now unfolding in Saudi Arabia, a country which handed over exploitation of its reserves to the world's most powerful oil companies, the very same ones that are spilling blood on Arab soil."

And how is the Salinas government responding to these concerns? Reportedly, the Executive called a private meeting with media owners and directors, at which the President personally requested "discretion in handling information" and "moderation" in opinions so as not to damage "the climate of good relations" with the U.S. government. More than a suggestion, this was a threat, and to prove it, Salinas unceremoniously fired Energy Undersecretary Alberto Escofet Artigas, the only high-level official who has dared to denounce the existence of "pressures from foreign companies to participate in national oil production." Escofet's firing has been called the first "war casualty," as this oil conflict gets closer every day to Mexican territory.