

Dateline Mexico by Carlos Cota Meza

The case of the Negroporte cable

A confidential memo from the U.S. ambassador has been made public, which points to Washington's true plans for NAFTA.

On May 13, the Mexican weekly *Proceso* created an uproar here when it published a confidential memorandum by U.S. Ambassador to Mexico John Negroporte, which was sent to his immediate superior at the State Department, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Bernard Aronson.

In the memorandum, Negroporte discusses the significance of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the orientation of the Salinas de Gortari government, and the future of Mexico's future.

In point number four of the document, the U.S. ambassador asserts that "Mexico is in the process of dramatically changing both the substance and image of its foreign policy. It has gone from a nationalist and protectionist ideological viewpoint, to a more pragmatic, competitive, and outward view of world problems."

Point number six says, that "From a foreign policy standpoint, the Free Trade Agreement would institutionalize acceptance of a North American orientation in Mexican foreign relations."

And in point number seven, Negroporte asserts that the U.S.'s intention is to consolidate the economic model of the Salinas government. "On the economic front, a Free Trade Agreement could be viewed as an instrument for promoting, consolidating, and guaranteeing the continuity of Mexico's economic reform policies, beyond the Salinas administration. I think it is reasonable to assume that the FTA negotiations will be a

useful lever, in continuing to pressure for a still greater opening of the Mexican economy."

The memorandum gives added weight to the arguments of Mexico's many critics of the trade agreement, since Negroporte in fact admits precisely what these opponents have been charging, that the Salinas government has capitulated to the pressures, insinuations, and "friendly proposals" of the Bush government.

Despite the fact that the memorandum was written with a certain *objective* tone, Foreign Affairs Secretary Fernando Solana called the U.S. ambassador to his office on May 13, to request an explanation of the *Proceso* exposé. The diplomat's response was apparently less than satisfactory, with the result that Secretary Solana's office issued a communiqué on May 14, stating that the confidential memorandum "has not been denied," and would require clarifications.

The communiqué added: "The Mexican government considers absurd any presumption that the possible negotiation of a free trade treaty with the United States could alter the orientation and fundamental goals of this policy. . . . Under no circumstances will Mexico allow its foreign policy to be negotiated."

While all this is going on in the upper layers of the government, neither the Mexican Senate nor House has taken up the issue. Neither has the ruling PRI party, nor its affiliated unions and other organizations. Equally oblivious was Trade Secre-

tary Jaime Serra Puche, who on May 14 indulged in a drunken binge in Washington, to celebrate the approval of "fast track authorization" of the NAFTA negotiations by several congressional committees. The "fast track" vote was scheduled to go to the full floor of the U.S. Congress during the week of May 20.

Notwithstanding this weak-kneed self-censorship, many Mexicans are asking questions. Chief among them is, who leaked the memorandum to *Proceso*? There are some who insist that Negroporte never imagined his confidential memo would be released to the Mexican public. Others suggest, however, that Negroporte—hardly an *ingénu* in these matters—was well aware that the embassy's fax line could be monitored from points *inside Mexico*, apart from the U.S. State Department. This latter hypothesis continues that it was therefore Negroporte himself who wanted his memorandum leaked. Why?

In point number 13 of his memorandum, the U.S. ambassador mentions what Salinas de Gortari has repeatedly stated before foreign audiences, although always in private. "Salinas made clear his view that a negative vote [on NAFTA] would play into the hands of the left and of critics of U.S.-Mexican relations. And that this, perhaps more than anything—said Salinas—would represent a lost opportunity that might not present itself again for a while. Similarly, Mexicans would be offended if the votes on the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) Uruguay Round and on Mexico were separated. This would be like 'spitting' on Mexico, said Salinas."

The U.S. Embassy, it would appear, has thus deftly put in the mouth of the Mexican President its own arguments for the urgency of passing the fast track authorization for NAFTA.