

# Bankers make Pronasol international model

by Cynthia R. Rush

Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari launched the National Solidarity Program (Pronasol) early in his administration, to ensure, through social control mechanisms, that a population subjected to years of International Monetary Fund austerity would not explode in rage against his government. Now, the World Bank, the IMF, and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) are escalating their campaign to extend Pronasol-style "anti-poverty" programs to all of Ibero-America, and beyond.

It's not that bankers have suddenly become concerned with the plight of the poor. Rather, they realize that the austerity policies they are committed to will lead to unmanageable political explosions, unless accompanied by social control operations such as Pronasol. If they don't at least give the illusion of addressing the continent's social problems, they could find themselves confronting massive popular upheaval which would put an end to their phony IMF-enforced "democracy."

Pronasol and similar programs are aimed at convincing people that they can "participate" in economic development, through cheap labor and local control "self-help" programs, while governments implement the austerity that the foreign creditors demand.

## Selling fascism

Salinas's Jan. 22 announcement that the World Bank, the United Nations, and the World Conservation Union will host the First International Conference on Social Development and Combatting Poverty, to be held in Oaxaca next September, to promote Pronasol internationally, reflects the bankers' policy.

The plethora of recent regional conferences on how to "alleviate extreme poverty," sponsored by the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) and the UNDP, is part of a public relations campaign to sell these programs to governments whose implementation of IMF austerity has increased their poverty, and thus political instability.

Argentine President Carlos Menem has already put into place his Federal Solidarity Program modeled on Pronasol, and on Feb. 9, Brazilian President Itamar Franco announced that he would also adopt a Pronasol-style program to provide cheap food and housing for his country's poorest sectors. Governors of seven Brazilian states who traveled to Mexico to study Pronasol returned with high praises for it, and em-

phasized that the government could count on financial assistance from the World Bank and IADB for this venture. In an interview with Brazil's O Globo-TV, Salinas de Gortari extolled the benefits of the program, but then underscored the main point: "Economic reform *without* social welfare [i.e., social control—ed.] cannot be successful."

## Pay the debt, and like it

Multilateral lending agencies and Anglo-American think tanks want to see Pronasol imposed continent-wide, as quickly as possible. On Feb. 10-13, the IADB and the UNDP sponsored a conference in Washington on "Social Reform and Poverty," which brought Ibero-American proponents of this approach together with their counterparts internationally.

Pronasol, whose Mexican director, Carlos Rojas, was one of the speakers, was a focus of attention at the two-day gathering. In his speech, Unicef director James Grant emphasized that "one of the keys to the success of social initiatives is the mobilization of civil society, such as has occurred in Mexico with Pronasol." With programs such as these, Grant said, both Ibero-America and the Caribbean have the opportunity to "assume leadership in the international fight against poverty."

On Feb. 6-7, the same two agencies hosted a private conference for congressmen, businessmen, and politicians in Lima, Peru, entitled "Monetary and Fiscal Legislation Policies and Alleviating Extreme Poverty."

In both cases, the message was the same: Ibero-American countries must pay their foreign debt and maintain policies of economic liberalization. If they do, the World Bank and IADB will help them set up a network of "intermediate" community-based and volunteer agencies to provide services in health, sanitation, and education. Non-governmental organizations, which are intended to replace the traditional institutions of the nation-state in the context of ever more limited national sovereignty, are to play a major role in these schemes.

Luminaries such as World Bank President Lewis Preston and IMF Managing Director Michel Camdessus also demanded that budgets for Ibero-America's armed forces be drastically cut, supposedly to allow for increases in "social expenditures." In reality, the Anglo-American establishment demands the dismantling of the armed forces as an institution which has historically defended economic and territorial sovereignty.

As for the real nature of these anti-poverty programs, Preston said it all during his speech at the Feb. 10 conference in Washington. No one should get any ideas about major investments in infrastructure or health and education services, he warned. After all, "fiscal objectives" cannot be undermined. The emphasis must be entirely on "basic" needs; that is, the minimal investment possible to make people think someone is helping them, while making it impossible for them to ever leave their poverty behind.