Dateline Mexico by Carlos Cota Meza

Salinas crawls for NAFTA

The free trade agreement has undergone many incarnations, but with or without it, Salinas's "miracle" is finished.

The policy content of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari's administration first came together in a clear way in February 1990, when superminister Joseph Marie Córdova Montoya travelled together with Trade Secretary Jaime Serra Puche to Washington to conduct secret talks with the Bush administration, and thus launched what later became the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

In his second State of the Union address on Nov. 1, 1990, Salinas said he had decided to proceed with the negotiations because the revolutions in eastern Europe which overthrew communism suggested a return to market economies which threatened to draw foreign investment into that part of the world.

By his third annual address in 1991, the treaty had already become a trilateral one, with Canada's inclusion. It was then said that the incorporation of a third country would forge "the largest free-trade zone in the world," based in North America.

By Salinas's fourth address, NAFTA was the bellwether for Mexico's supposed growth into the First World. He reported at the time that he had already concluded the "vast and complex" negotiations leading to "a good treaty for Mexico" which would increase exports to Canada and the United States.

On Nov. 4, 1992, George Bush was defeated in his reelection bid by Democrat Bill Clinton, who had expressed a lack of enthusiasm for the trade accord. But even so, in the days immediately following his defeat, Bush and his Mexican and Canadian counterparts signed the accord.

Bush's defeat led to the physical, emotional, and political defeat of Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, who was obliged to relinquish his post as leader of the Canadian Progressive Conservative Party to Kim Campbell, who went on to lead her party to its worst electoral defeat ever.

And now, in his fifth State of the Union address on Nov. 1, 1993, Salinas has declared that "the treaty is not the solution to all of our problems," and that "its benefits will not be short term, nor will it yield spectacular results." From being top priority for the very security of the Mexican state over several preceding years, NAFTA ended up occupying the least space possible in the latest address.

But at five minutes to midnight, President Clinton has launched an all-out offensive for NAFTA's approval by the U.S. Congress, and the agreement is now the highest priority for U.S. national security. The CIA, Pentagon, White House National Security Council, and various U.S. legislators are now pressuring to get it approved on Nov. 17. If not, they argue, the worst is confronting Mexico.

Clinton is apparently willing to offer anything, up to and including national sovereignty itself—Mexican sovereignty, of course, but also the sovereignty of the United States, as *EIR* has shown. Clinton privately claims to have the Mexican government's promise that *after* NAFTA's approval, new negotiations will be held on those issues which remain "unresolved," "confusing," and "ambiguous," although this is systematically denied on the Mexican side. The issue which comes under these three categories, of course, is—oil! Clinton has publicly asserted that he will not hesitate to apply Section 301 of the U.S. trade law (which gives the Executive the right to impose unilateral trade sanctions on other countries, for various reasons) "if Mexico's policies or actions deny its workers internationally recognized rights or restrict U.S. trade."

These are not offers, but unambiguous pressures and threats. The Mexican government, in its desperation, has already agreed to implement NAFTA even before its enactment. For example, it was just announced that Mexico has agreed not to export sugar to the United States (the term "exportable surplus" was redefined); regarding citrus and vegetables, Mexico agreed to accept mechanisms whereby U.S. producers could present "proof of damage" in case of an increase in Mexican exports, or a change in their price, through which the United States could then re-impose tariffs that had existed before NAFTA. In the case of plate glass, wines, and electronic products, Mexico has agreed that on the first day NAFTA goes into effect, the reduction of customs tariffs on these sectors would be accelerated in favor of U.S. industry. Needless to say, Mexican industry is stunned, and has managed only to say, "We don't know what is going on."

What is in fact going on, is that while approval of NAFTA is as unsure as ever, the countdown will not stop on Nov. 17, with the U.S. congressional vote. To the surprise of the Mexican government, the NAFTA enforcement bill which Clinton has presented to Congress includes the "right" of the United States government to reopen negotiations on NAFTA. A never-ending story.