

Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menendez

Who told the President to stay home?

López Portillo didn't listen, but some political heavyweights advised him not to make his state visit to India.

On the eve of President José López Portillo's departure to attend India's Independence Day celebrations as the guest of honor, the Mexican newsweekly *Siempre* acrimoniously criticized the president's trip.

"We find in the trip no clear objective which makes it indispensable or even useful. We do not see its usefulness, much less its necessity."

Mexican government officials consulted by *EIR* were surprised and disturbed by the influential magazine's attack, because López Portillo has never been criticized for a foreign mission since he became president in late 1976. It is a tradition here that all sectors of the nation unite to give the president added force in his foreign relations initiatives.

Siempre's attack served to break the ice, opening the door to a series of media blasts which ranged all the way up to charges of presidential "megalomaniacal pretensions."

Political observers attribute *Siempre's* surprising turn primarily to the presidential succession race, now in full swing. Our opinion is that Mexico City Mayor Carlos Hank González was one of the main movers behind the criticism of the president. *Siempre* editor-in-chief José Pages Llergo is known to belong to the mayor's inner circle of intimates, and *Siempre* has for years been tied to the Christian Democratic "opposition" to the

federal government, an opposition with which Hank is closely coordinating political initiatives.

Hank's opposition to the India diplomacy was seconded by the foreign minister, Jorge Castañeda, who reportedly asked the president not to go on the grounds that he should concentrate on Central American problems. Castañeda is known to support the guerrillas in El Salvador, and his preference for the confrontationist policies of the International Social Democracy are also widely recognized.

One top government official explained to us that Castañeda's opposition to the trip was due to his fears that López Portillo's talks with Indira Gandhi could change the tone and content of the upcoming North-South summit slated to take place in Cancún, Mexico in June.

For the better part of 1980, Castañeda worked with his friend Willy Brandt to shape the summit in such a way that it would be dominated by the proposals of the Brandt Commission. But Castañeda—and his "Hankista" allies—got very nervous when López Portillo and Ronald Reagan reached an informal understanding at their historic Ciudad Juárez meeting in early January.

According to reliable sources, the two heads of state reached an understanding that Mexico—buttressed by Third World allies like India and Iraq—would contain the

confrontationist faction in the developing sector most associated with Fidel Castro's leadership of the Non-Aligned Movement, and that Reagan would in turn agree to participate in the June North-South summit in Mexico and try to get substantive economic discussions underway.

This, of course, threatened to overturn the Castañeda-Brandt apocryphal. Hence the hostility to the Mexican summitry with the Indian prime minister.

Even before he left for India, López Portillo's government was shaken by a series of incidents that security-linked officials are viewing with the greatest suspicion.

One example is the recent "peasant" blockage of the Cactus Pemex petrochemical complex in Chiapas. Others include various land seizures in the north of Mexico, and strikes and threatened strikes among left-led trade union layers.

But probably most shocking was the news late in the week, *after* López Portillo had departed for India, that "someone" had distributed to the media a press release allegedly signed and sealed by the Mexican Foreign Ministry, announcing that Mexico was breaking diplomatic relations with El Salvador! The authenticity of the document was promptly denied by the ministry, but no one has yet been able to explain this outrageous incident.

Well-placed sources told me that when López Portillo was informed in India about the phony press release, he became "infuriated."

When the president returns to Mexico next week, we were told, "heads will roll" for what has gone on in his absence.