

Dateline Mexico by Carlos Valdez

PRI, government splitting apart

One defection after another, from prominent individuals to mass organizations, is bleeding the ruling party.

The political crisis wracking Mexico, the result of President Miguel de la Madrid's stubborn insistence on imposing former Budget and Planning Secretary Carlos Salinas de Gortari as his successor, despite Salinas's defeat in the July 6 elections by National Democratic Front (FDN) candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, is turning into genuine tragedy for the ruling PRI party.

In a desperate effort to avoid the virtual crumbling of the 50-year-old government party, Manuel Camacho Solís—one of the leading ideologues behind PRI presidential candidate Salinas—was named as PRI secretary general, to try to smash the spreading dissidence in the ranks. Camacho, a technocrat like Salinas, has no links either to the party constituencies or to the old-line revolutionary tradition, and is thus considered ideal for the job.

His debut was nonetheless a disaster. His first action as secretary general was to respond to two major PRI defections to the FDN in the state of Tabasco: the first, of former PRI state president Andrés Manuel Obrador López, who is currently running as FDN gubernatorial candidate in Tabasco; the second, that of the state leader of the National Peasant Confederation (CNC), Darwin González Ballina, who was elected federal deputy for the PRI July 6, and then announced his resignation from the ruling party to join the Cardenista front.

Camacho's "fire-fighting" trip to Tabasco had the effect of throwing more fuel on the fire. Instead of trying

to woo back the defectors, he proceeded to provoke a confrontation with the PRI's own disaffected labor federation in the state, run by oil workers' leader Raúl Charles Trevino. Camacho encouraged the creation of an "independent" labor movement, as a rival to Trevino's CTM.

This demonstration of the PRI's new "modernization" techniques did not go unanswered. On Aug. 26 and 27, the powerful national oil workers' union, the SRTPRM, published a full-page statement in the national press, expressing their outrage with the PRI national leadership. "We have nothing against the PRI. . . . We oil workers love our PRI T-shirts, but not those who have failed the PRI. . . . We love the party of the Mexican Revolution. And if we have differences at times, it is with men, not with the party. Actions are decided by men—not institutions—sometimes for the good and sometimes for the bad."

And in a final severe critique of the government's economic policy, the SRTPRM warns that "the best policy is to give the people cheap food, create jobs, and effectively help the farmers on their collective plots. No country can have complete sovereignty if it allows its trade, its capital, its production, its land, to be appropriated or exploited by other countries."

PRI problems are not limited to Tabasco, by any means. On Aug. 29, the organizational secretary of the PRI executive in the state of Veracruz, 25-year party veteran Edmundo Butrón Peralta, resigned from the PRI and announced his membership in the FDN.

"I refuse to be a co-participant in electoral fraud," he said, adding that he was "a witness in the presidential campaign . . . to the people's rejection of official candidate Carlos Salinas de Gortari." Butrón Peralta appealed to Salinas "not to take one more step along the road that will lead him unflinchingly through the back door of history, where [Mexican traitors] Miramón and Huerta await you with open arms."

One day later, in Monterrey, Nuevo León, Lucas de la Garza, the former secretary of Nuevo León Gov. Jorge Trevino Martínez and a son of former Nuevo León Gov. Arturo de la Garza, announced his resignation from the PRI and joining of the FDN "in search of a more promising democratic option."

To these personal decisions can be added those of entire contingents, such as the 3,000 PRI members who make up a Tlaxcala political organization. Similarly, in Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz, a prominent former PRI women's leader, Isabel Cantillo de Herrera, joined the FDN, along with the leader of 4,000 landowners from the region, Rubén Cabrera Pérez.

Also on Aug. 30, a group of 23 "long-standing" PRI members headed by former Sen. Norberto Mora Planarte, issued a strong public attack on the "modernists" in the PRI, and criticized the current economic policy, warning, "We are not among those who urge patience and gradualism in the face of the poverty of the masses."

Journalist Ernesto Julio Teissier summed up in the daily *Ovaciones* of Aug. 31, "It is known . . . that there are mass defections in La Laguna, in Michoacán, in Guerrero, and in other states. The ruling party is bleeding, sometimes in drops and other times in gobs, but constantly, something which is not being publicly recognized."