

Dateline Mexico by Carlos Cota Meza

Mexico, the 'perfect dictatorship'

Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa accidentally told the truth about Mexico, much to the embarrassment of his hosts.

President Carlos Salinas de Gortari is suffering one propaganda failure after another. Since his regime's very existence is based on propaganda, the failures could end up in a deafening crash.

Vuelta magazine, published by existentialist poet Octavio Paz, organized a seminar entitled "Twentieth Century: experience of freedom." A select group of "intellectuals," mostly Eastern European dissidents from socialism now reborn as economic liberals, attended along with a grab-bag of Western Europeans. Vargas Llosa, a rabid exponent of President Bush's free market cult, got top billing.

Televisa TV took care of the commercial promotion for the conference, but some noticed the generous hand of the Economic Culture Fund, the state publishing house given ex-President Miguel de la Madrid by his successor, Salinas.

It is not necessary to go into the thinking of these luminaries, since as Vargas Llosa's abortive race for the Peruvian presidency shows, most of their political predictions have turned out to be ridiculous fiascos. At the conference they were trying to exalt their ineptitude, wrapping themselves in the ample cloak of "if the Berlin Wall fell, therefore, liberalism has triumphed."

The main goal of this event, clandestinely financed by the government, was to contradict what Pope John Paul II told businessmen in Durango during his May visit. The Pope said the revolutions in Eastern Europe "have been at times superficially interpreted as the

victory or defeat of one system over another—as the definitive triumph of liberal capitalism." He denounced "certain interests" for doing that to avoid the necessary critical view of the effects liberalism has had in the Third World countries.

The *Vuelta* seminar was a conclave of the Knights Templar of liberalism, from which they would sally forth against the Pope who dared to perturb consciences. Octavio Paz and Televisa were also aiming to provide the new Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) with the "intellectual cover" Salinas requires to make it seem that someone in Mexico actually supports his neo-liberal economic policy.

The timing was no accident. The *Vuelta* seminar ended Sept. 1, the day when the PRI's 14th National Assembly began. Paz's get-together with his friends was the backdrop for the PRI assembly which was going "in search of democracy."

But the roof fell in on them. On July 30, Mario Vargas Llosa dropped a stink bomb among the high priests of liberalism: "Mexico is the perfect dictatorship. The perfect dictatorship is not communism; it is not the Soviet Union; it is not Fidel Castro; it is Mexico. Because it is a dictatorship camouflaged so as not to seem to be a dictatorship. . . . It also has created a leftist rhetoric . . . very efficiently recruited the intellectuals, the intelligentsia . . . bribing them in a very subtle way, through contracts, through nominations, through government jobs."

The reaction was immediate. Oc-

tavio Paz, the "bribed intellectual" *par excellence*, felt compelled to reply. Vargas Llosa was also attacked by the attorney general, by the vice president of Televisa and presidential ambassador for special affairs, Miguel Alemán Velasco, by five governors, by two national leaders of the PRI, and, of course, by Miguel de la Madrid. Vargas Llosa abruptly and prematurely left the country the day after he spoke; and it is still not known whether he was threatened with Article 33 of the Constitution, which mandates the expulsion of foreigners who meddle in internal political questions.

Why did the Mexican political class react so violently against someone who recently had been so sharply politically discredited in his own country?

Since the Eastern European events, the current Mexican government has been struggling to avoid the comparison with the overthrown regimes. Salinas has insisted Mexico already had its revolution and that he will not tolerate any "mechanistic" comparisons or extrapolations.

What is going on in Mexico is neither comparisons nor extrapolations. The current government is suicidally stuck to its neo-liberal economic program and trying to impose dictatorially its irrational dogma on all of society. The Salinas government is one of those "certain interests" the Pope spoke of which flee criticism of the social effects of their economic policies.

This neo-liberal dictatorship is what is crumbling. The Salinas regime has no support.

We do not want to credit Mario Vargas Llosa with being judicious, but, if we analyze the acts of the current Mexican administration, we could only conclude that, with his polemical declaration, the novelist hit the nail on the head, despite himself.