

## Dateline Mexico by Carlos Méndez

### PRD opens 'another Chiapas' in Tabasco

*Oil, terrorism, separatism, and drugs: The same old lethal brew is being stirred up in the state of Tabasco.*

On Jan. 29, shocktroops of the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) occupied more than 60 oil wells in the southern state of Tabasco, which borders Chiapas, and which, like Chiapas, is one of Mexico's principal oil production areas. The pretext for the operation is the charge that the State oil company, Pemex, does not share oil revenues with the Indian communities, and has not taken sufficient measures to protect the environment in Tabasco. These charges are viewed by Mexican national circles as a farcical cover for building a second separatist movement against the nation.

The PRD offensive occurred precisely as British interests launched a campaign to gain control of Pemex, in the wake of the government's first moves toward its privatization. President Ernesto Zedillo used his January trip to London, to announce that the government will move full-steam ahead to privatize Pemex's "secondary" petrochemical operations.

The British were the owners of the leading oil companies which operated in Mexico, before the oil industry was nationalized in 1938. Mexicans have not forgotten that the British have had a project for over 100 years, to seize control of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, the southern border of which is formed by Tabasco and Chiapas.

The British press, and its hangers-on, labeled the Tabasco oil occupations a "Chiapas-style" crisis, with reference to the Zapatista separatist insurgency. They painted the PRD action as a spontaneous "indigenous"

mobilization. London's *Financial Times* wrote on Feb. 13 that "thousands of Mayan peasant Indians" were involved in the occupation. Cable News Network screeched that the Mexican Army was "repressing the Indians," while journalist Carlos Ramírez proclaimed in the Mexican daily *El Financiero*, that the head of the invasions, Andrés López Obrador, "could become the leader of an important indigenist movement in Tabasco, as 'Marcos' is for the Indians of Chiapas."

The Mexican Army has evicted the protesters several times. López Obrador told the Mexican press on Feb. 13, however, that the PRD will continue its blockade of Pemex installations in Tabasco, adding that if an "accident" occurred, it would be an act of "self-sabotage by Pemex."

While the so-called "moderate" wing of the PRD is now said to have reached an agreement with the Interior Ministry, the Tabasco action signals that a new phase of irregular warfare has been launched, which, like the Zapatista operation in Chiapas, cannot be ended by dialogue, but only by the firm enforcement of laws, and a clear identification of who is deploying this new assault.

López Obrador heads the PRD in Tabasco, and is from the most radical wing of his party, aligned with party chief Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, a leader of the Cuban-led narco-terrorist São Paulo Forum, and an ally of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN). López Obrador was the PRD's candidate for governor of Tabasco in 1995. The current PRD oper-

ation has a collateral objective: to bring down the governor of Tabasco, Roberto Madrazo, from the ruling PRI party, and install in his place the PRD candidate whom voters had rejected at the polls.

Nor can the drug trade be left out of any evaluation of this new front of irregular warfare. In January, the PRD-EZLN complex stepped up its defense of the drug trade:

- On Jan. 16, the parliamentary caucus of the PRD protested the government's expulsion of captured Gulf cartel drug lord, Juan García Abrego, on Jan. 15, calling it illegal, despite the trafficker's claim to be a U.S. citizen, and therefore legally subject to expulsion.

- Mexican Army raids in January against drug-trafficker airstrips and bases in Chiapas provoked outraged protests from the Zapatistas. Gen. Mario Renan Castillo, head of the Seventh Military Zone (in Chiapas), explained that the anti-drug campaign was necessary, because Chiapas has long functioned as a central transshipment base for the traffickers; but on Feb. 5, Zapatista spokesman Commander Tacho threatened that the EZLN would pull out of peace talks with the government, if the military continued its anti-drug operation.

- The EZLN-allied national debtors' movement, "El Barzón," led by Maximiano Barbosa and Juan José Quirinos, announced that they have scheduled protests for March, to demand rapid implementation of one of the clauses of the North American Free Trade Agreement. The clause governs unregulated cross-border trucking, which law enforcement authorities on both sides of the border have identified as one of the drug cartel's primary interests at this time, to facilitate an increase in cocaine and heroin shipments into the United States.