

Cabinet shakeup in Mexico

New ministers expected to strengthen government's domestic and foreign policy

In a sudden move May 17, Mexican President Jose Lopez Portillo requested the resignations of his Interior Minister, Jesus Reyes Heróles, his Foreign Minister, Santiago Roel, and his Planning Minister, Ricardo Garcia Sainz.

The replacements in the posts indicate that the dramatic shakeup, just short of the mid-point in Lopez Portillo's six-year term, will consolidate government action and enable more effective implementation of Mexico's progressive domestic and foreign policy.

The events of the first weeks since the change fully confirm this view. The new Foreign Minister, Jorge Castaneda, has stepped in aggressively to direct twin diplomatic offensives, one on world energy supplies and one designed to isolate the barbaric regime of Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua.

Simultaneously, the president of the ruling Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), Gustavo Carvajal, called upon all political parties in the country now participating in a program of political reform to unite in defense of the nation's sovereignty, its oil resources, and its foreign policy. He was speaking May 26 to a giant outdoor rally of the PRI called to back up Lopez Portillo's decision the week before to break diplomatic relations with Nicaragua.

Roel's presidential ambitions

Less reliable British press sources, such as the *New York Times's* stringer in Mexico, Alan Riding, have stated that the primary motive for the shakeup was disagreements over how to handle the May 17-18 state visit of Fidel Castro to Mexico.

The real factors had nothing to do with that highly successful summit.

The problem of Santiago Roel in the Foreign Ministry was clearly the most pressing of the issues Lopez Portillo solved with the cabinet shakeup. Roel's presidential ambitions to succeed Lopez Portillo in 1982 were notorious. Intent on building up his own political machine rather than carrying out Lopez Portillo's directives, Roel was the divisive beachhead in the present cabinet for all those who wished to start an early and damaging scramble for the succession. He was further neglecting administration of the Foreign

Ministry, the pride of Mexico's civil service, according to Mexican sources.

Since at least January, Roel was more or less openly building his own following. He turned special attention on U.S. Mexican-American groups, many of whom began to complain that they were being cut off from access to Mexican official circles unless they "played ball" with Roel.

The situation came to a head when Roel unilaterally extended a border inspection tour in early May into a two-week political junket, and then committed an unpardonable sin in the Mexican political lexicon: on his own initiative, he made a personal appearance with President Carter during a Carter campaign swing in southern California.

For nationalist Mexico this is taboo. Within two days of his return to Mexico City, Roel was out.

His replacement, Jorge Castaneda, is a respected career diplomat who most recently headed Mexico's delegation at the Law of the Sea negotiations.

The exit of Planning Minister Ricardo Garcia Sainz had been rumored for over six months. It is known that he opposed Industry Minister Oteyza's ambitious National Industrial Development Plan, Mexico's primary program for investment of the oil export revenues. Lopez Portillo gave his strong support to the Industrial Development Plan in mid-March.

The new Planning Minister, Miguel de la Madrid, moves up from the number two post at the Finance Ministry. His previous work has seemed closer to the monetarist leanings of former finance minister and current head of the Interamerican Development Bank, Antonio Ortiz Mena, than to the in-depth development approach favored by Lopez Portillo. But it is expected the President made the appointment after making clear to de la Madrid the failings of Garcia Sainz's efforts. In the wake of the appointment, de la Madrid has vigorously picked up an administrative reform program which the President highlighted as a key goal at the beginning of his administration.

Olivares steps in for Reyes

Though the full reasons for the change over at the Interior post—the most powerful in the cabinet—are

not known, no major change in direction is expected. Departing Reyes Heróles, one of Mexico's most distinguished intellectuals and known as a master politician, turns over the duties to Enrique Olivares Santana, formerly a governor, head of the Senate, and a top official in the PRI party. Known also as a master politician and a solid "orthodoxist" party man, Olivares will continue the political reform program initiated by

PRI president—

'The nation is fully united'

Highlighting the growing popular mobilization in Mexico to defend its progressive domestic and foreign policies from Washington and London pressures, the president of the ruling PRI party, Gustavo Carvajal, delivered the following call to a mass rally of the PRI in Mexico City on May 26.

The Political Reform created by President Lopez Portillo opened up possibilities of political participation to all the parties. Each one is fighting for different platforms; nonetheless in the face of attacks from abroad, and pressures of all sorts designed to alter our sovereign decisions in the exploitation of our natural resources and on our foreign policy, we stand united.

Unity is the great symbol of the Mexican people. That is why the foreign ambitions for our natural resources and our oil, the deceptions and the misinformation that we perceive, will not succeed, because they are going to discover a nation fully united around its president and its government.

I want to extend an invitation from this platform, standing beneath the Monument to the Revolution, symbol of the unity of our people, to all political parties throughout the country to unite against those foreign interests which seek to violate our national sovereignty, so that the interest of Mexico will always prevail above all others.

President Lopez Portillo during the past two years. Its first test comes in early July balloting for the lower house in Mexico's bicameral system.

There are indications that one of the friction points leading to Reyes's resignation was unbending opposition to inclusion of forces associated with former President Luis Echeverría in the current general mobilization of nationalist sectors around defense of the oil and foreign policy. The issue was compounded by the possibility that Echeverría—currently on diplomatic assignment in Australia—might soon be returning to Mexican soil. The relations between current and past presidents are studied with particular care in Mexico, because the strong presidential system builds enduring political machines around each president.

Since the cabinet switch, the semi-official government daily, *El Nacional*, has editorialized that Echeverría is welcome back in the country whenever he wishes to return, and that the longstanding friendship between the current and former presidents has not changed. At the same time, it reiterated the well-understood "rule of the game," that Echeverría would not undertake any direct political role in the country, unless it was by Lopez Portillo's request.

One of the most telling pieces of evidence that the whole cabinet switch serves to strengthen the "mobilizers," who want to prepare mass forces to resist U.S. pressures for the oil and related domestic destabilization maneuvers, is that congressional leader Rodolfo Gonzalez Guevara has been named to a prestigious undersecretary position in the Interior Ministry in the shakeup. Gonzalez Guevara, completing a term as leader of the Mexican Chamber of Deputies, delivered the principle address, on behalf of the three branches of government, at the celebration to honor 19th century Mexican President Benito Juárez's birthday, March 21. He delivered a dramatic call to action in a speech which electrified the country: "We can now state that within our society an economic counterrevolution is building up that, if not halted in time, can destroy the material basis of our nationalist, revolutionary and democratic development." The answer, he said, was the current political reform program. But not merely reform as an electoral question. "The most important thing (in) . . . the political reform is authentic popular mobilization."

—Tim Rush