

## Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

### The talk of Hermosillo

*Presidential politicking was fast and furious at this year's 'Meeting of the Republic' sessions.*

The "Meetings of the Republic" have been a big annual event since President López Portillo kicked them off in 1978. The idea is to bring together the entirety of Mexico's officialdom on the anniversary of the promulgation of Mexico's present constitution on Feb. 5, 1917 to evaluate the health of Mexico's federal system and set collective policy for the upcoming year.

There is a strong dose of soporific rhetoric at these affairs, but everyone who is anyone in Mexican politics is there, and more politics are concentrated into a single 48-hour period than on any other occasion in the year.

In years past, López Portillo has used the event to focus the attention of the cabinet, governors, congressional and judiciary leaders, and mayors all present, on central policies of economic and political development. This year was no exception, as both the president himself and keynote speaker Jorge Díaz Serrano, director of Pemex, made the issue of rapid modernization the central point of their speeches.

Díaz Serrano highlighted the commitment to progress contained in Article 3 of the Constitution, which mandates the "constant economic, social, and cultural improvement" of the nation. He concluded by reiterating the nation-building slogan popularized by López Portillo throughout his term: "Think big, build big, to make Mexico a great country." Added

Díaz Serrano: "This is the most accurate interpretation of the Constitution today."

But what lent special expectation to this year's meeting, held in the capital of the northwest agricultural state of Sonora, was that this is the year the ruling PRI party chooses its candidate to succeed López Portillo for the 1982-88 term. The question was on everyone's mind: what hints on the all-important succession question will be gleaned?

This was a festival of *política a la mexicana*, and some of the biggest political gossip columnists devoted entire columns to the issue of which door certain *presidenciable* cabinet ministers would choose to enter the hall—some doors being considered more "strategic" than others, depending on how much stir an entrance from that quarter would cause.

The object of the most intense speculation was Díaz Serrano, since the keynote "in the name of the three powers"—executive, legislative, and judicial—is the most important speech next to the president's.

Díaz Serrano lost some important policy decisions last fall to Industry Minister José Andrés de Oteyza, and people were wondering if López Portillo was reviving his star by putting him in the spotlight in Hermosillo.

All commentators concerned noted that, indeed, the speech Díaz

Serrano gave was "presidential" in tone. And in a reference nobody missed, Díaz Serrano repeatedly extolled the contributions made to Mexico's revolutionary history by the "men of the north." Madero, Carranza, Obregón, and Calles, the chief leaders from 1910 to 1935, all came from the northern states of Coahuila and Sonora—as does Díaz Serrano, a native of Sonora.

But the fact that Díaz Serrano is not a full, formal member of the cabinet must not be forgotten. In its 50 years and nine presidential choices, the PRI has never moved outside the formal cabinet for a candidate, and is unlikely to do so now. Díaz Serrano's presidential hopes remain a very long shot.

Hence there seems to be some basis for speculation that López Portillo chose Díaz Serrano not for who he is but for what he is not: one of the frontrunners from the cabinet itself. In this way the speculation was deflected from more likely choices onto a less likely one, and López Portillo's own freedom of maneuver was kept intact.

One of the surprises of the meeting was López Portillo's call for a national "debate" on the role of private property in the country. He was responding to attacks from the left on his new agricultural law (see *EIR*, Jan. 17).

It is not yet known precisely what lay behind the presidential call, especially since the president himself, in the same breath, said he was in favor of keeping the current "mixed system." If so, why open the debate?

So far the reaction from all sectors—business, government, opposition parties—has been more puzzlement than either rejection or embrace.