

Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

Mitterrand's socialist friends in Mexico

The French elections have increased the pressure from the left on President López Portillo.

Mexico's politicians and journalists all closely followed the recent French elections. Ever since General Charles de Gaulle's historic 1964 trip to this country, and his public pronouncement of a "political alliance" between the two nations, Mexico and France have had close political and economic ties. The relationship matured during the joint presidencies of López Portillo and his old friend, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing.

The Mitterrand victory in France has shattered that alliance. Not only is the political entente now a thing of the past, but even France's role in Mexico as a reliable economic partner is threatened, especially with Mitterrand's decision to wind down France's nuclear energy program—an area in which the two countries were beginning to work together.

But López Portillo's personal sentiments aside, the fact of the matter is that some political forces in Mexico had an important part in the international campaign to topple Giscard. Newspapers like *Excelsior* and *Uno más Uno*, for instance, ran story after story attacking Giscard as a right-winger. *Uno más Uno's* queerest columnist, Juan María Alponete, specialized in denouncing the French president as a "monarchist" and a would-be "king." ("That's only because Alponete prefers queens," one irreverent wit explained to us).

On the government level, the

anti-Giscard campaign was run out of the stronghold of the Socialist International in Mexico, the Foreign Ministry itself. Foreign Minister Jorge Castañeda personally led the pro-Mitterrand charge.

With the French electoral returns barely in, Castañeda broke all protocol by rushing to announce to the press Mexico's pleasure with the results—before President López Portillo could utter a word. Castañeda regaled Mitterrand with praise, calling him "an outstanding statesman." And he declared that Mitterrand's rise to power would contribute to the victory of the Socialist International-controlled insurrectionary forces in Central America.

Mexico's media correctly read this as yet another Castañeda endorsement of the cause of violent revolution south of Mexico's border—executed, as usual, through a political end-run around his own president.

López Portillo, unfortunately, chose not to contradict his foreign minister in his own subsequent remarks to the press, and expressed his desire that Mexican-French relations remain on good terms. He added that Mitterrand's victory would aid the struggle for democracy in Central America.

Public proclamations aside, the Mexican president is known to hold great personal respect for Giscard's statesmanship.

But with Castañeda kicking the

door open to the Socialist International in Mexico, and López Portillo refusing to slam it shut, Mexico's closet social democrats jumped at the golden opportunity. Alejandro Sobarzo, the chairman of the House of Representatives' foreign affairs committee and a top PRI party official, spoke of "the affinity of the PRI's principles with those of the Social Democracy."

Socialist allies within the PRI have for nearly a decade tried—unsuccessfully—to get the Mexican party to officially affiliate itself with the Socialist International.

With Mexico's socialists on the move, politicians in Mexico City watched closely this week to see how Javier García Paniagua, the new head of the PRI, would handle his first test as head of the COPPAL. The COPPAL, or Conference of Latin American Political Parties, was pulled together from among the continent's social-democratic and other "progressive" parties by the previous head of the PRI, Gustavo Carvajal, a known sympathizer of the Socialist cause.

At the COPPAL meeting in Santo Domingo, García Paniagua chose to roll with the punches. He endorsed the final resolution supporting Mitterrand's victory and expressing support for the "peoples' struggles" in El Salvador and Guatemala. But in his own remarks, the new PRI head stuck closely to repeating Mexico's traditional policy of calling for nonintervention and self-determination. He provided no support for the Central American leftist guerrillas.

Whether or not López Portillo will be able to hold to this more moderate course in the face of the renewed Socialist drive remains to be seen.