

Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

A nuclear test center for Sonora

Governor Ocaña has called on Mexicans to start the transition from the petroleum era to the nuclear era.

On Feb. 15, the governor of the state of Sonora, Samuel Ocaña, and the director of the National Institute of Nuclear Research (ININ), Dalmau Acosta, announced that Sonora had been chosen as the site for Mexico's controversial nuclear testing center. Ocaña, who is viewed by President López Portillo as one of the country's most competent governors, declared, "Nuclear energy will give us the opportunity to desalinate sea-water, which can be used in the enormous plains of rich land of Sonora," Ocaña stated. He added that he would like "these centers to assimilate the science and technology of other countries, and to enrich them, so that we can build our own nuclear technology."

I received reports from firsthand witnesses of this event, who remarked that the enthusiasm with which most Sonorans greeted the news of the forthcoming construction of the nuclear center sharply contrasted with the nationwide brouhaha that environmentalist groups raised last year when the same ININ announced its intention to build the center in Pátzcuaro, Michoacán. Unlike Ocaña, the Michoacán governor, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, sided with the environmentalists, and argued that the center would endanger the ecology of the nearby Lake Pátzcuaro.

Last December, in our special monthly consulting service on "Mexico's Energy Policy," *EIR* broke the story that Sonora was the

front-runner to win the competition with other Mexican states for siting of the nuclear test facility. "The ININ is known to be studying a proposal of its own for installing a special nuclear training facility in Sonora, after the failure earlier this year of installing one in Pátzcuaro, Michoacán," we wrote at the time.

The Ocaña government has for some time led efforts to bring the most advanced technologies to Mexico. For example, last October the state organized an impressive industrial exposition where it featured plans to make of Sonora a regional pole of industrial development.

Ocaña has also strongly lobbied for the continuation of the construction work on the PLHINO, a huge hydraulic project to bring surplus water from the state of Sinaloa to the rich but dry agricultural regions of Sonora. PRI presidential candidate Miguel de la Madrid recently endorsed the PLHINO concept, and committed his administration to completing it.

Ocaña's performance as governor has made him a rising star on the national political scene. According to political observers in Mexico City, after his governorship he will move to a high post either in the PRI national leadership or in the incoming De la Madrid administration, since he is viewed as a figure who can rally pro-development forces nationally. Asked whether there was any guarantee

that the next federal government would carry on the López Portillo government's commitment to nuclear energy, ININ director Acosta stated pointblank: "Governor Ocaña is our guarantee."

Recent concessions by PRI presidential candidate Miguel de la Madrid to the Wharton School's zero-growth, environmentalist programs for Mexico, have brought this into doubt. In a meeting on "ecological planning" in the state of Tabasco Feb. 13, De la Madrid engaged in a long rationalization of the PRI for the first time "raising the ecological banner in the political fight." These statements are now being lauded by the Jesuit left and Social Democratic-tied circles in Mexico as a signal that the powerful ruling party has finally yielded to pressures to "go greenie."

This same crowd is also hurriedly moving to set up a base of operations in Sonora, and organize "grass-roots" opposition to the Ocaña government's industrial programs. In February, a group of zero-growth and environmentalist academics announced the formation of the "Colegio de Sonora," a branch of the "Colegio de Mexico," the oldest and most powerful think tank for the promotion of the Club of Rome "limits-to-growth" theories in the country. These networks have also made inroads in the University of Sonora's Center of Scientific and Technological Research, and have developed close contacts with Jerry Brown-connected environmentalist groups in California and Arizona.

For further information on EIR's monthly consulting service, "Mexico's Energy Policy," call Peter Ennis at (212) 247-8820.