

Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

A race of dwarfs

Fathered by the moral midgets who implement International Monetary Fund starvation policies.

The financial world was entertained at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) meeting by the theatrics around Mexico and its creditors coming to terms. Meanwhile, starvation levels had reached a point of no return in Mexico.

Almost 24 hours after "stopping the clock" at the midnight, Sept. 29 deadline for the talks, Mexico agreed to terms on its debt which, at best, are the same as those prevailing during the past four years. In return for a 1/16th of a percent reduction in interest levels, Mexico made concessions which bankers said would raise the profitability of their Mexican business, but which have remained secret.

Mexican President Miguel de la Madrid, who is presiding over the disembowelment of his nation, was forced to listen on Oct. 2 to a public report on the results of his four years of IMF austerity. De la Madrid gave the opening speech at the First National Meeting on Worker Nutrition, Health, and Productivity, organized as a "responsible protest" by the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), the labor wing of the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party.

The CTM's health secretary, Dr. Hector San Román, informed him that 60% of the population is undernourished. "The loss of buying power of wages which has taken place over the past three years has depressed the nutritional levels of the Mexican population by 20%, so that current nutritional levels are worse than those of

10 years ago."

As it fell into misery, the population has reduced the quantity of its food intake as well as substituting items of lower nutritional quality. Caloric consumption fell 18% from 1982, before Mexico's IMF agreement, to 1984, while animal protein consumption fell by 50%, studies showed.

Mexico's population is being degraded by the IMF's conditions. Infant mortality is at 50 per thousand on a national basis; 42% of children under 15 are chronically undernourished, according to the study handed the President and summarized by Dr. San Ramón. That leaves them vulnerable to gastrointestinal and respiratory diseases, the main causes of death. The study notes that the problem is critical in rural and urban slum areas, in which malnutrition is the number-one cause of infant mortality. *Only 22% of children under 4 years old have normal height and weight.* The doctor reported, "comparatively, our children spend an average of 50-60 days a year sick, while children in better-nourished countries or in the privileged layers spend only 15 days sick."

Meat, milk, and eggs have disappeared from the diet, leaving only rice, beans, tortillas, pasta, sugar, and coffee as the basic diet. In August 1981, 5,000 head of beef were slaughtered daily in the Mexico City region. Now, not even 2,000 are, despite the increase in the population. The price of a kilogram of chicken or soup bones with scraps is equal to half of the daily

income of a worker lucky enough to have a job earning the minimum wage.

(The president of the National Agricultural Council, Juan Manuel Unanue Rivero, confirmed Sept. 22 that food production in Mexico has fallen by 40% this year. He blamed this on "reduced demand" and the unrealistic parity prices offered basic grain producers. Mexico has also decreased imports of grain, milk powder, and cooking oils by 3 million tons since 1983.)

The elimination of price subsidies, explicitly mandated in de la Madrid's first IMF agreement, caused milk prices to increase by 757.1% from 1982 to 1986. This eliminates milk from the diet of millions of children and pregnant women.

Dr. San Ramón concluded, "The crisis is creating undernourished workers, who are chronically sick, physically and mentally and condemned to aging prematurely."

Labor-based Sen. Arturo Romo told the meeting that "a reduction in productivity is a consequence" of the increasing malnutrition and disease of the working class. "The poverty of production and supply of food coming from the Mexican countryside is unacceptable," he insisted. He condemned "the seditious ideologues and analysts who seek to uphold the so-called free enterprise system to the death. They claim to be impotent to solve the crisis and to recover an economic growth capable of satisfying the population's needs."

No one doubted he was answering the President's brief opening statement: "In these times of economic difficulties, we have to be on guard to prevent substantial reductions in the living standards of the majority. The government cannot completely prevent it, because that is what the crisis is made of."