

# Who is trying to provoke a civil war in Mexico?

by Hugo López Ochoa

With a month and a half to go before Mexico's change of Presidents, the *Wall Street Journal* Oct. 7 published a full-page advertisement by the previously unheard-of Committee to Improve U.S.-Mexican Relations, which accused Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, leader of the National Democratic Front (FDN) opposition, of trying to violently prevent the inauguration of President-elect Carlos Salinas de Gortari of the ruling PRI party. The phantom committee charged that Cárdenas would try to impose himself as President, establishing a "Communist dictatorship." The ad concludes with a warning that this scenario would trigger a "civil war" and endanger the security of the United States, which would in turn "force the [U.S.] government to mobilize the required troops to defend its 2,000-mile border, and redeploy personnel from other continents."

This call for U.S. government intervention in Mexico's internal affairs is part of an ongoing international campaign by the same financial circles who hold the debt of Mexico and the other Ibero-American nations, to destroy nationalist movements like that of Cárdenas and the FDN, which oppose the orders for new austerity in Ibero-America, orders recently issued at the International Monetary Fund's Berlin congress.

This global strategy was outlined by U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz in a recent speech to the United Nations. Shultz said that "the next 18 months" will be decisive for imposing a "liberal economic revolution" across Ibero-America, and to accomplish that, "already obsolete" nationalist traditions must be uprooted. Not accidentally, this is the identical formulation used by Mexican President Miguel de la Madrid, in describing the proposals for state dirigism and economic sovereignty presented by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas.

In Mexico's case, this means an attempt to annex it as an oil and slave-labor reserve of the U.S. Eastern Establishment, through the so-called North American Common Market. Both Henry Kissinger, in a recent article for the *Los Angeles Times*, and David Rockefeller, during his September visit to Mexico, insist that Mexico has no choice but to join such a common market.

On Oct. 6, Mexican "historian" Lorenzo Meyer wrote in

the daily *Excelsior* that the conditions for creating a North American Common Market "already exist," but that Washington was concerned about "the capacity of the new presidential team to enforce its government program, a program with which the U.S. has no problem: namely, realizing one large free trade zone in North America." Meyer noted that Mexico had rejected such an option 10 years earlier, buoyed by its oil boom, but that "now it can no longer afford the luxury of ignoring the tempting offer of having certain access to the rich U.S. and Canadian markets, in exchange for abandoning the old idea of pursuing an independent development path, a path that has already failed."

Meyer, who is considered a mouthpiece for Salinas's two principal strategists—PRI secretary general Manuel Camacho Solís and economic adviser José Córdoba Montoya—asserted that the architects of the North American Common Market identify two obstacles to their plan, one "external" to the PRI (that is, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and his alleged "Communist hordes"), and one "internal," the powerful leader of Mexico's oil workers union, Joaquín Hernández Galicia.

Hernández Galicia has been the main critic inside the PRI of the De la Madrid government's Economic Solidarity Pact, the austerity regimen which has driven Mexico into the worst depression in its history. It is an open secret that Cárdenas is highly popular among the oil workers, and that the majority of them—as, in fact, the majority of Mexicans—broke ranks with the PRI to vote for him in the July 6 presidential election.

On Sept. 27 and 28, the *Wall Street Journal* published two front-page articles, authored by Roger Cohen and David Assman, respectively, accusing Hernández Galicia of corruption. The articles, cited at length by Lorenzo Meyer in his Oct. 6 *Excelsior* article, constitute a death threat against the oil workers' leader, comparing him with Jimmy Hoffa, the American Teamsters union leader who mysteriously disappeared in the 1970s.

On May 17 of this year, Hernández Galicia gave an interview to the daily *El Universal*, in which he charged that an assassination plot against him was a response to his opposition to plans to re-privatize the Mexican state oil com-

pany, Pemex. With the collapse in international oil prices, the government wants to fire a large number of oil workers, and to further reduce the wages of those who remain. Workers' buying power has already shrunk 70% during the six-year tenure of De la Madrid.

The anti-Cárdenas salvo that appeared in the Oct. 7 *Wall Street Journal* is meanwhile part of the effort to deal with the "external" threat. The language of that full-page ad was, in fact, strikingly similar to the propaganda barrage the De la Madrid government itself has launched against Cárdenas, whom they have accused of fomenting "insurrection" for having demanded Salinas's resignation as President-elect, and the holding of new elections. The campaign began on Sept. 15, when PRI president Jorge de la Vega Domínguez accused Cárdenas of wanting to "provoke civil war."

On Oct. 3, however, prestigious *Excelsior* columnist José Luis Mejías wrote, "We have carefully reviewed the last ten addresses of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, and find in none of them any incitement to mutiny, or rebellion, much less to civil war. On the contrary, his statements abound in anti-violence sentiment, and appeals to reconciliation and to dialogue." Mejías concludes, "Those who, despite all this, still talk about our heading toward civil war, are certain they can push the government toward repression."

## Reconciliation or chaos

Without doubt, the greatest fear of the oligarchy—domestic and foreign alike—is that the nationalist ferment headed by Cárdenas is generating sufficient pressure within the ranks of the PRI itself to force Salinas de Gortari into some form of alliance with Cárdenas's FDN. This would in all likelihood force the adoption of a genuine program of defense of national sovereignty against international usury.

Contrary to the wishful thinking of the oligarchy, Cárdenas has not faded away, but continues to mobilize hundreds of thousands around his program. On Oct. 2, more than 100,000 citizens applauded him and demanded that he address a meeting held in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas, despite efforts by radical elements in the gathering to exclude him. On Sept. 24, Cárdenas had to triple the number of meetings he had scheduled during a tour of Veracruz, because citizens had flooded to the cities and clogged the highways to greet him. On Oct. 6, thousands of peasants gathered to receive Cárdenas at the Comarca Lagunera, an historic Cárdenas stronghold in northern Mexico, and on Oct. 9 more than 40,000 *Cardenistas* demanded the resignation of Michoacán governor Martínez Villicana, at a demonstration described by the national press as "unprecedented in size."

## The 'Seven Plagues'

Salinas will take power in the midst of a veritable "Seven Plagues of Egypt." On top of the dizzying collapse of oil prices and pressures generated by new international interest rate hikes, are the disasters caused by the tropical storms and

cyclones which have battered southern Mexico and the Gulf, and the drought that has ravaged the northeast. This, of course, must be added to the brutal destruction of the economy caused by the recessive measures ordered by De la Madrid.

The situation has reached such distressing proportions that within the PRI itself, rebellions have begun. Congressional representatives of the PRI-linked National Peasant Federation (CNC) unanimously denounced before the Mexican Congress the new parity prices decreed for agricultural producers. Said CNC senator Héctor Hugo Olivares, "These are hunger prices," and the producers are insisting they will sow nothing until they win an 80% hike in parity prices, as compared to the 50% offered by the government. "Production will collapse" without just prices, they warn.

It is in fact Mexico's financial oligarchy, headed by banker Agustín Legorreta, which is threatening a scenario of chaos and civil war if Salinas shows any signs of changing his economic course. This was made explicit by monetarist mouthpiece and journalist Luis Enrique Mercado, who wrote Oct. 2 that capital flight would be unleashed unless Salinas defines himself in favor of continuing the Economic Solidarity Pact. It would appear that Salinas is fully prepared to play the bankers' game, at least for now. On Oct. 5, Salinas announced that the Pact would continue through his first month in office, and that a transition team to convey "economic information" would be set up.

## A military warning

On Sept. 29, the Mexican Armed Forces offered their support to Salinas at an event organized by Defense Secretary Gen. Juan Arévalo Gardoqui, and attended by the Air Force chief, where Salinas promised to "modernize" and "strengthen" the military.

But on Oct. 7, the military command lectured their future commander-in-chief. At an event organized by Naval Secretary Miguel Angel Gómez Ortega, Salinas was warned, "Without popular support, nothing important can be built for the nation." The Admiral added, "The legitimacy of the State does not depend upon compliance with foreign financial obligations. . . . The modernity or development of [our independence] cannot be premised on the abandonment of the nationalist and revolutionary state, constructed by the people with blood and laws, nor can it be premised on the surrender of nationalist, popular, democratic, and unhegemonic postulates, as defined in our Constitution."

And in clear reference to the idea that a military dictatorship might be installed to impose IMF austerity, Adm. Gómez Ortega insisted that the Navy "absolutely rejects military patriarchies, since progress cannot rest on the trampling of rights, nor restriction of freedoms, nor on an order founded on torture, cruelty, and arrogant abuse. . . . The people know that the paths to resolve conflict must be peaceful . . . that genuine respect is conquered with moral and political authority."