

Mexican oilworkers back debt moratorium

by Marivilia Carrasco and Hugo López

In a paid announcement printed in the Mexican press on Nov. 1, the Revolutionary Oilworkers' Union of the Mexican Republic (STRPRM) revealed the policy issue that is really behind the oilworkers' fight to bring Mario Ramón Beteta, ex-chairman of Pemex, the Mexican national oil company, to trial for embezzling government funds.

Addressing the Mexican people, the House of Representatives, and all "true members of the PRI" (Mexico's ruling political party), the ad says: "Subservience, abjectness, and slanders shall not keep the truth from the Mexican people. As we've always said, the facts will continue speaking to the nation, even as the international bankers' employees attempt to slander us; this is why those who tightened our belts yesterday and today strangle our nation's life, in an alliance with the country's banking elite which holds over half of the debt, do not want a moratorium even in jest."

The demand for debt moratorium by the strongest trade union in the PRI has panicked Mexico's oligarchs. On Nov. 3, STRPRM sections 34 and 35 put it even more clearly: "The only ambition of the new Porfiristas [after dictator Porfirio Díaz, whose regime led to the 1917 Mexican Revolution] is greater economic power to achieve greater benefits and privileges, not to fight for national sovereignty or for better living standards for the people." The statement goes on, "the new Porfiristas have always blackmailed the government with the greatest cynicism. Or is the constant threat of taking their money out of the country not blackmail? Isn't it blackmail to demand laws and regulations ever more favorable to [their] capital?"

The ad says that the leadership of the "new Porfiristas" are "300 families led by the Legorretas, Suárezes, and Bor-tonis: the banking elite which speculates and bargains with the Mexican people's and investors' rickety economy." President-elect Carlos Salinas de Gortari hasn't a chance of implementing an economic recovery program unless he shakes this "neo-Porfirista" mafia, and throws its most corrupt spec-imens in jail.

Central Bank director Miguel Mancera is apparently on the oilworkers' target list, too. Rep. Adolfo Barrientos, who is close to the union, announced Nov. 2 that "the oilworkers' union also demands an investigation of the misdirection of Central Bank funds earmarked for housing, which were invested in the stock market just before last year's October stock market crash." Barrientos also demanded a probe of

the dollar payments for the sale of Mexican crude oil, which were invested in foreign financial institutions and have generated further profits.

Barrientos warned that the STRPRM doesn't oppose an internal inquiry, but "we will also demand that the investigation be broadened to include the 300 families who hold the wealth in Mexico, to determine the source of the wealth of these families who pressure the government to favor their interests."

A new majority?

The oilworkers' allegations against Beteta were backed by all of the congressmen linked to the Mexican Workers Confederation (CTM), the National Democratic Front of popular former presidential candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, and most of the right-wing National Action Party congressmen. This defines the possibility of a new majority in the House of Representatives, which could totally change the nation's economic policy.

The power of this potential new majority can be seen in the fact that President Miguel de la Madrid's frantic efforts to protect Beteta and preempt the scandal have failed. The oilworkers charge that Beteta committed fraud in 1986 during the creation of the Mexican Oil Fleet, privately owned by Isidoro Rodríguez, to whom Beteta gave an exclusive Pemex oil shipping contract. Rodríguez's company was built on a loan issued by Banpesca, the official fishing credit agency, based on the contract he already had with Pemex. The loan was for—you guessed it—buying ships. On top of that, Rodríguez, who also owned the Mexican Stock and Investment Exchange, and was chairman of the National Chamber of Automotive Transportation, overpriced the ships at \$19.5 million, even though the budget office estimated their value at \$12 million, and Beteta knew it.

On Oct. 29, the Attorney General's office ruled that criminal action against Beteta was not in order, a ruling rejected by the oilworkers' representatives and the entire opposition in Congress. Then various PRI congressmen tried to build on the Attorney General's decision, but were beaten back by the oilworkers' representatives in what several newspapers described as a virtual break between the union and the PRI. On Nov. 2, Barrientos announced that in the Beteta case—and possibly other matters, as well—no ruling will be upheld unless it is supported by the entire labor representation in Congress.

The "families" made their countermove Nov. 5. The PRI delegation in Congress—headed by Rep. Guillermo Jiménez Morales, a stooge for the private bankers—excluded Rep. Adolfo Barrientos, who had begun the congressional investigation of Beteta, from the commission charged with that investigation. Yet both the opposition and the oilworkers' faction in Congress said they were confident the vote would run 271-229 against Beteta, when the commission's ruling comes to the floor.