

Dateline Mexico by Rubén Cota Meza

Salinas 'Informe,' a string of lies

The President's claims of great economic gains remind many Mexicans of the notoriously phony "Aleman smile."

On Nov. 1 President Carlos Salinas de Gortari delivered his first *Informe*, the annual state of the nation address that used to be given on the first of September and was moved last year to All Souls' Day, some say because the Mexican economy has turned into a ghost of its former self. The last President, Miguel de la Madrid—the one who changed the date of the *Informe*—and his successor, Salinas, have played this gruesome Halloween trick on the nation, by obeying every demand made by the foreign creditor banks to pay debts at the expense of the productive economy.

The *Informe* was designed to promote the further gutting of wages and production during Salinas's first year, as proof of his "courage" in standing up to popular pressure.

The President vaunted the fact that "total wages for workers in manufacturing industries grew 14% in real terms." Not only is this improvement inadequate in itself, but it only affects a small fraction of the workforce; no such gain was seen for wages of peasants, government employees, or service workers. As a result, more and more Mexican workers are taking to the streets to demand increases in wages and benefits.

Just in Mexico City alone—the world's most populous city—more than 200 mass demonstrations took place in the last five months. There were 36 in September. On Nov. 10, there were six, including teachers, public service workers, railroad workers, and retirees. The highways leading into Mexico from Querétaro, Pachuca, Toluca, Cuernavaca, and Puebla were blocked and the govern-

ment was forced to use the police to repress the protests. Several people were injured.

Fidel Velázquez, the leader of the Confederation of Workers of Mexico (CTM), called the definition of productivity presented by Salinas "an illusion." He observed that more and more workers are refusing to work for the minimum wage, equal to U.S.\$4 for an eight-hour day, since it costs more to travel to work and eat lunch out, than what they bring home in pay.

Salinas also lied about "positive achievements" in the foreign trade balance. He claimed that "in July, non-petroleum exports grew 8% compared to July 1988," but every Mexican knows that in reality they dropped from 20% to 8% in that period. He said that imports had gone down from 50% in January to 14% in July, and that the "trade surplus amounted to \$381 million," in the same timespan; but he did not mention what everyone also knows—those \$381 million are 90% below the 1988 surplus, which disappeared by the third quarter, and that 1989 will be the first year with a trade deficit since 1981!

The entire first *Informe*, and official talk in general, is replete with such inconsistencies, which are not going unnoticed. Otho Granados Raldán, who heads the President's Social Communications office, has seemed more concerned lately with saving face than with putting out any real facts.

Take the case of "Stanford Ph.D." Joseph Marie Córdoba, a supersecretary of state in the Salinas government. It was recently revealed that he never

got such a degree from Stanford, which had been the basis of his lightning climb to power. Spanish by birth and a French socialist by adoption, Córdoba had been set up in a super-ministry created just for him by Salinas de Gortari.

"Herr Otho" Granados, as the presidential media man is called these days, in honor of his behavioral resemblance to the Nazi propaganda minister Goebbels, responded to the exposure of the hoax, by saying that the degree "will be granted" next May, and that "arrangements are being made for this."

Various circles inside the ruling PRI party are beginning to wonder if the legitimacy of the whole Salinist regime does not rest on similar "perception games." A well known columnist in Mexico City warned: "Salinas, for the bulk of the citizens, has turned into a kind of anonymous avenger of the people, a severe scourge for those who have hurt and defrauded him, and no one doubted any more about his courage in making decisions."

However, "The citizens must not keep pressuring the President (nor feeding his ego, which no mortal escapes), by so highly praising his personal courage. Neither must his advisers nor his counselors do this. . . . Such a situation, which would always keep increasing and growing, could be negative for the country and for Salinas."

Some Mexicans remember that the public relations mavens around the late organized crime-linked President of Mexico, the unlamented Miguel Alemán, suddenly discovered that the then President had a "charming smile" and they played it to the hilt. As a result, whenever Mexicans wanted to refer to a lie, they would use the popular saying "you are phonier than Miguel Alemán's smile."