

Dateline Mexico by Salvador Lozano

World Bank orders legal abortions

Salinas moves to legalize abortions, after World Bank technicians calculated that killing babies cuts costs.

On Jan. 31, the World Bank ordered Ibero-American governments to legalize abortion and make it the center of their maternal-infant health programs. Quickly, the government of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari put into motion the necessary legislative machinery to take this latest step into "modernity": Deputy Blanca Ruth Esponda, chairman of the Population Commission of the Chamber of Deputies, had the bill legalizing abortion ready only 20 days later.

The World Bank delivered these latest orders at a misnamed "Central American Conference for Maternity without Risk" in Guatemala, attended by health officials, politicians, and legislators from ten Ibero-American countries. World Bank official Anne G. Tiker demanded that governments provide "safe abortion" in all maternal-infant health programs. All "legislative changes" required to legalize abortion must be undertaken immediately, she said.

Most remarkable, was that the World Bank demanded this policy of legal genocide on the basis that killing unborn children cuts down hospital costs! The bank had just finished a study on "Public Hospitals in Developing Countries," which found that conditions related to pregnancy and birth were the top reason for hospital admissions. The bank is upset that these admissions eat up 13-24% of health budgets.

Another World Bank study, this time of Mexico's Social Security system, calculated that every peso spent on "family planning" between 1972 and 1984—when sterilization was

pushed—"saved" nine pesos that would otherwise have had to be spent for maternal-infant health services.

Bank officials expressed horror at how many babies are born in Central America, and demanded that the numbers be cut. The fertility rate in the region averages six children per woman. With "family planning" so cheap (abortions or contraceptives cost between 50¢ and \$2 per capita) the bank considers this a good way to cut costs of social programs, officials said.

To propose to legalize abortion in Catholic Ibero-America is politically explosive, but the World Bank evidently has decided that, with the governments of Ibero-America all so eager to join George Bush's "new world order," the time has come to demand it. Until now, Castro's communist regime has been the only government to do so.

The Mexican government could move so quickly to satisfy World Bank orders, in part because the government had already been working with Washington to draft bills for abortion, in discussions running parallel with the negotiations for a free trade accord. Lucy Atkins, the U.S. Population Council's representative in Mexico, had been working on this for over a year. Indeed, the Mexican government has long been, in the words of the London *Financial Times*, "the darling of the bank's economists (and its major shareholder, the U.S.)." Mexico's "intimacy" with the World Bank grows daily, the paper said March 3. "The World Bank-Mexico team has proved to be extremely effective in achieving its goals."

Cuba's friends in Mexico immediately gave their backing to the abortion bill. Deputy Rosalbina Garavito, parliamentary coordinator of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas's Democratic Revolution Party, announced that the party has always supported the "social demand" that "a woman can decide freely for her body." But other political parties in Congress are divided.

The National Action Party (PAN) is the only congressional delegation which unanimously rejected the bill. PAN Deputy Víctor Orduna called "the mere attempt to legislate on this matter . . . a crime," and announced that the PAN caucus will oppose the bill with everything "from denunciations before international human rights bodies to acts of civil resistance all over the country." If abortion is legalized, there will be "serious social confrontations between Mexicans," he warned.

Msgr. Norberto Rivera Carrera, president of the Catholic Bishops' Family Life Commission, denounced the World Bank policy as demonstrating "the intention of the international creditor institutions to pressure the Mexican authorities to bend to their will," so that they adopt demographic policies which "are contrary to human rights." Progress, not suppression of human life, is needed; "Mexico's greatest wealth is its Mexicans," he wrote in a pastoral letter.

"Anti-birth imperialism" is responsible for creating the "paranoid myth" of overpopulation, he charged, not because it cares about poverty, but because "it seeks to dominate through perversion. This is the only thing which explains the campaigns for pornography and the strong financing for pro-abortion campaigns." Even if the government legalizes abortion, canon law will continue judging it "a grave sin," and anyone who commits it will "automatically be excommunicated."