

Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

The Fuerte-Mayo canal is on

The mobilization of the Pro-PLHINO Front ensured construction of the canal despite IMF conditionalities.

Defying the International Monetary Fund dictates that have been taking apart industry and infrastructure here, Miguel de la Madrid's government has given the go-ahead to construct a water development project linking the Fuerte and Mayo rivers in the south of the state of Sonora. The canal will make it possible to irrigate 30,000 hectares of rich but dry arable land in this state on the U.S. border.

The decision to build the canal, announced April 23 by Sonora Governor Samuel Ocaña, is a direct affront to the IMF austerity program forced on Mexico as a condition for a three-year \$3.9 billion loan. The devastation already wreaked on Mexico's industry and agriculture in only six months is so great that food and medicine supplies are reportedly reaching dangerously low levels.

The Fuerte-Mayo canal is part of a larger development project called the North West Hydraulic Plan (PLHINO) that would bring water from the water-rich states of Sinaloa and Nayarit to the agricultural plains of North Sinaloa and Sonora. The project, conceived 28 years ago by government technical agencies, is adamantly opposed by the IMF and its sister lending institution, the World Bank.

The PLHINO would allow the opening of 1 million hectares for agricultural production in Mexico's most fertile food production region.

Hundreds of farmers were organized around the Pro-PLHINO Front, a non-partisan organization created in response to the insistence of the Mex-

ican Labor Party (PLM) that Mexico's survival depends on continued economic development. The farmers pressured the government to decide to build the canal. Governor Ocaña had also campaigned for the project.

In May 1982, Front farmers carrying banners reading "Under Economic Warfare, We Will Continue Fighting for Big Projects," gathered in the Guadalupe Victoria collective farm to attend ceremonies led by former President José López Portillo to inaugurate the Fuerte-Mayo canal. The Front organized large demonstrations in several cities of the state over the next months demanding the completion of the canal. Front members also went to the local press with articles warning that only the opening of modern irrigated agricultural areas could avoid the food shortages.

The Front gathered again in Guadalupe Victoria the third week in April to hear Governor Ocaña tell them that he and the federal government had reached an agreement to finish the canal by next year. The Secretary of Agriculture and Water Resources, Horacio García Aguilar, announced the de la Madrid government's commitment to invest an initial sum of 6 billion pesos (\$40 million) to complete the Integral Agriculture Development Program of the Fuerte-Mayo Zone in four years.

This program, Ocaña explained, means the construction of transportation belts, irrigation and drainage systems, credit facilities, housing projects, schools, medical facilities, a food

distribution system, and most important, the organization of farmers around what he called "modules of production," in the 30,000 hectares irrigated by the canal.

The farmers greeted these words with banners reading "Eating Comes Before Paying the Debt." The Front has advised the government to renegotiate payments on Mexico's foreign debt of \$80 billion, to allow funds to go to productive purposes.

With this first victory against the IMF, Front members are now making plans to organize farmers in other states of the country around badly needed water projects. Twenty-five collective farms and representatives of 12 peasant organizations in the state of Durango have formed the Pro-PLHIGON Front, which is fighting for the water-development plan for the region north of the Gulf of Mexico. This project would irrigate the north and northeastern plains of Mexico, including La Laguna, a rich agriculture area that the IMF program is making a desert.

Leonardo Espitia Jordan, Mexican Labor Party candidate for mayor of the city of Gómez Palacio, Durango, is running his electoral campaign to organize farmers around this project, and in the process educating the state on the work of the great hydraulic planner and scientist, Leonardo da Vinci.

Jordan's election posters, which read "Vote for Leonardo," show a self-portrait of the 15th-century Italian Renaissance's Vinci as the father of hydrodynamics, "the science to unleash an hydraulic revolution in Mexico."

Members of the Pro-PLHINO Front are also planning to organize farmers and peasants in other states of the country to fight for the PLHICEN, the water-development plan for central Mexico.