

## Dateline Mexico by Carlos Cota Meza

### Oil not for local consumption

*"Protecting the ecology" has become the latest lie justifying killing Mexicans to make debt payments.*

On the 53rd anniversary of the Mexican nationalization of its petroleum industry on March 18, President Carlos Salinas de Gortari announced with great fanfare the permanent closure of Mexico City's largest oil refinery, as a step to ease the city's horrid air pollution. The refinery, named the "18 of March" in honor of the nationalization, produced 50% of the city's gasoline needs and 80% of its diesel. "Let's plant trees where today there is nothing but pipelines," Salinas exclaimed.

What a fraud! The refinery was closed, not to better the environment, but to cut domestic consumption of oil products, in order to generate "surplus" crude stocks for export—without having to invest in costly increases in exploration and production.

This was stated frankly by Petroleos Mexicanos (Pemex) director Francisco Rojas one day after the "radical ecological measure" was announced. "The 100,000 barrels a day which were refined in the '18 of March' plant will help maintain the current export platform fixed at 1.3 million barrels a day," he stated.

According to Rojas, the income earned from the additional crude exported—generated by cutting internal consumption—will finance the importation of 20,000 more barrels of gasoline, and 10,000 additional barrels of fuel oil, per day. The Pemex chief added that at some future unspecified time and place, the increased exports could also finance the building of a new refinery to replace the one shut down in favor of a park.

So much for President Salinas's

promises to relocate the refinery's nearly 5,000 workers in new jobs. Between one day and the next, the workers and their families, who had lived in company housing flanking the refinery, have been put out on the streets. An entire secondary economy that had served the refinery community has also disappeared.

The result? Mexico City may eventually experience some 2% less pollution—but will definitely have about 20,000 more starving homeless.

The closure is the latest in a series of measures taken in the past eight years, aimed at reducing domestic consumption in order to export the resulting "surplus." Not only has that policy generated more money to pay the debt, but at the same time Mexico "helps" the United States reduce its trade deficit.

The Mexican government has no margin to substitute for the production lost in the closing of the "18 of March" refinery, by expanding some other part of Pemex's refining system, because that system is already operating at close to 100% capacity, due to the ravages of a decade of disinvestment.

The recent accident in the Pajaritos petrochemical complex demonstrated the damages caused by this policy. Over-exploitation and lack of maintenance of the installations caused the accident (although unofficial reports hint that the explosion could have been an act of sabotage aimed at Pemex's incipient petrochemical production).

According to the 1990 Pemex "Annual Operating Report," petroleum products were imported at the

rate of 130,500 barrels per day—almost 5 million barrels total for the year. Purchases abroad of gasoline and fuel oil made up some 80% of the total import \$850 million import bill for petroleum products. And while the commercial balance on this account was in deficit, the dollar value of imports of petrochemical products also rose by 322.8%.

What country or foreign businesses will benefit from the "ecological" measures of the Mexican government?

First, there was the "one day without a car" program, where a portion of the city's cars were ordered out of use each day, a wildly inefficient way to reduce pollution which only succeeded in imposing huge economic losses upon the residents of the city. Then, the government attempted their "one day without streets" program, closing the historical center of Mexico City to powered vehicles. That lasted only one day, and had to be suspended after the resulting gridlock dislocated the functioning of nearly the entire city.

Now, some states, such as Chiapas and Quintana Roo, have attempted to impose a new program, "a life without children," in which abortion is legalized to provide a "legal" cover for the intended mass sterilization of women.

"Let there be trees, where before there were human beings!" appears to be the motto of the Salinas government and those idiots who applauded the shutting down of Mexico City's refinery.

Such treason was underscored by the fact that the government chose the anniversary of the nationalization of Mexico's oil industry as the date to begin its dismantling of Petroleos Mexicanos, closing the refinery on the very day on which the historic act by Gen. Lazaro Cárdenas del Río occurred.