

Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

U.S. proposes oil-for-technology deals

President Reagan is said to be behind a renewed push for transfer of advanced technologies to Mexico.

The government of the United States strongly supports the desire of Mexico . . . to use nuclear energy as well as to expand its own technical and manufacturing capacity in this area," U.S. Energy Secretary James Edwards told a nuclear-energy seminar in Mexico City March 25. In a press conference later, the U.S. official announced that the Reagan administration is interested in exporting the most advanced nuclear technologies and knowhow to Mexico in exchange for increased amounts of Mexican oil.

Edwards's remarks mark a sharp departure from the hideous sabotage of oil-for-nuclear deals his predecessors engaged in. James Schlesinger's embargo of Mexican enriched-uranium deliveries in the late 1970s is still fresh in the minds of government officials here.

Despite such bad memories, these officials have welcomed Edwards's offer. There is of course a certain caution about the possibility that the U.S. official could be speaking with a "strategic-reserve" scheme in the back of his mind. Under this Hudson Institute-concocted plan, Mexico would play the role of a raw-materials supplier in a U.S.-dominated zone of influence pitted against other superpower-controlled regions.

Once their doubts are cleared, these officials think the Reagan administration's nuclear offers could certainly mark the beginning of a new era.

Signs indicate that the President himself is the main force behind this attempt to realize bilateral economic potentialities and to keep the battered U.S. nuclear-export market alive. The U.S. President has sent a letter, I have learned, to President López Portillo pledging full cooperation with Mexico in meeting its nuclear program, which calls for an installed capacity of 20 gigawatts by the year 2000. U.S. Ambassador John Gavin delivered the letter to López Portillo on Feb. 4.

Reagan's efforts are backed by elements of his California-based "kitchen cabinet" group, by high-ranking officials in the Department of Energy, by some White House officials, and by representatives of nuclear-supplier companies.

As part of their efforts, the DOE has organized a series of seminars here in Mexico City on advanced areas of nuclear research and technological applications, the first of which was attended by Secretary Edwards on March 25. Edwards discussed a framework for collaboration in the area of long-term training of nuclear scientists and technicians in a meeting with President López Portillo and Ambassador Gavin at the end of March.

President Reagan's overture to this country contrasts remarkably with the tremendous pressures the U.S. Federal Reserve and London-Wall Street bankers are putting on Mexico to cancel some of its most ambitious capital-intensive pro-

grams, among them the construction of the country's second nuclear plant. As I have reported, U.S., French, Canadian, Swedish, and German companies are now bidding for equipment contracts for this 2,400 megawatt plant.

London bankers are pretty confident they are going to get their way. "One cut the government is certain to make is a \$2 billion nuclear reactor contract sought by American, Swedish, and Canadian bidders," the Feb. 27 edition of the London *Economist* forecast in a review of the probable effects of the February peso devaluation. A senior executive at Bankers Trust told an American journalist in March that "something's got to go . . . nuclear will definitely be cut."

The *Washington Post* has joined the anti-nuclear bandwagon by raising the "nuclear-proliferation" bogeyman. In an editorial March 8, the *Post* announced, "There is a string of trouble spreading in Latin America that is potentially at least as serious as the fighting in Central America." Dismissing Mexico's traditional commitment to such non-proliferation pacts as the "Tlaltelolco Agreement," the *Post* accuses Mexico and other Latin American countries of striving to obtain nuclear weapons technologies under the guise of nuclear energy development.

Up to now, the López Portillo government has reiterated its commitment to the nuclear program and is preparing to announce the results of the bidding on Aug. 1 as scheduled. Spokesmen for PRI presidential candidate Miguel de la Madrid have also publicly stated that he fully backs the present administration's commitment to nuclear-energy development.