

Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

Renewed offensive for nuclear power

The new Secretary of Energy and Mining defends the long-delayed Laguna Verde project.

Many were taken by surprise—in particular the environmentalists—when Mexico's new Secretary of Semi-Public Energy, Mines, and Industry, Alfredo del Mazo, said at the opening ceremonies of a seminar on Nuclear Energy in Latin America that took place in Mexico City. "Despite the delays—not all imputable to technological capacity—and the risks implied by the use of the atom, the federal government will put the nuclear project in Laguna Verde, Veracruz, into operation, which will start to generate electricity next year. If it did not join the most scientific and technological processes such as the use of the atom to create electrical energy, our country would give up its opportunities to transform itself into a modern nation, and be incapable of incorporating itself into the evolution. It would mean denying a heritage to the next generations and alienating ourselves from a means of consolidating a great and vigorous country."

The "bombshell" effect of the statement—no one expected the Mexican government to take such a decision, when during the last three years of International Monetary Fund-dictated management the project had been practically suspended for lack of financing—set into motion the left-wing "ecologist" roster.

Since the Chernobyl disaster in the Ukraine, the Mexican ecologist groups, acting as if they took orders from Moscow, have launched a total offensive to shut down Mexico's only nuclear project, including going so far

as to talk of holding demonstrations to force the government to close what they consider the greatest threat to national safety.

After Secretary Del Mazo's statements, the environmentalists, mainly grouped in the international Friends of the Earth (whose president was Mexico's representative to the World Health Organization), and in the Association for Alternative Technology, where some officials of the Federal Electricity Commission, the Autonomous University of Mexico, and the Autonomous University of Michoacán get together to preach against technology and in favor of going back to pick-and-shovel, gave a press conference to "question" Del Mazo's announcement.

Their main arguments are the same ones heard everywhere: that nuclear energy produces "high contamination," and is "the most expensive way to produce electricity." They introduced the new variant which U.S. Senator Jesse Helms has been pushing against governments, including Mexico's: "corruption." They noted that in various countries there have been cases of corruption over the giving of commissions to officials in charge of deciding on the construction of these plants, and therefore demanded, without giving any proof, that the Controller General of Mexico should start to look for cases of corruption.

The government's decision opens a new flank in the fight to get out of the economic recession. As Del Mazo said, "Laguna Verde is a big effort of

Mexican engineering which has assimilated modern technology to generate electricity; it has developed technological infrastructure and highly skilled manpower, which means greater national participation in future nuclear-electrical projects of the country."

We can expect open opposition, much stronger than occurred four years ago when there was talk of setting up a nuclear laboratory in the state of Sonora, and well-financed environmentalists rose up all over the country. Now, it can be expected that they will reappear with "bells on," above all because of their ties to the German Greens, who make no secret of their intentions to turn over Western Europe to the New Yalta deal.

In the coming weeks, a new facet will be coming into view of the fight which the Mexican government picked when Finance Secretary Jesus Silva Herzog was forced out, and it was proposed that foreign debt payments be made on the basis of the country's ability to pay, and therefore the country would need to start growing again. The Laguna Verde project needs financing, which is impossible if a new accord is signed with the IMF.

Hence, the decision to "return to thinking big." Secretary Alfredo del Mazo threw down the gaudlet said during the seminar: "In exercise of its sovereignty and as a member of the International

Organization, Mexico has solicited specialized world organizations to support it in watching over and supervising the safety of the project, and after the first visits to Laguna Verde, no recommendation at all has been received to modify its safety systems. Of course, risks exist, but even including the Chernobyl atomic disaster in the Soviet Union, nuclear is one of the safest industries in the world."