

Dateline Mexico by Isaías Amezcua

Discontent with Salinas grows

Not even the bombast surrounding Mexico's debt renegotiation can fill the country's vacuum of power.

The renegotiation of Mexico's foreign debt announced July 23 and celebrated *ad nauseam* by the Salinas de Gortari government, has not achieved the "stabilizing" effect hoped for by the Salinas forces. Their idea was to use the news of the renegotiation as an unquestionable triumph that would tighten their grip on power. The festivities have been unable to hide what is an open secret in Mexico: that there is an enormous vacuum of power and political disorientation among ruling circles in government and within the PRI party.

With his over-hasty announcement of the debt renegotiation, President Salinas had hoped to rescue his deteriorating image and thrust himself into the limelight as a national savior. Poorly advised by his backers, Salinas went on national television on the evening of July 23 to present the debt renegotiation deal as Mexico's salvation and as a guarantee that economic growth and improvement of living standards would resume. Salinas asked his television audience to stand and sing the national anthem. Many viewers were so disgusted by his transparent demagoguery that they turned off their TV sets. Salinas's grandstanding even came under criticism in government circles.

The presidential press office began a feverish propaganda campaign to sell the debt package, distributing "suggestions" to the media not to publish adverse commentaries on the signing of the deal. On July 24, Salinas met with 500 select social, political, and business leaders to reiterate

the "historic" importance of the debt agreement, whose achievement was due entirely to his government and none other. Criticisms of the President's Hollywood-style extravaganza—something Salinas had pledged he would never permit under his administration—were not long in coming.

The reason for the vacuum of power in Mexico is that Salinas has shattered the "national consensus" among the various groups that hold political power in the country. The last straw was the shameless concession of the Baja California governorship to Ernesto Ruffo Appel, candidate of the National Action Party (PAN) in the elections of July 2. Salinas's action was considered a "personal decision" and a "good-faith gesture" to the strategists of the U.S. State Department, who have long wanted to see a bipartisan PRI/PAN system of government in Mexico, to the exclusion of any other political party.

Various sources report that what occurred in Baja California has left many PRI members disoriented. No longer can anyone be sure whether he will be sacrificed tomorrow on the altar of "good Mexico-U.S. relations." As a self-defense measure, PRI leaders in the states are refusing to take part in activities organized by the party's national leadership. They want nothing to do with anything coming from Mexico City. Rumors are widely circulating that, as a result, PRI president Luis Colosio is planning to resign. This would be a hard blow to Salinas, since Colosio is a confidant

of the President.

One possible replacement for Colosio under discussion is Carlos Hank González, the Tourism Secretary, a representative of the PRI "old guard" and considered aloof from the President. Also mentioned is Guillermo Jiménez Morales, leader of the Chamber of Deputies and considered an ally of Salinas, but also a representative of the dirtiest elements of the so-called PRI "dinosaurs." One strike against Jiménez Morales is the fact that the building of the Chamber of Deputies burned down last May after three bombs exploded there. The government has tried to cover up the incident by claiming that the fire was "unintentional," but Jiménez Morales is seen as being responsible for the lack of security which facilitated the incident.

Added to all this is the fact that Salinas is now burdened with the scandal caused by the arrest of José Antonio Zorrilla Pérez, the former head of federal security under the previous Miguel de la Madrid government. Zorrilla was arrested last June under the charges of having masterminded the assassination of a well-known journalist and also for having protected the country's leading drug czars. The revelations of the Zorrilla case have already implicated his former bosses Manuel Bartlett and Miguel de la Madrid. Bartlett today is Salinas's Education Secretary; the longer he stays in that post, the more discredit he brings to the Salinas government.

The Salinas government is known as a mere extension of its predecessor, for which reason it is widely believed that no real investigation of the Zorrilla case will be conducted while Salinas is in office. According to various sources, Salinas will try to solve his problem by sending Bartlett as his ambassador to France, and De la Madrid as his ambassador to Spain. This move will force a reshuffling of his cabinet.