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SUBJECT: Conservative and Communist Forces in Mexico Prepare for the Next Presidential Elections

SUMMARY

The next Presidential elections in Mexico, in July 1964, may well be crucial to this country's future. Domestic problems, particularly the growing awareness of underlying economic and fiscal weaknesses and the need to ensure a more equitable distribution of personal income, as well as the ever-increasing impact on Mexico of international developments, make it increasingly difficult for the Government to continue its appeasement of the many factions it contains by the pursuit of ambivalent policies. The next elections may therefore turn on the issue of whether the country's basically conservative tendencies will prevail or whether it will permit its small, but well organized, minority of Communists and their sympathizers to take control of its "Revolutionary" traditions and programs.

The official candidate of the Government Party (PRI) will, as in the past, probably win the 1964 Presidential elections by an overwhelming majority. Within the Party are representatives of practically all political philosophies, from Marxists and Communist sympathizers to ultra-conservatives. Thus, both left and right pressures will grow within the PRI, each faction attempting to acquire sufficient political strength to impose its own candidate on the Party, the candidate who will automatically become the new President.

Two new forces have emerged outside the Party, but, so far at least, publicly avowing their loyalty to the PRI and the Mexican Revolution. One is the Movimiento de Liberacion Nacional (MLN), a group

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which brings together for the first time all elements of the left, and in which the Communists seek to find a "respectable" and nationalist way to power. The MLN, which has its greatest asset for unification of the left in the prestige and rural strength of ex-President Lazaro CARDENAS, is already expected by the PRI to evolve into an opposition party. It is, in fact, in the process of organizing the Union Revolucionaria Mexicana (URM), which is an openly declared political party. The second group is the Frente Civico, a strongly anti-communist organization created by ex-President Rodriguez, and with which ex-President Aleman is widely believed to be associated. It is the first organization in Mexico to attempt to rally public support on a nation-wide basis to oppose the Communist threat.

Both groups are expected to attempt to gain enough public support to influence the selection of the next PRI candidate. Alternatively, one or both may attempt to challenge the PRI in the next elections, although the latter will almost surely try to control -- or destroy -- any group which seriously threatens its own continued political dominance. No sector of the population will be more important in forthcoming moves to gain political strength than the long-disregarded peasants and farmers, the campesinos. These, comprising half the population of the country, are on the brink of becoming one of Mexico's most powerful political forces. Communists and conservatives -- and, for that matter, the PRI as well -- recognize this, and the campesino will probably be the principal target for all the factions now beginning to maneuver in preparation for the 1964 elections.

A. THE EMERGENCE OF NEW FORCES

By the late summer of 1961, two new and potentially important political forces had sprung into existence in Mexico: The Movimiento de Liberacion Nacional (MLN), the vehicle of the Communists, Marxists and radical leftists, and the Frente Civico Mexicano de Afiracion Revolucionaria (FCMAR), generally known as the Frente Civico, a grouping of Mexico's conservatives and anti-Communists operating independently of the Catholic Church. The organization by democratic elements of a Frente Civico is generally viewed as a significant development in this country, where the forming of "political action" groups has long been an exclusive preserve of the extreme left.

Although Mexico's moderate elements had been concerned about Communist penetration for some time, they had done little but talk among themselves or

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1/ See Embdes 288, August 31, 1961.

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publish an occasional article in some friendly newspaper. Many, even those who are anti-clerical in opposing renewed political activity by the Catholic Church, felt secure in the knowledge that Mexico is essentially Catholic, hence presumably impervious to Communism. Others, having close ties with the Church but remembering the violence of the Church-inspired Cristero rebellion of the 1920's, feared another eruption of Church-State conflict. Finally, still other moderates believed that, in the final analysis, the United States could be depended on to prevent Communism from taking hold in Mexico. There is no reason to doubt that the many prominent Mexicans who minimized the dangers of the Castro-Communist threat to their country sincerely believed that Mexico's Catholicism and its proximity to the United States were effective deterrents to Communism. But events over the past year have shaken their earlier convictions.

The first manifestation of nation-wide significance of this awakening to the dangers of Castro-Communism was the strong, anti-Communist statement issued by Cardinal GARIBI of Guadalajara in the autumn of 1960 after a three-day assembly of Mexican bishops.^{1/} The Church took many months to mobilize its temporal forces, and it was not until June 1961 that mass rallies were held in Puebla, Torreon, and other major cities. The appearance of "Cristianismo, si; comunismo, no" stickers by the tens of thousands throughout the country made evident the Church's political power, for the first time in many years, to the leftists, to the Government, and to the conservatives. The genuine support that the Church found among the masses of the people caused both democratic conservatives and the extreme rightists to try to capitalize on the same sentiment. Thus, the ultra-right Sinarquistas took over one of the Church-sponsored anti-communist rallies at Leon in June 1961 and converted it to their political purposes.

The largest of the conservative groups is the Frente Civico organized by ex-President Abelardo RODRIGUEZ in association with a large number of prominent citizens, some of them former high officials in the Government. It is widely accepted as a fact that ex-President Miguel ALEMAN is also one of the leaders of the Frente Civico but that, in order to retain a greater degree of freedom of action, he has so far avoided becoming openly identified with the new group. The Frente Civico has declared publicly that it was completely loyal to the President and the PRI, and that it has no ambition to set itself up as a separate political party. Although its directors continue to say that it intends to operate as a loyal arm of the PRI to counter Communist activities, some of its members are saying quite freely that it may well be forced to advance its own candidate in opposition to the PRI in the 1964 Presidential

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1/ Embdes 476, October 31, 1960.

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elections if it doesn't succeed in ensuring that the PRI run a conservative candidate acceptable to the Frente Civico.^{1/} Thus, it is reported that the tacit approval first given the Rodriguez group by the Government has now been withdrawn, perhaps presaging a move by the PRI actively to oppose the growth of the Frente Civico. The group claims it is rapidly enlisting supporters throughout the country and that it has a large number of members in the Federal District and in the States of Jalisco, Nuevo Leon, Veracruz and Sonora. Smaller and less well-known are two other anti-communist associations working quietly and privately: one, the "Committee of Nine," is composed of young lawyers and has limited membership; the other, the "Patronal Group," consists of bankers and industrialists, principally from the Federal District. This new force, particularly the Frente Civico, can serve a dual purpose -- it can function as a counterweight to Cardenas and his communist-line MLN, and, by its very existence, remove the alleged reasons advanced by some of the Catholic clergy for the Church's entering into politics.

A variety of motives have caused these conservatives to attempt to mobilize their forces in defense of Mexico's national traditions and institutions. The Cuban invasion failure convinced many that Castro was much more powerful than had been suspected, and that his regime might be a fixture in the hemisphere for some time to come rather than soon fall, as many hoped, of its own weaknesses. The renewed political activity of the Church alarmed some liberal, anti-clerical Mexicans who saw in this a massive reactionary threat to the real achievements of the Revolution. Finally, a number of conservative businessmen appear to have decided to lend support to the organization of a non-Church, anti-communist grouping because they believed this would not only help to contain the Communists, but also help to restore confidence in the Government's stability and, therefore, create a better atmosphere for Mexico's economic development.

The greatest problems facing the conservative groups at this time are: (1) the Government's attitude toward the Frente Civico, at first reportedly favorable when this group declared it was a non-political organization loyal to the PRI, but now increasingly negative as Frente Civico members talk of "capturing" the PRI from within or, failing this, even becoming an opposition party by 1964; (2) the lack of unity among the various organizations, the "Committee of Nine" apparently not wishing at the moment to join, as junior members, with the Frente Civico; and (3) the report that wealthy contributors, needed to keep these groups going, especially the more active Frente Civico, have lost much of their initial enthusiasm and, apparently, some of their earlier fear of the Communist threat to Mexico. In some ways, growing pains are to be expected, for this is the first real attempt to organize Mexico's conservative elements against the Communist threat.

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Embdes 757, Dec. 21, 1961.

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In direct opposition to the Frente Civico is the National Liberation Movement (MLN -- Movimiento de Liberacion Nacional), the offspring of the Communist-organized Latin American Conference for National Sovereignty, Economic Emancipation, and Peace, which took place in Mexico in March 1961. Ex-President Lazaro Cardenas and his supporters, along with the Communists, Marxists, and "leftist intellectuals" who had been active in the Conference, established the MLN in August in order to carry out the programs approved by the Conference. It is reportedly intended that the MLN be organized throughout Latin America, some central coordination (presumably from Mexico) being required, but each national group formulating specific programs suited to local conditions. The MLN in Mexico is headed by Cardenas and a group of prominent Communists and fellow travellers. It quite patently has as its goal the unification of all Mexican leftist elements into a single bloc. It is strongly anti-United States, all of Mexico's ills being blamed on American imperialist exploitation and political domination.

It is increasingly clear that the MLN is under the influence of the Partido Comunista Mexicano (PCM), although efforts are made to maintain the fiction that there is no connection between them, and that the MLN is a purely Mexican, "Revolutionary" grouping of patriotic citizens. There are reliable reports, however, to the effect that the PCM intends to continue its penetration of the MLN in order to take over control of its policies, and that the PCM believes that the MLN can serve as a more respectable cover for its own activities should the Government cause difficulties for the PCM itself.

The MLN has also publicly announced that it has no intention of becoming an opposition party, but rather that it desires to support the PRI and the Government. These declarations are now widely recognized as false, particularly since it is a well-known fact that the MLN is actively attempting to develop a new political party, the Union Revolucionaria Mexicana (URM), recently created as an organ of the MLN. The leaders of the MLN have reportedly agreed secretly on the categorical necessity of running a URM candidate, under the aegis of Cardenas, in the 1964 Presidential elections. There is still speculation that the Cardenistas and his Marxist followers will attempt to work within the PRI to impose their candidate on the official Party. However, the fact that Cardenas, by his own admission, no longer considers himself a member of the PRI, would make it appear more likely that his chosen candidate will be run in opposition to the PRI by the MLN's embryonic political party.

B. THE PRI AND THE NEW GROUPS

The PRI, Mexico's Government party, since its inception has permitted no real opposition to its complete and unchallenged control of the Government apparatus.

I/ Embdes 732, Dec. 18, 1961.

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apparatus. The Party encompasses elements belonging to almost every facet of the political spectrum from ultra-conservative to radical left (the latter, for practical purposes, hardly distinguishable from Mexican Communists and the followers of the Marxist Partido Popular Socialista). The need to reconcile inherently hostile political philosophies under one banner explains the constant efforts of the Government party to portray the Mexican Revolution as indigenous and original, and as the only acceptable solution to Mexico's problems. This explains, as well, the sensitivity of the Government over references to it as "rightist" or "leftist"; it asserts it is neither of these, but rather that it is "Revolutionary". The Party hierarchy, despite its denials, has thus veered more and more toward an imprecise "centralism".

In the interests of self-perpetuation and stability of administration, the PRI has pursued an ambivalent course. This influences Mexico's foreign policy attitudes, particularly with respect to its oft-reiterated doctrines of "non-intervention" and "self-determination", which actually have their roots in historical occurrences involving the United States -- the Texan secession, the war of 1847, the occupation of Veracruz, and Pershing's pursuit of Villa. Starting in the late summer of 1960, however, there have occurred a number of events seemingly indicative of an alteration in Mexican policy -- a withdrawal from its earlier tolerance of, even a certain sympathy for, Castro and his Mexican admirers, and a perceptible move towards a more nearly "centrist", more nearly Free-World line.^{1/}

There appears

^{1/} It is true, of course, that Mexico voted in the negative on December 4, 1961 on the Colombian proposals before the OAS for collective action against Cuba. A narrow juridical point of view, to which Foreign Minister Tello and some other Mexican officials attached much importance, and a strong feeling that collective action of any kind would undermine its policy of non-intervention prompted the Government's negative position on the Colombian initiative. Some Mexican officials state that they are definitely opposed to Castro-Communism, but express the hope that the Castro regime will collapse of its own economic weaknesses rather than as a result of "interventionist" collective action. The Government has taken great pains to point out that its vote does not in any way indicate sympathy toward Castro. There has been considerable concern among Mexicans over this apparent public identification of their Government with the Castro regime, and unhappiness in official quarters over reaction in other countries to Mexico's negative stand. This is still at issue, many influential Mexicans, including some important officials, attempting to bring about a modification of Mexico's purely "juridical" position prior to the Meeting of Foreign Ministers which is to take place on January 22, 1962. (See Embdes 694, December 11, 1961.)

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There appears to be an increased awareness on the part of the Mexican Government of the world situation and a growing suspicion that Mexico is not invulnerable to potential exploitation or subversion by international communism. The abortive invasion of Cuba in April 1961 may actually have contributed to a more practical outlook on the part of many Mexican officials who apparently have come to feel that Mexico can no longer depend entirely on the United States to protect the present Government against Communism, but rather that it must rely to a greater degree on its own resources and its domestic political stability. The growing awareness of discontent among the campesinos has led to a fear in Government circles that this may be successfully exploited by Cardenas and the Communist MLN, a definite possibility in the light of the past year's disturbances in various states and also the outright attempt to revolution in the GASCA uprisings of September 14-16, 1961.^{1/} Moreover, the flight of domestic capital produced by uncertainty as to Mexico's political orientation, and the Government's realization of the very real promise implicit in the Alliance for Progress appear to have engendered an atmosphere more conducive to Mexico's closer alignment with the United States and the West.

Immediately following the first indications that both the MLN and the Frente Civico appeared to have political aspirations, the PRI philosophy of unchallenged government was expressed by one of its leaders, who declared publicly that "There can be no proliferation of political parties within the Revolution." There is already evidence that the Government views the MLN and its front man, Cardenas, with something less than equanimity. Over the past several weeks, the semi-official daily newspaper, El Nacional, has been running a series of anti-Cardenas editorials ranging from relatively mild ridicule to virulent invective.^{2/} In one of the more recent of these, it was asserted that the MLN was dedicated to the establishment in Mexico of a Soviet-type government under Cardenas tutelage. With his extensive following among the campesinos, Cardenas is still a potent force to be reckoned with, and, to date, the PRI has apparently been reluctant to cross him openly.^{3/} Nevertheless, at such time as he may constitute a real menace to the Party, it will unquestionably take whatever counteraction may be necessary.

The Government's recent move to bring all seven ex-Presidents into the "official family" by giving each a Governmental office is regarded by many as a clever move on the part of President Lopez Mateos and the PRI to

accomplish

^{1/} Embdes 546, October 31, 1961.

^{2/} See Embdes 541, October 30, and 696, December 11, 1961.

^{3/} See Embdes 602, November 14, 1961.

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accomplish two things: firstly, to counter rumors about weaknesses in the PRI and lack of stability in the present administration; and, secondly, to put the more influential ex-Presidents -- Cardenas, Aleman, Ruiz Cortines, and Rodriguez -- in a position where they will work for, and answer to, Lopez Mateos, busying themselves in constructive work rather than engage in political maneuvering. ^{1/}

Cardenas and Aleman are certainly the two ex-Presidents of greatest political stature, and each holds policies diametrically opposed to the views of the other. It remains to be seen whether they will forego political activity (Cardenas on behalf of the MLN, and Aleman as the focal point for most conservatives), or whether they will attempt to use their new positions to exert greater influence in Government. The current and widely held belief is that the latter will hold true; that Cardenas will take advantage of his new office (head of the vast Rio Balsas irrigation and development program) to advance the MLN among peasant-farmer communities; that Rodriguez will continue to push the Frente Civico; that Aleman will pursue his strongly anti-communist line; and that Ruiz Cortines, whose position and recent activities remain unclear, may cast his lot with conservative groups despite his personal dislike of Aleman. But the PRI is a powerful institution and the President, despite current reports that his administration is becoming increasingly weak, is still an astute politician. Although the PRI is reportedly concerned about Lopez Mateos' future (the possibility of his enforced resignation "within six months" is openly discussed in Mexico City), it is clear that the Party cannot afford to let the present administration collapse without serious damage to its continued political dominance. Thus, it is not impossible that Lopez Mateos, with the full power of the PRI behind him, can succeed in curbing the political activities of the ex-Presidents, submerging them in the responsibilities of a "national unity" endeavor, and perhaps also moving actively to control -- or, if necessary, remove -- the MLN and the Frente Civico.

D. THE NEXT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

The eyes of all three factions, conservative, Communist, and Government "center", are fixed on the Presidential elections of 1964. Assuming the continued existence of the Frente Civico and the MLN with substantially the same programs they have today, it is clear that each must engage in an increasingly aggressive campaign to enlist popular support over the next three years. There are four major groups which weigh heavily in Mexico's national elections -- organized labor, the large number of government employees (including those in nationalized industry),

^{1/} Embdes 703, Dec. 13, 1961.

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industry), the middle class, and the campesinos. Given the structure of Mexican society, the political leanings of the first three groups are already well established. Thus, the campesino group -- comprising about 50 percent of the country's population and potentially a powerful political force -- is the one most likely to become a major bone of contention between the Communists and the conservatives. Each has certain initial advantages. The MLN and the Communists profit from the wide popularity of Lazaro Cardenas among the campesinos. They can exploit the campesino's growing awareness of his own poverty and the increasing gap in living standards between himself and the urban dwellers and government officials. The left can certainly be expected, as the next elections approach, to increase to a violent pitch its propaganda against American "economic imperialism" and "exploitation", against the Church and its alleged desire to pull Mexico back to the "social injustices of the 19th century", and against all conservative trends in Mexico as being allied with the Church, the extreme rightists, and the United States to destroy the advances made under the Mexican Revolution.

The Frente Civico and other anti-communist groupings suffer by comparison with the leftists because they have no prominent figure, at least for the present, whom they can use as a public spokesman. They will, of course, probably never have anyone of the stature of Cardenas to appeal to the campesinos. However, the conservative groups do start out with certain advantages among the campesinos. The latter, despite their occasional outbursts of violence, are essentially a conservative, clannish, property-loving people. They are passionately attached to their "tierra" and their small holdings, even though they may be communal land holders (ejidatarios). Moreover, the campesino woman is a much more influential member of the family than is generally admitted. She is a hard-working realist, outspoken, intolerant of radicals and others who try to upset established patterns of village life, and much more deeply influenced by the local priest or leading Catholic laymen than by any politician or local official.

Thus, both the leftists and the conservatives have certain initial assets in their move to enlist wide popular support among the campesinos. The Government and the PRI are fully aware of this situation and have already begun a campaign to reassure the campesinos of their future under the "Revolution".

Ideally, the PRI might hope that both the MLN and the Frente Civico remain as identifiable focal points for leftists and conservatives, easily kept under surveillance and kept in approximate balance. If either or both come to be regarded as threats to PRI stability and control, and particularly if either presses forward with real political leadership in opposition to the PRI

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or becomes too strong in rural Mexico, the PRI can be expected to move swiftly against it. Only time will tell whether the PRI can tolerate the continued existence of either group; whether, at a decisive moment, one of them will have unexpectedly gained enough power to dictate to the PRI; or, finally, whether the potentially explosive campesino group will support the MLN or the Frente Civico, perhaps even with violence, or continue to vote the PRI ticket.

Thomas C. Mann

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Ambassador

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