

Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menéndez

A new presidential frontrunner

The unveiling of Del Mazo as energy minister was just the first of the bombshells that have got Wall Street very perturbed.

During the week of April 17-22, a political earthquake shook Mexico's power structures and paved the way for a realignment of forces which may lead to important changes in the disastrous economic programs that have been implemented in this country.

When, the morning of the 17th, it was announced that Secretary of Mining and Energy Francisco Labastida Ochoa would be elected governor of the red-hot state of Sinaloa, the press went into a tizzy in favor of one candidate to assume the important vacancy of this strategic cabinet post: Mario Ramón Beteta, head of the state-owned oil company Pemex, ex-treasury secretary, former presidential candidate, and a good company Pemex, ex-treasury secretary, former presidential candidate, and a good pal of the international financial community. The trio was rounded out by presuming that Beteta would be succeeded at Pemex by Gustavo Petriccioli, now director of Nafinsa, the state-run finance company. His post would go to the current ambassador to the United States, Jorge Espinoza de los Reyes. This team, the media opined, would march in the front door of the presidential succession in 1988.

This script was still being taken for granted by most of the national press on the morning of April 19. But the whole costly campaign fell apart a few hours later, when President Miguel de la Madrid made his surprise announcement, that the new energy secretary would be Alfredo del Mazo, governor of the state of Mexico.

The decision turns Del Mazo into

the frontrunner for the presidential succession in 1988, which has been fought over between the treasury, interior, and budget secretaries. It may even herald changes in economic policy, which has up to now toed the International Monetary Fund line.

It should be noted that Alfredo del Mazo himself is a product of banking and financial networks. He was in the Cremi Bank, was vice-president of the National Banking Commission, and on the public-debt administration of the treasury. He was also adviser to various semi-public and private firms. However, before accepting the state of Mexico governorship, he ran the Banco Obrero (the labor bank) backed by the top leader of the Mexican Confederation of Labor, Fidel Velázquez.

This support, together with that of his friend Miguel de la Madrid, at the time a pre-candidate for President of Mexico, and that of Gustavo Carbajal, then chairman of the ruling PRI party, was what let Del Mazo bring a group different from the Hank González gang then running Mexico state, into that crucial state in 1981. One of Del Mazo's main objectives has been to dismantle, as far as possible, the paramilitary apparatus set up by Carlos Hank González and his predecessor Jiménez Cantu, as their fortress in the state of Mexico.

At that time, Beteta asked for the governorship of the state of Mexico, and was rejected by President José López Portillo and Fidel Velázquez.

Del Mazo is not just a close friend and "compadre" of the President. His main support comes from the labor

unions and the political networks of his father, governor of Mexico state and secretary of agriculture under President Adolfo López Mateos (1958-64). Del Mazo's father was so close to López Mateos that the President became Alfredo's godfather. The elder Del Mazo supported López Mateos in the historic deeds that moved the world: the founding of the Non-Aligned Movement with Nehru of India, Sukarno of Indonesia, Nasser of Egypt, and Tito of Yugoslavia among others. It was also López Mateos, fervently supported by Del Mazo senior, who nationalized the electrical industry, in those days owned by Mexican Light and Power Company, run in Mexico by Gen. Maxwell Taylor of Vietnam infamy.

And it was Adolfo López Mateos who invited the President of France, Gen. Charles de Gaulle, to Mexico. De Gaulle for the first and only time in Mexican history spoke from the presidential balcony to thousands of Mexicans, offering his support to Non-Alignment and to a new world economic order.

Mexico's creditors see in the Del Mazo naming and other political changes the possibility of a shift in the country's attitude toward the foreign debt problem and the conditions of austerity demanded by the International Monetary Fund. As the *Wall Street Journal* put it on April 21, commenting on the new nominations, "Pessimists say it will be nearly impossible for Mexico to implement any truly far reaching new economic program. The *tapadismo* [unveiling of candidates—ed.] works against such drama. Candidates are not supposed to draw any but the most innocent attention to themselves. . . ." In short, facing an electoral season, they might hesitate to impose the IMF's demands.