

Miguel de la Madrid became Mexico's president. Making use of this regional diplomatic forum, he has promoted a foreign policy that includes new approaches and tactics, although it retains its continuity with the policies of previous administrations. With Contadora, Mexican diplomacy took on a multilateral approach and was thus obliged to negotiate even its own previously held positions. This has meant that Mexico's Central America policy has become more discreet and that the government has had to moderate its friendly attitude toward the Sandinistas. With the Contadora process, Mexico took on the role of active mediator. It became an intermediary after having been a partisan. One example of this change is De la Madrid's role as the principal promoter of direct talks between Washington and Managua. As Mexico has adopted this more neutral position it has played a very important role in urging the Sandinistas to moderate their political postures. For Mexico, the success of the Contadora peace effort would mean stability on its

southern border and with that, the possibilities of economic development, political pluralism and the exercise of the right to self-determination for Central America. Nonetheless, and despite support from the international community, Contadora has faced serious difficulties, at times to the point that it seemed likely to die. Pressures from Washington, and the intransigence of the Central American governments have impeded the Group's work. Time and again in the last three years it was announced that an agreement was imminent, but efforts have yet to culminate in a signed accord. As 1986 began, Contadora's future seemed somewhat optimistic. The fact that three new governments would be inaugurated (in Guatemala, Honduras and Costa Rica) opened more room for political negotiation. With the Caraballeda Message and the Guatemala Declaration, the Central American countries and the Contadora support group (Argentina, Peru, Uruguay and Brazil) revived the peace efforts. The normalization of

diplomatic relations between Nicaragua and Costa Rica also helped to create a greater climate of detente and moderation in the isthmus. Nonetheless, as Secretary Sepulveda stated, there are no easy solutions for the Central American crisis. The Reagan administration's insistence on giving military aid to Nicaraguan counter-revolutionary groups pre-

sents a major obstacle to the peace effort. Mexico and other Latin American countries fear that this policy can only lead to direct military intervention in Nicaragua, and that would surely engulf the region in flames and bring to a sudden end the course of contemporary Latin American history.★

Horacio Castellanos Moya

AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE, THE CITY REBUILDS

Eight months ago, Mexico City was devastated by a killer earthquake that caused over 20,000 deaths and changed the city's center forever. Both its survivors and the government are rebuilding.

The lives of people in Mexico City were tragically disrupted eight months ago. The initial feelings of impotence and despair soon turned into solidarity and concern. Essential emergency and rescue work was taken up by ordinary people on such a scale that the government recently granted the



"Profits from the World Cup should go to reconstruction". Photo by Renzo Gostoli.

September 19 Medal, created especially to reward the efforts of the city's common people during the emergency, to over 4,000 volunteers. Today, results in home-rebuilding are being achieved by the very same people who were made homeless by the quake.

The tragedy aggravated previously existing problems. The destruction of thousands of homes, most of which had been built to house Mexico City's first factory workers, was added to the effects that the current economic crisis has on the lives of working class families.

When last September many of the city's working class barrios became disaster areas, thousands of people joined in emergency work. Brigades were formed to distribute food, women cooked hundreds of meals a day, rescue teams sprang

women and children desperately combed the ruins in search of a trapped family member or of lost belongings and remembrances.

Mercedes Lopez, a young 24 year old volunteer, said last September: "In Tepito -one of the barrios in Morelos- people are desolate. They stand in front of their wrecked homes and don't know what to do. The buildings that are still standing have large cracks in the walls, and the people are out in the open. Many lost their businesses. Some were fighting each other over the aid that was coming in. When we (the volunteers) arrived in the neighborhood people would pull us into their homes. They'd ask us who was going to rebuild their houses, as if we were representing the government."

The people of Morelos worked out an answer some six

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The day after. Photo by Jesús Carlos.

up overnight, technicians shored up damaged roofs and repaired information and transport networks. The heavily populated neighborhoods of Morelos, Guerrero, Centro, Tlatelolco, Emilio Carranza, Roma, Doctores, Peralvillo and many others, vibrated with activity.

The city no longer seems to have been devastated by war, nor is the broad sense of solidarity still with us. There were still 23 thousand people living out in the open in March, and another 30 thousand live with relatives or have returned to their damaged homes although they are unsuitable and unsafe.

As in many things, there are two sides to the process of rebuilding housing in Mexico City. On the one hand, the government issued a decree expropriating over 3,000 city lots and buildings and set up a special government agency to carry out the housing renovation program. But on the other hand, many of the actual short-term solutions to the problem are coming from the people directly affected by the earthquake.

Government priority has been to restore damaged health and education facilities, and this has been an important factor in leading the **damnificados** (the people directly affected by the earthquake) to start rebuilding their own homes. Ismael Hernandez, long time resident of the Morelos neighborhood, and a member of the Popular Tenants Union, says: "We organized ourselves to clean up the rubble right after the earthquake. We decided to put our houses back on their feet ourselves because we don't want to go on being the same (people)."

Living quarters, stores and small family work shops line the narrow streets of Morelos. When it was semi-destroyed, men,

months later. "The tenants themselves are building their own housing," says Ismael Hernandez. "At the beginning of our eight-hour voluntary work day we talk and agree on a division of tasks. We are instructed by our master bricklayer and by young architects from the National University. They show us how to build a wall, how to mix cement and sand, how to lay foundations."

Juan Carlos works along with Ismael. He believes that the tenants' reconstruction work is a turning point in their lives. "We've learned bricklaying, electricity and plumbing. Women have played a very important role. They carry bricks, bring in the sand and help the bricklayers. Youngsters have also been of immense help, as many of them have stopped going to school to work full time on reconstruction. You can't go to school when you're living out on the street."

The earthquake damaged 60% of the housing in the Colonia Morelos. The Tenants Union has drawn up a series of reconstruction projects with the help of architects from the nonprofit association House and City. Housing at Relojeros 42, Pintores 86 and Tapiceria 88* is already in the process of being rebuilt. Special attention is paid to respect for local custom, such as the inner patio that is held in common by all tenants.

Manuel Rodriguez is a leader of the Tenants Union. He talks about the consciousness-raising effect these six intense

* These colorful names are reminders of the Colonia's origins, a neighborhood of artisans: watchmakers, painters, upholstery.

months of work are having on people. "The quakes generated consciousness on the need to help each other, a kind of solidarity which wouldn't exist in Mexico City under normal conditions. Now we can say we are going to rebuild our homes and keep our barrio."

Along with other social consequences, the 1985 earthquake gave rise to problems that have stimulated communal organization in the barrios. Instead of passively waiting for others to propose solutions or start the work, the Colonia Guerrero is another example of a neighborhood that now boasts several housing units rebuilt by their inhabitants. There is a sense of urgency in the work, both in the need to build altogether new housing and in the job of shoring up and remodeling damaged structures. The heavy rainy season

habitants of the lots and buildings expropriated by the Mexico City government shortly after the earthquake. A total of 45,000 certificates, in which the government agrees to repair damages or build new housing, will eventually be distributed. Nonetheless, the leaders of the Colonia Guerrero's Tenants Union still fear their proposals won't be entirely taken into account. Manuel Muñoz, spoke to us at the Union's headquarters, set up nine years ago when two buildings in the neighborhood collapsed. "We neighbors of Guerrero want a reconstruction project that will respect our roots in the barrio and our organized participation in the work," said Manuel.

In order to dispel such fears, last March President Miguel de la Madrid personally inspected the Housing Renovation

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Refuge for earthquake victims at Tlatelolco. Photo by Renzo Gostoli.

starts in May and brings with it the danger that damaged walls and roofs may cave in.

Other Colonias, such as Doctores and Roma, managed to find funding for their reconstruction projects with religious groups and nonprofit organizations. The Tenants Union in Doctores has completed projects for rehabilitating 32 buildings which will house 357 families. The neighborhood organization said that 40 million pesos (some \$80,000) came from UNESCO, and another 31 million (some \$62,000) have been provided by a nonprofit group called Peace and Development.

The old downtown area has 1,500 affected families, and 278 inhabited buildings are in danger of collapsing. There is no registered legal owner for these buildings, so there is nobody the tenants can buy them from. This type of problem led people to set up an organization that coordinates the efforts of those with loss of or damage to their living quarters because of the earthquake. Despite the government's good will and efforts, this problem and others have yet to be resolved.

On the other hand, the General Office for Housing Renovation distributed over 26,000 certificates of ownership to the in-

Program to see how it was being carried out. "I will accept neither bureaucratic fumbling nor resistance on the part of lower level government employees to hinder or slow down the program," said the president.

The grassroots organizations also mean to act against bureaucratic botching. The Coordinating Committee is working to mobilize the Mexican people to guarantee that the president's intentions are fully carried out. They also mean to push for the dismissal of incompetent public employees involved in reconstruction programs.

In the words of Ismael, long time dweller of the Morelos barrio, "We will never be the same again." The disaster that struck the city actually opened the way for vigorous people to rebuild their homes and themselves.

There is little doubt that if it weren't for the international pressures that force the country to dedicate most of its income to paying off its foreign debt, Mexico would be completely rebuilt by now, and more vigorous than ever. ★

Jorge Luis Sierra Guzmán