

Rogelio Hernández

# PRESIDENT SALINAS WORKS FOR NATIONAL CONSENSUS

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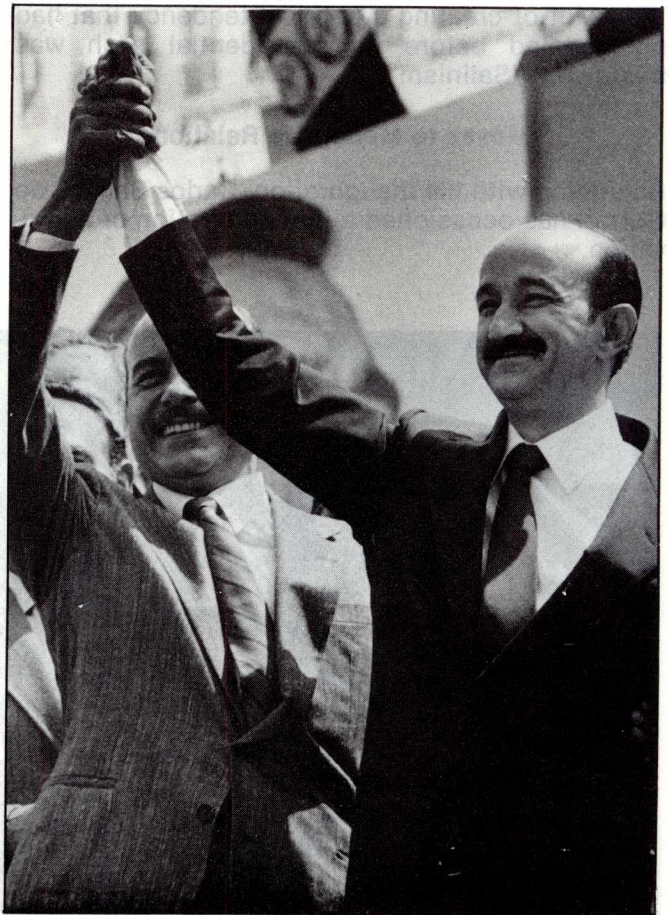
In the spring of 1987, Federal Deputy Luis Donaldo Colosio declared himself one of the few Salinists at that time:

"The Budget secretary, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, is one of the very few who have an integral perspective on national problems and possess a political project with which to face the economic crisis," insisted the man who would later be the president of the National Executive Committee (CEN) of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI).

In that meeting, the supporters of the ex-president of the Chamber of Deputies Budget Commission considered the basis of their conviction and calculated the scarce support that their precandidate commanded at that moment. This raised doubts about the existence of his "political project" to deal with the problems of the national economy.

By May of 1989, the first 150 days since Carlos Salinas de Gortari took office as the constitutional President of Mexico had passed and the opinion of Luis Donaldo Colosio had become generalized mainly as a result, of the President's long-range political initiatives.

Few sectors of the Mexican society have not been shaken up by one or another of the decisions that Salinas de Gortari has made as President of the Republic. With his very active politics and his drive to modernize the economy and economic relations, the 40 year-old President has even suc-



Salinas de Gortari, PRI candidate to the Presidency. Photo by Marco A. Cruz/Imagen Latina

ceeded in attracting such parties as the PARM (Party of the Authentic Mexican Revolution) and the Cardenist Front for National Reconstruction, which formed part of the pro-Cárdenas National Democratic Front coalition during last year's elections. And Salinas has also been able to incorporate the most conservative party, National Action (PAN), into the rules of the game, although this party had threat-

Reporter and analyst of political affairs for the newspaper, *El Excelsior*.



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ened to conduct widescale boycotts of the economic and political systems in protest against electoral fraud.

The man who began his legal stay in office accused by both political tendencies, and in some places abroad as well, of lacking legitimacy, and who, besides continuity in economic policy, did not possess a project deserving of national support; who began his term without a political team of national significance or a proposal to develop one quickly, in five months has generated broad recognition of his "political skill" and his "ability to take the initiative rapidly". He has gained consensus, to the point of creating a political tendency that had not existed before the presidential sash was bestowed: "Salinism".

**Moves to Modernize Relations**

Beginning with his inauguration, Carlos Salinas de Gortari has occasioned either admiration or aggravation.

For example, departing from traditional Mexican protocol, but in a style common to many countries, he invited the heads of state of Argentina, Belize, El Salvador, Honduras, Cuba, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Colombia to the inauguration ceremony. Afterwards, the majority of the political left criticized Fidel Castro and Daniel Ortega, the leaders of Cuba and Nicaragua, for "legitimizing the Salinas government with their presence". But the action, and its effects, had already taken place.

This same day, Salinas upset more people with the presence in the Legislative Palace of high-level officials of the Catholic church headed by the Roman apostolic delegate, Gerolamo Prigione and the president of the episcopate, Ernesto Corripio Ahumada. Once again, the leaders of the left and even some members of the PRI, were alarmed about a "regression in the separation of Church and State". But Salinas responded laconically during the ceremony: "It is necessary to modernize relations".

The next day, Carlos Salinas de Gortari revealed a political project he had not announced previously: he installed a National Commission of Solidarity Programs and drew to this organization and its subcommittees people segregated by other administrations because of their critical or leftist tendencies, such as Carlos Tello Macías, who nationalized the banks, and Rolando Cordera Campos, one of the most highly respected critics within this political field.

This same day it became obvious that the strat-



President of the Republic. Photo by Marco A. Cruz/Imagen Latina



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egy of coordinating a variety of political tendencies would not be limited to the political left. Showing a photograph as evidence, Salinas calmly declared that he had met with the leadership of the National Action Party (PAN), including one of his fiercest opponents: Manuel J. Clouthier, one of his four rivals in the presidential elections.

#### **Demonstrations of Power**

During the month of December the initiative that governed from the National Palace made several "blows" that revealed power where many asserted none existed; apart from minor actions and decisions, on the 12th, prominent politicians signed the Pact for Stability and Economic Growth (PECE) which, with modifications, was a continuation of a document designed by the Budget ministry under the administration of Miguel de la Madrid. According to observers, the Pact had slowed and even diminished the inflation rate, which had been high for two presidential terms.

Two days later, on December 14, the first of several important agreements with opposition forces in the social sector began. The first meeting was held of what would later become an organization that would coordinate the peasant movement, officialist organisms and the majority of leftist tendencies in rural areas: the Permanent Agrarian Congress, an organization similar to that which coordinates the majority of the important unions, the Labor Congress.

Within 24 hours came another action, this one well received by the left and by labor: a packet of fiscal initiatives was sent to Congress in which a new tax on capital that directly affected profits was proposed, and it was approved: a 2 percent tax on fixed assets. This produced a public confrontation with business representatives which had not yet been fully resolved in May.

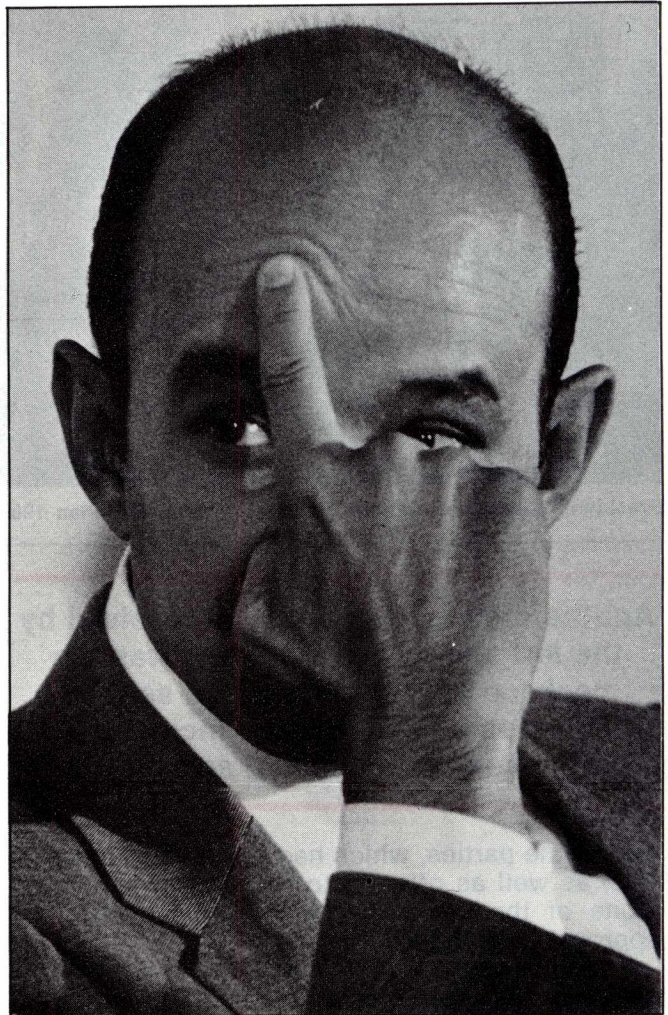
#### **Search for Recognition**

Definitive steps indicated the political direction that was going to be followed. Other actions began

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"Political skill and swift initiatives". Photo by Angeles Torrejón/Imagen Latina

to fill in the outline even more: the December 19 break-up of the National Democratic Front (FDN) began with an interview between leaders of the Authentic Party of the Mexican Revolution (PARM) and Carlos Salinas de Gortari. This organization, which had formally endorsed Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, began to be criticized immediately because it had not consulted the other members of the FDN before the meeting with Salinas. Another interview with the opposition took place December 23, this time with the Mexican Democratic Party (PDM), a right-wing party which lost its register in the July elections because it did not receive the required 1.5 percent of the votes. The motivation underlying these actions, as with the meeting with the PAN, was to demonstrate the existence of Salinas presidential authority.

In February, a less active but not less effective month, besides the formal activities required of every head of state, Carlos Salinas de Gortari announced his consent to the revision of the Federal Electoral Code, which had been repeatedly criticized by the opposition as "the basis of the electoral fraud committed on July 6". He called for the Code to be reviewed and offered equal representation to the parties in the commission in charge of the re-evaluation (he put the PRI on the same level as the





President Salinas presents the National Development Plan 1989-94, May 31, 1989. Photo by Angeles Torrejón/Imagen Latina

**Another action, this one well received by the left and by labor groups, was the package of fiscal initiatives sent to Congress. This package included a proposed tax on capital and profits**

rest of the parties, which had never been done before) as well as offering to call extraordinary sessions of the Congress for the "discussion and approval of changes".

The next day, the first of a series of more spectacular actions took place. Joaquín Hernández Galicia, "La Quina", along with other leaders of the oil workers union, was arrested. The organization had been repeatedly criticized as a source of personal wealth and of gangster-like practices. Besides, the union leadership had severely criticized Salinas during his electoral campaign for the elitist economic policy which he declared he would follow.

Reactions to this initiative were varied, but the majority were supportive of the measure. Part of the FDN criticized the arrest as unconstitutional for the manner in which it had taken place and also as an obvious intrusion on union matters. Salinas heard some criticisms personally when he met a second time with the PAN's national executive committee.

The Salinas administration continued to emit decisions which led to polemical debates among observers and political participants. The arrest and imprisonment for fraud of various executives of the stockbroking firms *Operadora de Bolsa and Mexi-*

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cal" was ordered on February 13. Among them was the brother of Agustín F. Legorreta, president of COPARMEX, the most important entrepreneurial association in Mexico. In this case, as with the oil workers' leaders, the executives' illegal actions were open secrets and it was assumed that they would not be charged because they were "part of the network of mutual support that exists in Mexico."

#### Work to Win Consensus

Ten days later, another measure, which initially received general approval, was made known: the intention to modify laws and accords to grant a pardon to 403 political prisoners, in a country where officially none existed. The legislation, nevertheless, was not as expeditious and benevolent as it purported to be; by May only six people had been freed and the last four ex-guerrilla fighters in prison had been excluded from the pardon.

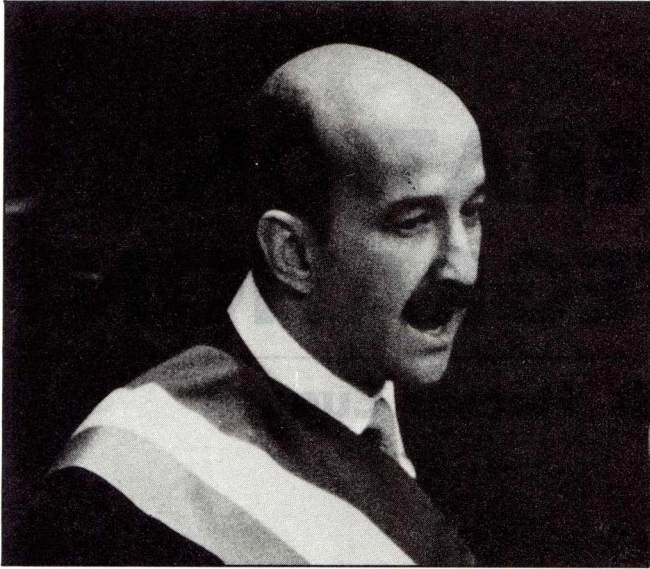
**Another initiative which received general approval was the intention to modify laws so as to grant a pardon to 403 political prisoners, in a country where officially none of these existed**

Also in May, the Salinas administration began the renegotiation of the foreign debt.

"Untouchables" continued to fall. In March it was Miguel Félix Gallardo, one of the most important drug traffickers in Mexico, with a great deal of influence in the United States and Colombia; later Miguel Ángel Rico Urrea, another important trafficker, was also detained.

In April, pressured by a country-wide teachers' movement which demanded a 100 percent salary hike and union democracy, the Salinas administration responded with the "voluntary retirement" of another corrupt union leader, Carlos Jonguitud Barrios, as well as an offer of a 25 percent salary increase in spite of the 10 percent limit established





The swearing in of the new President, December 1, 1988. Photo by Marco A. Cruz/Imagen Latina

by the Pact for Stability and Economic Growth (PECE). However, the dissident teachers continued the strike, prolonging the movement until May. They did not consider the increase to be sufficient and felt that Elba Esther Gordillo, the new leader of Mexico's largest trade union, the National Educational Workers' Union (SNTE), was no assurance of union democracy.

### Blows to the left and to the right, appealing to the nation's general interests, clearly within the political project of gaining consensus and directing a way out of the crisis

In conclusion, the majority of the decisions mentioned indicate a new type of government for Mexico. Included in this group is the determination made in the beginning of May to dismiss 23,000 thousand workers of the Mexico City bus company, Ruta 100, in answer to another forceful movement demanding a salary increase. Decisions taken so far by the Salinas government include fierce blows to the left and to the right, and appeal to the general interests of the nation, but clearly within the political project of gaining consensus and directing a way out of the crisis.

So, 150 days after taking office as constitutional president of Mexico, the opinions in favor of Carlos Salinas de Gortari seemed to be in the majority. He was generally seen as a leader who has quickly gained legitimacy with strong, direct actions, while opposition protests that "he had won the election through a corrupt process and with the help of a ruling by the Congress in which the results of almost 5,000 thousand voting booths were omitted", were apparently subdued. □