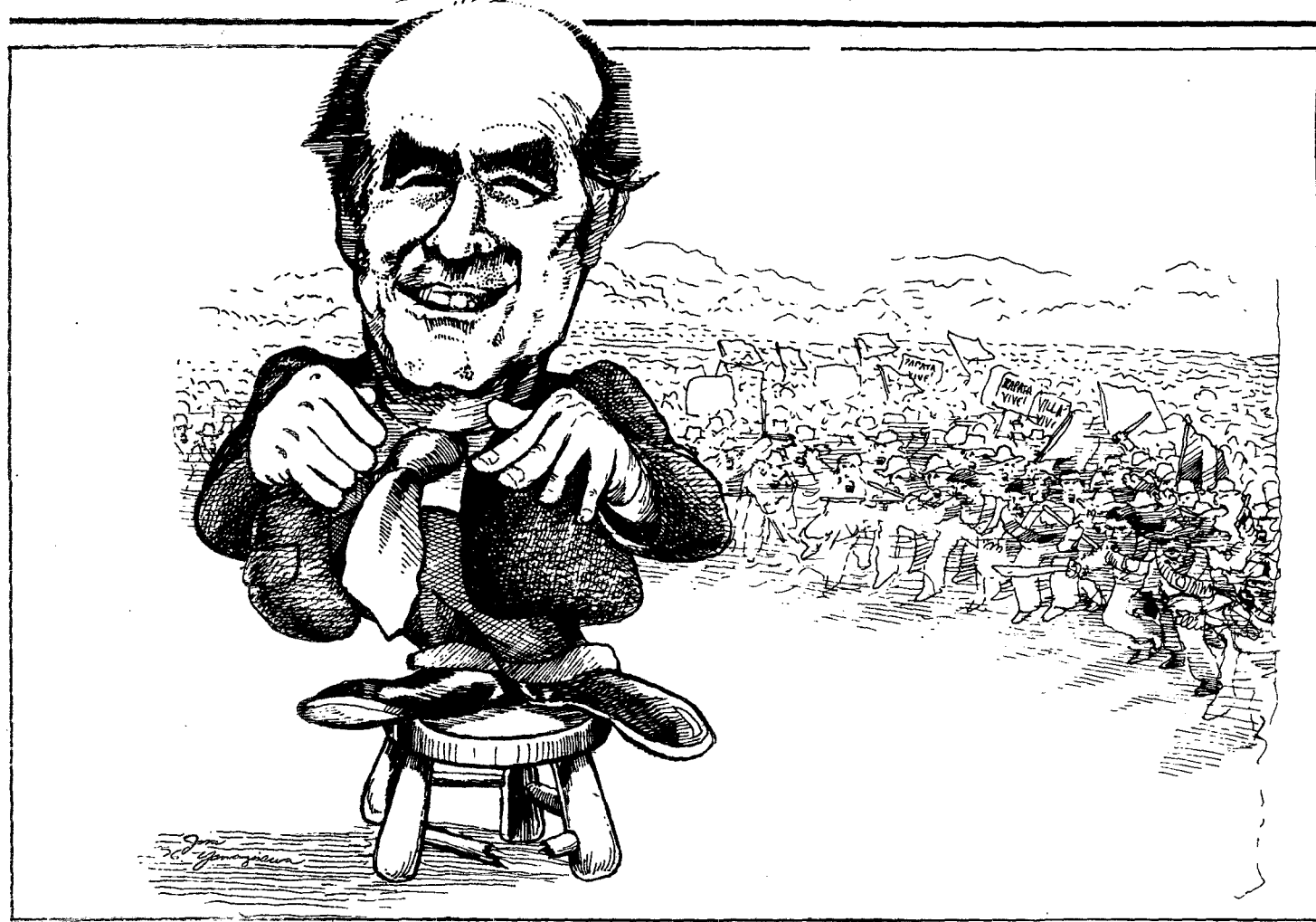


# IN THE WORLD



## Mexican agrarian conflict

By Margit Birge

Berkeley, Calif. Farmworkers and peasants lined the road through the Yaqui Valley of Sonora, the Mexican state bordering Arizona. "We're waiting for the president who will declare that this land is ours," a man said.

Some of the richest agricultural lands in Latin America are in the valley and it produces 45 percent of Mexico's wheat, so the stakes were high. Hundreds of army troops were stationed there, sent to isolate workers occupying land with rifles and machineguns. In two years, more than 100 farmworkers have been killed in confrontations with the army, police and landowners.

But this time, in early November, most farmworkers were confident that Echeverria government's promises to distribute all big landholdings would be fulfilled.

For some, their wish came true. Acting on the Agrarian Reform Law that prohibits landholdings of more than 250 acres, President Luis Echeverria expropriated 240,000 acres of land Nov. 19 and distributed it to 9,000 farmworker families. The government hoped this would regain farmworker support for the 40-year ruling Institutional Revolutionary party. Their support was especially needed after devaluations brought price increases of up to 100 percent on basic food items and provoked widespread discontent.

But the conflict cannot be resolved so quickly. The new government of Jose Lopez Portillo, which took office Dec. 1, faces growing political pressures from all sides.

Land invasions are continuing everywhere, despite press-created images that the conflict has been settled. Growing numbers of workers are joining independent organizations challenging party-controlled peasant and farmworker unions. In addition, landowners are making tighter alliances with business groups to protest expropriations. Meanwhile, economic conditions that forced farmworkers to take mass actions have not changed. And the economic crisis affecting all capitalist countries leaves little room for the government to maneuver.

### ►Growing migrant force.

Changes in the Mexican fields are similar to those in U.S. agriculture. Agribusiness corporations have bought land and are

***"The new government of Jose Lopez Portillo, which took office Dec. 1, faces growing political pressures from all sides."***

monopolizing the marketing of fresh produce. U.S. corporations often provide the only source of credit, seeds and fertilizer for small farmers; in this way, with landowners, they can control production.

Small farmers who cannot afford the new technology or who cannot compete with big landowners are being forced to lease their land and work on the big estates. Together with farmworkers who do not own land, these farmers make up a growing migrant labor force that travels the coast each year, following the crops as they are harvested.

Farmworkers in northwest Mexico harvest vegetables that make up more than \$100 million a year in exports. Yet they rarely earn more than \$5 a day if they can work year-round. This is why many farmworkers go to central Mexico cities or come to the U.S. in search of better jobs.

The recession of course has meant fewer jobs in the cities and stricter immigration controls at the border. And this is what has provoked the militant invasions.

Farmworker actions are part of a wave of land invasions that began in 1975. By this November, close to 50,000 farmworkers had mobilized to demand land throughout northwest Mexico.

A central issue of the agrarian conflict is the invasion leadership.

In Sonora, the Independent Peasant Front, an organization not connected with the party, initiated most of the invasions. Their move forced the party-backed Pacto de Ocampo, a coalition of several farmworker organizations, to support the mobilizations.

In Sinaloa, just south of Sonora, party-backed groups have urged farmworkers to end occupations after a few days and wait for court rulings to resolve the conflict. (Many farmworkers have waited 20 to 30 years for court rulings on expropriations.) In contrast, independent groups have been more militant and have paralyzed production for weeks.

### ►Violence and land.

The Echeverria government responded by using violence against the more militant groups and rewarding loyal party followers with expropriated land. The same contradictory policy was followed with landowners: Echeverria criticized "greedy" landowners for using the economic situation for private gain, while simultaneously supporting their right to block land-reform implementation through the courts.

When Echeverria left office, neither landowners nor farmworkers were satisfied. Agribusiness interests made alliances with the National Chambers of Commerce and Industry to protest government policy. Businesses and industries in at least eight states participated Nov. 24 in a shutdown to protest the Sonora land expropriation.

For farmworkers, the future is uncertain. Expropriations may not hold up against court challenges. If the expropriations do hold, those who benefit and receive land will need large amounts of technical aid, in addition to seeds and fertilizer. Most planting must be finished by Dec. 15, so time is running short. If farmworkers cannot form collective marketing arrangements they will not obtain good prices.

Already farmworkers who received land distributed last year in Sinaloa are renting it back to original owners, who have the technology and training necessary to run production. If that pattern continues, it raises doubts about the viability of redistributing land under the present system.

The situation in the countryside remains tense. Farmworkers without land continue their fight. Thousands are still camped as of mid-December along to roads in Sinaloa. Invasions continue throughout the country. Independent groups from all over the country are organizing a national, independent farmworkers and peasant organization. About 2,000 farmworkers camped for 36 hours Dec. 8 in the offices of the agrarian reform secretary in Mexico City. They told reporters: "Not even God will stop our fight."

Margit Birge, who works at Peoples Translation Service in Berkeley, Calif., has just returned from a five-week trip to Mexico. Two years ago she studied political economy at the National Autonomous University in Mexico City.

## IN SHORT

### ***Spanish elections show desire to end Franco era***

Madrid. In a statement issued Dec. 16, Spain's main Socialist party said the vast number of "yes" votes in the nationwide referendum on political reform showed the people's desire for getting rid of the system bequeathed by Gen. Francisco Franco.

The Socialist Workers' party, which had supported the boycott, accused the government of abusing its control of the news media and using bans on public meetings and arrests to silence the opposition during the campaign.

It said if general elections, scheduled before June under the reforms, were held in the same conditions, "they would be a farce."

Certainly the opposition's campaign was dwarfed by the government's massive advertising drive and only a handful of the politicians allowed to speak on television recommended a boycott.

The average Spaniard saw few of the anti-referendum wall slogans painted on the streets of Madrid and Barcelona. They were quickly whitewashed over by the authorities during the night.

—Reuters

### ***While Portuguese parties all claim election gains***

Lisbon, Portugal. Portuguese Prime Minister Mario Soares declared Dec. 12's local government elections gave his minority Socialist government a vote of confidence—but three opposition leaders disagreed.

They questioned his claim, insisting in a televised debate Dec. 13 that each of their parties had made the most gains.

In a low turnout—65 percent voted, compared with 75 percent in the June presidential election and 92 percent in the April parliamentary poll—the Socialist party led with 33.28 percent of the votes with results in 30 of the 4,035 parishes still to be declared.

It was followed by the Social Democrat party 24.28 percent, the United Peoples Electoral Front (Communist) 17.69, the Center Democrat party 16.63 and the Popular Unity Movement (radical left) 2.49 percent.

Soares said the vote was for town hall officials rather than a national government but noted that opposition parties had presented it as a plebiscite on his government. "It was a certain victory for the Socialists in this respect too," he said.

Socialists dropped 2 percent from the poll in the April parliamentary elections. They have been ruling for five months as the country's first democratic government in 30 years. Communists did a bit better than before. The others were little changed in their percentages.

Prof. Diogo Freitas do Amaral of the Center Democrats said the outcome showed government support was limited strictly to the Socialist electorate.

Dr. Francisco sa Carneiro, chairman of the Social Democrats, said he did not wish to join in a coalition government with the Socialists.

—Reuters



Exclusive

# New U.S. Africa policy urged

By Charles C. Diggs Jr.

Washington. I have returned from a fact-finding mission to southern Africa—strengthened in my resolve to press for new American policies.

First, we must recognize that racist South Africa is the principal threat to peace in that whole area. South Africa is the principal supporter of the white-minority regime in Zimbabwe/Rhodesia. Without the military and economic assistance plus access to the outside world that South Africa provides, Rhodesia would collapse.

Although South Africa exerted some influence on the Rhodesians in concert with Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger's initiatives, it obviously has not been a maximum effort. This has contributed significantly to the frustrations at the Geneva conference.

Indeed, after Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Smith agreed to the five-point Kissinger plan, South Africa ended its slowdown of goods en route to southern Rhodesia and South African Prime Minister John Vorster has refused to implement economic sanctions against the rebel colony. While I was there, newspapers carried stories of South African families who were opening their homes to provide rest-and-recuperation vacations to Rhodesian soldiers and their families.

Additionally, South Africa, the illegal administrator of Namibia, controls the Turnhalle conference proceedings in Windhoek, where a handpicked, unrepresentative group is attempting to direct that country's destiny along lines of the "separate development" concept to keep the white minority in charge.

Finally, South Africa has reaffirmed its total rejection of sharing political power with nonwhites and further has refused to establish equality between groups with respect to job opportunities, wages, education, housing, public accommodations or the criminal justice system.

Based on this, American policy must be uncompromising. We must support greater economic pressure against South Africa and discourage investments there by American private enterprise. We must tighten the arms embargo. We must put visa applications by South Africans to visit the U.S. under the strictest controls, in conformity with visa controls South Africa exercises over Americans, particularly those who are black.

We must convert our diplomatic missions in South Africa to communication centers for all the people, not just whites. We must isolate South Africa diplomatically, intellectually and culturally by discouraging our scho-



Charles C. Diggs Jr.

Photo by UPI

lars, athletes and entertainers from visits there.

Most importantly, we must disabuse the Western world of the myth that South Africa can rightfully claim to belong to the free world democracies. Present-day South Africa must be recognized as the repressive, totalitarian system it is.

In South Africa, there is no right of habeas corpus; no protection against search and seizure, preventive detention is a daily practice; torture is a common occurrence in the detention centers where hundred of youths have been herded since June 16; there is taxation without representation for the vast majority of the population; there is a vast security network that invades the privacy of all individuals on a routine basis. In short, there are gross violations of human rights and civil liberties that would shock the American people if the truth were known.

There are other steps that must be

taken involving other areas that are interrelated.

We must buttress the economies of those nations who have been so severely affected by the southern Africa crisis—Zambia, Tanzania, Angola, Mozambique, Lesotho, Botswana and Swaziland. We must insist on selection of American personnel for relevant positions within the State department and other international agencies who are sensitive in implementing a national policy and are representative of our population.

We must educate the American people and their elected representatives in Congress that it is in our best interest to pursue a progressive posture.

Rep. Charles C. Diggs Jr. (D-Mich.), who has just returned from a study mission to South Africa, where he compiled information on racial conditions and political problems, has written this article exclusively for *In These Times*. He also attended the Geneva conference and the American-African conference in Lesotho.

## Black leaders push Carter vs. S. Africa

Washington. A group of prominent blacks influential in U.S. politics and civil rights organizations has issued a strongly worded statement on U.S. policies in southern Africa after returning from a recent conference there.

Their demands may force President-elect Carter into a delicate balancing act. He will be under heavy pressure from blacks who elected him to change U.S. policy while trying not to endanger U.S. economic interests in the region.

"We African-Americans," wrote delegates to the African-American Conference in Maseru, Lesotho, "are in a peculiar power position because we are a significant political force within the nation that has the greatest potential to influence events in Africa."

Their statement called for nine courses of action, most significantly support for liberation movements in Africa, by "the most effective means available, including, if necessary, force." They also called for support for U.N. sanctions against South Africa, tax punishments for U.S. businesses that invest there, direct economic assistance to "frontline" nations bordering Zimbabwe and South Africa, and black influence on Carter's cabinet and other appointments that affect African affairs.

Black conference participants from the U.S. included members of the Congressional Black Caucus such as Yvonne Braithwaite Burke, Charles C. Diggs Jr., Cardiss Collins and Andrew Young. (Young Dec. 16 was named U.S. ambassador to the U.N.) Also present were Mayor Richard Hatcher of Gary, Ind., Georgia state senator Julian Bond, Manhattan borough president Percy Sutton and representatives from organized labor and well-known civil rights organizations.

Delegates announced their intention to "develop a forceful lobby...to build a broad-based constituency in support of African objectives." The lobby, the statement said, "will press for greater recognition that South Africa is the root of the problem of oppressive minority rule" and a "threat to world peace."

The most recent set of U.N.-imposed sanctions against South Africa for its continued illegal occupation of Namibia were vetoed by the U.S. "We will insist," the African-American delegates wrote, that the new administration support these sanctions. Young's appointment could result in some quick diplomatic shuffles and major compromises on sanctions.

Carter will have a problem if delegates press their demand for "tax disincentives and appropriate executive action to discourage or prohibit further investment by Americans in the South African economy." Although the demand is a powerful tool, any interference with U.S. commerce in South Africa will not go well with Carter's business constituency.

Carter will also have to push hard to get increased aid to the frontline nations through Congress, as delegates want. The last session of Congress killed, with Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's blessing, an aid package to hard-pressed Mozambique. The Mozambicans, hardly able to provide basic necessities for themselves, are being drawn into the war in Zimbabwe and have been attacked by white Rhodesians several times.

Delegates supported a quid pro quo on admission of South African citizens into the U.S. since "many Americans are denied visas to visit South Africa and the right of transit to the landlocked kingdom of Lesotho in violation of international law."

The statement closed with a call for partnership between African-Americans and "brothers and sisters in Africa to secure the human rights of all African peoples both in the motherland and the Diaspora."

—Tim Frasca

## South African leader urges official investigation of political detainees

Johannesburg, South Africa. Black leader Sonney Leon Dec. 16 urged the Geneva-based International Commission of Jurists to investigate the deaths of detainees in police custody in South Africa.

His pleas followed the alleged suicide Dec. 15 of black high school teacher George Botha, 30, who fell six floors to his death down a stairwell while being taken to security police offices in Port Elizabeth.

Amid mounting public concern, the independent Institute of Race Relations, in a report last week, said at least 13 people have died in detention in the past year. Eight of them were held under the security laws and five of these were alleged to have committed suicide.

"The idea that people can be murdered in custody is a particularly horrible one," the *Rand Daily Mail* said in an editorial Dec. 16.

Police said Botha, who had been arrested Dec. 10, flung himself over a railing and down a stairwell as he reached the offices with his police escort. Police have not said why Botha was being held.

His wife, Pralene Botha, said: "The police said he had committed suicide. This is a terrible shock to me. He was not the sort of person who would do it."

Botha's suicide followed the Dec. 11 death in custody of an Oxford-educated black engineer found hanged in a police cell after being arrested on suspicion of plotting urban guerrilla actions.

That dead man was Wellington Tsha-

zibane, 30, a close friend of Isaac Siko, who police say tried to blow up a restaurant here Dec. 7.

Tshazibane, who held an honors B.S. degree in design engineering from Oxford University, England, as well as an M.S. degree from Britain's Salford University, was arrested Dec. 9 when he arrived from Lesotho at Rand Airport here, police sources said.

His mother, Joyce Mavuso, said police took him home, searched the house and took away documents. On Dec. 11 police told her her son had hanged himself with a strip of blanket in his cell at John Vorster Square police station. They said a note was found by the body.

—Reuter