

Plans for the Future

Salinas's program for the Mexico of tomorrow

In Mexico City last week, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, 40, who will almost certainly become the next president of Mexico, was interviewed by Mexico City Bureau Chief Stryker McGuire and a group of NEWSWEEK editors. Excerpts:

NEWSWEEK: Do you envision the possibility within your political lifetime of someone other than a PRI candidate winning a presidential election?

SALINAS: I will work very hard for that not to happen, but I will always accept the verdict of the voters. But polls, research, evidence show that there is a sound majority behind the presidential candidate of the PRI. I find the competition growing stronger at the Congress level, at the municipal [level] and even in the gubernatorial races. It will have to go through steps. That is the way the electorate will show its preferences.

Would you consider naming to your cabinet people who are not members of the PRI?

That has happened in the past. But I will look for people with the capacity, the experience, the knowledge to face the tasks of running government . . . [As for] inviting people who openly participate in opposition parties, I think the answer would be no.

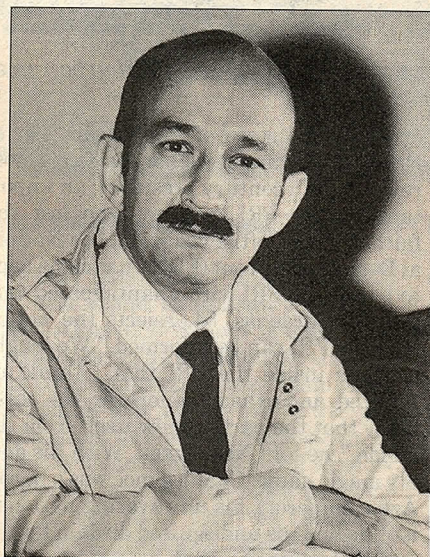
Do you think that the time has come, given the economic conditions in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America, to wipe the debt slate clean?

I believe that we will get more from firm negotiation than from open confrontation. The market already shows that the value of Mexican debt is below its face value. Well, we want to take advantage of that situation. I do not contemplate a debtors' club, but for me it's important [to have] dialogue and coordination among debtor countries.

I believe that we will have better results in negotiations if we have a more solid domestic economic basis. For me, it's fundamental to clean the house first as a precondition to have a stronger arm in dealing with the creditors. That means price stabilization, almost no public-sector deficit, the possibility of recovering growth. That job is almost done, and I am planning to consolidate it and from that firm basis do a stronger negotiation.

What about the high unemployment rate and the fact that the Mexican people's purchasing power has dropped so much?

That's why I have insisted that growth is a necessity in Mexico, not merely a goal. It's a necessity because every year, 1 million people enter the labor market demanding jobs, and I would rather have them working in Mexico than elsewhere. And we have now the possibility to grow without inflation. So I am planning to promote growth and to strengthen our domestic market with an export-oriented economy.



SERGIO DORANTES—SYGMA

'Clean the house first': The Candidate

Could you undertake any kind of ambitious program like that without first keeping more of Mexico's money inside Mexico?

That's why I have said that I will rely heavily on private investment and also give additional stimulus to foreign investment, so as to strengthen savings in Mexico to promote growth. Yes, we need the money, and I am not planning to print money to finance these programs. That's why I have invited the private sector to participate more in building roads, dams or a Metro line, to participate more in the telephone company. That is, we have to use more of private savings to promote the growth of the country. The public sector does not have the room to tackle all aspects of economic life. The past has proven that to be the case.

Will the selection of your successor be different than it has been in the past?

Let's wait first for the result of the recent elections. I can answer that question for you in July or August.

What are some of the specific reforms you would like to see in Mexico?

We need a better relationship between the executive branch and the legislative branch. I believe that Congress, and specifically the Chambers of Deputies, must have a greater responsibility in several respects. One is establishing a fixed amount for the ceiling for foreign indebtedness in Mexico, with no exceptions to the ceiling they impose.

I have also said that I am willing to talk with the press about the relationship between the government and the media. I asked them to make proposals. I am convinced of the need for a free press.

Do you think that the criticisms of the Mexican political system that have come from the United States have been constructive in recent years?

I think that you should understand that a political system that has allowed more than 60 years of peaceful transfer of power is something that you cannot put aside easily. I have made a commitment to modernize it but not to [make it] disappear—that is, to recognize more competition, to recognize the plurality of the Mexican people. And we Mexicans love liberty: we want to live in freedom—and freedom of choice as well. My purpose is to respect that mandate for freedom, but not to destroy this political system—to modernize it, to strengthen and to make it more democratic, but to allow the Mexican people to choose their leaders peacefully.

What do you regard as the greatest irritants in the relationship between Mexico and the United States?

I would say that there are four major issues in U.S.-Mexican relations. First is trade—the United States is the biggest market in the world. We have very small access to it. I would like to see Mexico export goods instead of people to the United States; that is, creating job conditions in Mexico to reduce migration to the United States.

Second is finance. The biggest part of Mexican debt is with U.S. financial institutions, and that's an issue that we will have to continue tackling.

Third—and I am not listing them in order of importance—[is] migration, illegal migrants to the United States. There my point of view is that the U.S. economy needs those workers and will continue to need them. I believe that in relation to migrants, we must sit and talk seriously, calmly, with facts, figures and a clear idea of the direction in which