12-1-1993

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Ruling Party (p.r.i) Nominates Social Development Secretary Luis Donaldo Colosio As 1994 Presidential Candidate

by Carlos Navarro

Published: Wednesday, December 1, 1993

On Nov. 28, the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) nominated Social Development Secretary Luis Donaldo Colosio Murrieta as the PRI candidate for the 1994 presidential election. If elected, Colosio is expected to continue the free-market reforms initiated by former president Miguel de la Madrid and carried through by current President Carlos Salinas de Gortari. Colosio served under both De la Madrid and Salinas in the former Budget and Planning Secretariat (Secretaria de Programacion y Presupuesto, SPP). The SPP’s functions were incorporated into the Finance Secretariat (Secretaria de Hacienda y Credito Publico, SHCP) in 1992. Like Salinas, Colosio received his post-secondary education in the US, earning graduate degrees in social development/urban economics at the University of Pennsylvania. “I’m in favor of an economy of certainty,” Colosio said in his acceptance speech at the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) headquarters. “I have seen the social cost of mistaken policies and the awakening of hope from correct policies. Discipline in public finance has come, never to leave again. There won't be any deviations...There's no road back.” Colosio, who headed the Social Development Secretariat (Secretaria de Desarrollo Social, SEDESOL) since March of this year, also served previously as a senator, a representative in the Chamber of Deputies, president of the PRI, and head of the government’s social assistance agency (Programa Nacional de Solidaridad, PRONASOL). He also served as campaign chief in Salinas's successful 1988 presidential bid. Given the PRI's dominance of Mexican politics since 1929, Colosio is the instant front-runner in the upcoming election, which is scheduled for Aug. 24, 1994. But Colosio a native of Sonora state is expected to face heavy competition from Democratic Revolution Party (PRD) candidate Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, who ran against Salinas in 1988. Shortly after his nomination in an unprecedented move for a PRI candidate Colosio agreed to hold televised debates with Cardenas, National Action Party (PAN) candidate Diego Fernandez de Cevallos, and other candidates. On Nov. 30, Cardenas’s campaign coordinator Roberto Robles Garnica told reporters he will soon meet with PRI president Fernando Ortiz Arana to discuss details of a debate between Colosio and Cardenas. Meantime, the rivalry between the PRD and the PAN has also been heating up. During November, a number of PRD members in San Luis Potosi, unhappy with the selection of Cardenas as the party candidate, defected to the PAN. For his part, Cardenas has been harshly critical of Fernandez de Cevallos, suggesting that his positions are no different than those of the PRI. According to political analysts, Colosio was considered a compromise candidate who could effectively counter the populist appeal of Cardenas while still gaining acceptance among the business community, which had favored Finance Secretary Pedro Aspe as the best choice for presidential candidate. "I don't think there will be jubilation [about Colosio's nomination], but I think he'll be well received," said Sergio Martin, director of macroeconomic studies at the Mexico City consulting firm Macro Asesoria Economica. For his part, Pedro Aspe praised Colosio saying the new PRI candidate "has profound knowledge of the country's economic and political situation." "Colosio is very popular, and the financial circles have faith in him," said newspaper columnist Sergio Sarmiento. Political analysts say Colosio is expected to focus on redistributing wealth and
providing benefits to poorer Mexicans, but without threatening the reforms implemented under Salinas. On the other hand, PAN candidate Diego Fernandez de Cevallos criticized the choice of Colosio as an attempt by the PRI to take advantage of the government's social programs to gain votes for the ruling party in the upcoming election. Meantime, the nomination of Colosio resulted in a minor cabinet reshuffle. Colosio resigned his post as Social Development Secretary and was replaced by his deputy Carlos Rojas Gutierrez. Education Secretary Ernesto Zedillo Ponce gave up his post to become coordinator of Colosio's presidential campaign. He was replaced by Foreign Minister Fernando Solana. Mexico City Mayor Manuel Camacho Solis, who had also sought the presidential nomination and was said to be disappointed with the choice of Colosio, accepted the post of foreign minister. Manuel Aguilera Gomez, PRI party president in the Federal District, was named to replace Camacho Solis as Mexico City Mayor. According to the Spanish news service EFE, shortly after Colosio's nomination was announced publicly, the PRD offered Camacho a leadership position in the party, an offer which Camacho declined. In other political developments, the PAN accused the PRI of committing widespread fraud in rural areas in order to assure victory in gubernatorial elections held in Yucatan state on Nov. 28. The PAN, which has a strong presence in Yucatan, was favored to win the election. However, unofficial results gave the victory to PRI candidate Federico Granja Ricalde by a margin of 58% to 41% over PAN candidate Ana Rosa Payan. The government was due to release official results on Dec. 1. Among other things, PAN spokesperson Delmer Peraza claimed police had stolen ballot boxes, armed youths had threatened voters, and PRI supporters had voted several times in some areas. For her part, Payan said the alleged wrongdoing by the PRI showed what voters could expect in the presidential election next August. "We have been defending the ballot boxes but the system has continued with its vices," she told the Associated Press. On the other hand, economic analyst Rogelio Ramirez suggested that the PRI whose presidential election victory in 1988 was marred by widespread allegations of fraud may not have to resort to dirty tricks to win the election in August. "The PRI could win with clean elections because they have solved the major economic problems, especially inflation, and because they have created a perception of stability and order in government policies," said Ramirez, president and chief economist of consulting firm Ecanal. (Sources: Notimex, 11/24/93, 11/25/93, 11/29/93; Spanish news service EFE, Associated Press, 11/28/93, 11/29/93; Washington Post, New York Times, 11/29/93; Reuter, United Press International, 11/28-30)

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