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Government To Retain Ownership Of El Nacional Newspaper

by LADB Staff

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In mid-February, after two failed attempts to sell off the state-run newspaper El Nacional, the government announced that it will retain the newspaper during the remainder of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari's term in office. The Interior Secretariat (Secretaria de Gobernacion), which announced the decision, did not offer any specific explanations for the move, although it did affirm that the government would take several steps to make the newspaper "self-sufficient," such as closing some operations.

El Nacional publisher Pablo Hiriart told reporters that three of the newspaper's five bureaus in Hermosillo, Tijuana, and Monterrey will be shut down this year. In addition, the newspaper's format will change from a full-color 76-page edition, to a 48-page newspaper printed in black and white. In the two previous auctions of the newspaper, the Finance Secretariat (Secretaria de Hacienda y Credito Publico, SHCP) had rejected all bids as "too low."

In fact, in the last round of bids, as a strategy to attract more buyers, the government decided to sell individual bureaus of El Nacional rather than the newspaper as a whole. Nevertheless, media analysts were surprised by the government's rejection of bids during that second round in January of 1994, since the bids that were placed for the Mexico City edition alone were far higher than the highest bids offered for all of El Nacional's properties in the first round of bidding in July of 1993. At that time the analysts speculated that, given the public relations nightmare caused by the conflict in Chiapas, the government may have had second thoughts about giving up the only newspaper fully under its control. Indeed, both groups submitting bids in January had promised to change the editorial direction of the newspaper.

Meanwhile, in a letter to President Salinas in late February, workers from El Nacional's three bureaus that are designated for closure asked the executive to reconsider the move. They reminded President Salinas of his promise to protect the jobs of the workers of El Nacional when the newspaper was first offered to the private sector.

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