

# voices of MEXICO

News, Commentary and Documents on Current Events in Mexico and Latin America

## SOCIAL PACTS,

a Remedy but not a Cure



*Democracy in Teachers'*

*Union will Help Resolve*

*Education Crisis*



## UNPROTECTED CHILDREN:

The Myth of Human Rights



## LIFE IN THE UNIVERSE



Inequalities and Challenges

in Mexico's Education

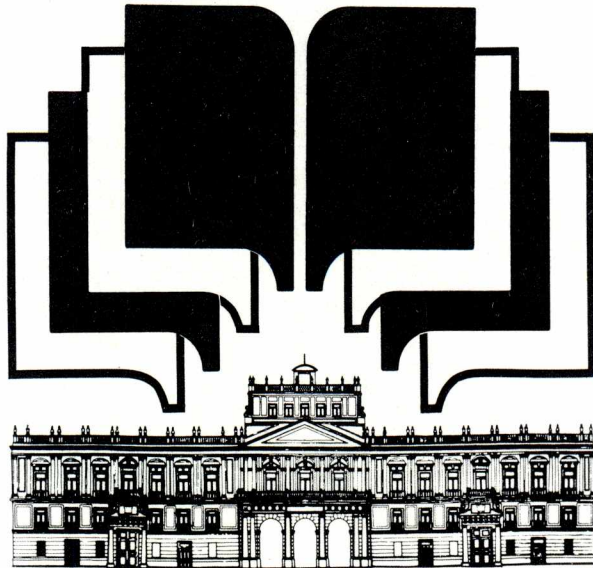


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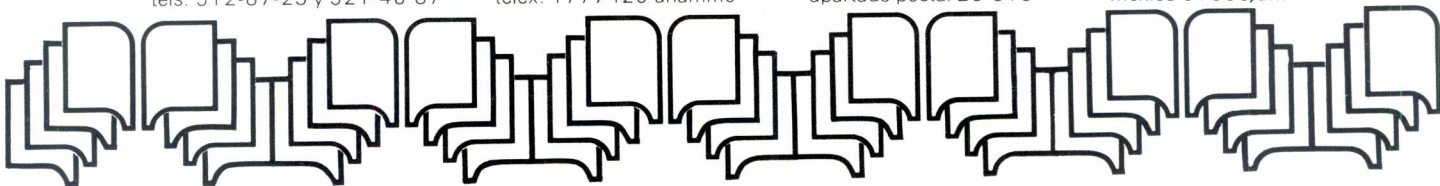
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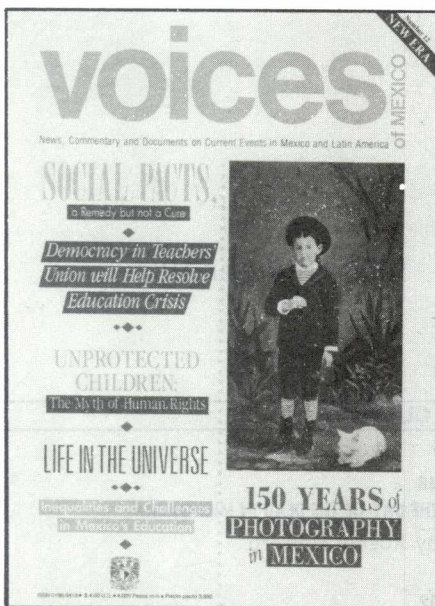
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# THIS ISSUE



Cover: Angel García Domínguez  
Photo from the album of the  
Sánchez Mejorada family.  
Reproduced by Agustín Estrada.

Result of an agreement between the business sector, trade union organizations, peasants and the government, the Pact for Economic Stability and Growth (PECE), is the option chosen to confront the country's economic crisis, which has worsened since 1982. The existence of the Pact is a demonstration of the modernization fostered by the government, but in reality it is only a synthesis of the business sector's project for the nation (reduction of salaries, privatization of the economy, support for the growth of in-bond industries and an increase in the business sector's participation in deciding national economic policies).

The existence of the Pact also reflects the weakness of workers' and peasants' organizations, while the great majority of ordinary citizens cannot see when the economic crisis is going to disappear from their daily lives. However, it is this same "ordinary citizen" who, as a political subject, has begun to exercise pressures, through election processes and social mobilizations, to end the archaic structures and strategies which still dominate the electoral system. Voices examines these changes in the pages of this issue, with the analysis of the Pact by David Barkin, and that of political transition in Mexico, by the Governor of Guerrero, José Francisco Ruiz Massieu. Another matter of great importance through 1989 in Mexico was that of education, and we present interviews with representatives of two tendencies in the teachers' trade union movement. The examination of the national situation and future perspectives concludes with themes of world relevance: the rights of children, the possibilities of life in other parts of the Universe, the celebration of the day of the dead, the 150th anniversary of photography, and a look at black films, complete this issue of Voices of Mexico.

Mariclaire Acosta

# SOCIAL PACTS,

## a Remedy but not a Cure

David Barkin

The Pact for Economic Stability and Growth, and its antecessor, the Economic Solidarity Pact, represent the compulsory response which the society has been obliged to give in the face of the current critical economic situation, which damages not only the nation's growth today, but that of the future as well. Protected by the world experience of similar concertations between social sectors traditionally opposed to each other, the pacts have constituted basic agreements between the business sector, workers and peasants. These pacts have served to control inflation, but in fact there never has been an agreement with the poorest sectors of the population, whose purchasing power has been drastically and systematically reduced over the last few years. Nor is there a firm control of price increases, in spite of the discipline exercised over salary rises, while conditions for workers have worsened as their contracts —results of years of trade union struggles— have been undermined. The effectiveness and pertinence of the pacts are still a motive for polemics and doubt in Mexican society.

The following article by researcher David Barkin examines the perspectives of the social pacts and evaluates their results.

How short are our collective memories! The recent (1987-1990) stabilization efforts are reminiscent of the Tripartite Pact between labor, business and government drawn up during World War II to restrain increases in wages and prices "so as not to damage wartime production". Rather than review the impressive array of statistical evidence that demonstrates the serious deterioration in living standards for the vast majority of Mexicans during the wartime "boom" years, suffice it to quote the U.S. Ambassador of the moment. In a private telegram to Washington, pleading for emergency shipments of corn to Mexico in 1944, he wrote that:

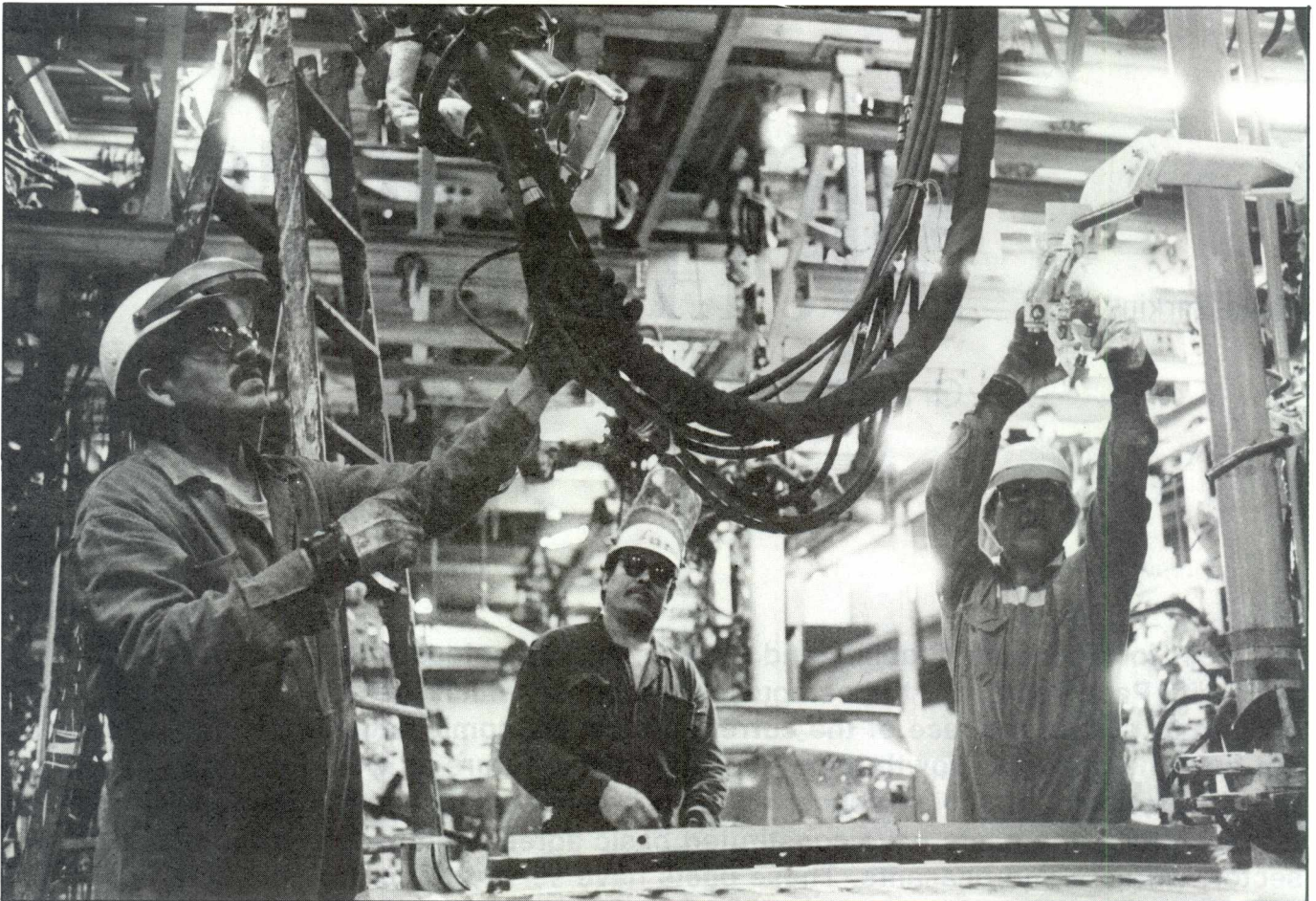
(in spite of the boom in industrial production) I have not been so pessimistic with regard to the outlook here at any time since I came to Mexico as I am now. The cost of living has gone up tremendously. We are living really on a social volcano here now. The situation of the workers is intolerable for everything they eat has gone up enormously and wage increases do not seem to help for the price controls have been inadequate (as quoted in Niblo, p. 25).

Mexican collaboration with the war effort consisted of the wholesale acceptance of American dictates to reorient production to the needs of the U.S. economy, on terms established by the U.S. government. It provoked widespread opposition. Niblo summarized it succinctly: "Inflation, shortages, and opulence in the midst of poverty became the hallmark of the day". Even the head

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*Research Director of the Economy Development Center.*

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Workers in the automobile industry — one of the industries most affected by the economic crisis. Photo by Marco Antonio Cruz/Imagenlatina.

of Mexico's Central Bank was moved to propose an alternative strategy: instead of outright collaboration, which provoked strong inflationary pressures and massive economic dislocations, he advocated a policy of neutrality in the economic sphere, which would have permitted Mexico to exchange its mineral and agricultural wealth for industrial equipment rather than foreign exchange which the Americans would not let the Mexicans spend because of wartime trade and production controls. He was not persuasive, and even before the end of the war it was clear that Mexico had paid dearly for increased economic activity: it had granted extraordinary influence to the U.S. in reshaping its economy and formulating future development policies. In the process, the distribution of income and wealth became much more regressive, setting a standard for the decades to come.

### The Food Weapon

The lessons of that period have been lost on modern Mexico. Few remember the food emergency of 1943-1944: the country required more than 200,000 tons of maize imports because U.S. demands for "collaboration" were met by switching almost one quarter of Mexico's maize land to production of oil and edible seeds and natural fibers (e.g., cotton and jute) for the war effort. In the meantime, U.S. authorities who had provoked the shortfall in food production in Mexico, showed their gratitude by opposing exports of maize from the U.S. be-

### The mainstays of the Social Pact are the control of wages and some prices with a drastic reduction in government spending, especially in social services

cause of domestic needs and transport bottlenecks; during 1944 imports arrived in some areas where stocks were down to only a few days supply. Few even recalled the use of this "food weapon" when the issue of self-sufficiency was raised once again in the late 1970s.

From this perspective, today's Pacto de Estabilidad y Crecimiento Económico (PECE) is old hat. Like its predecessor, the Pacto de Solidaridad Económica promulgated in November 1987, it promises to reverse the pattern of stagflation which plagued the country in the previous years. The government reassures us that Brazil's failed Cruzado Plan and Argentina's sorry experiences are irrelevant. Even without looking South, the austerity and wage freezes in Mexico's wartime atmosphere of inflation forty years ago should instill serious doubts about the contention that the nation can resume a process of more equitable growth without first reversing the recent increase in income concentration

and decline in living standards. Based on a standard of (1938 = 100), wages fell to a low of 46.4 in 1947! In fact “not until 1971, did the purchasing power of real wages regain the 1938 level” (Bortz 1986).

The mainstays of the PECE are the control of wages and some prices with a drastic reduction in government spending, especially for social services: a wholesale internalization of the North American policy makers’ model for secure capitalist development. The disproportionately heavy burden that this model places on Mexico’s working classes is well understood in political circles in the U.S. and Mexico. After 5 years of drastic reductions in the purchasing power of wages had reduced labor’s share in national income to 25 percent of the total in 1987—down from a high of 36 percent in the mid 1970’s—the present approach is a surefire formula to further polarize Mexican society. Formal unemployment is rising and production for the domestic market declining, as most people manifestly have less to spend. In 1989, real wages were below those prevailing for workers in the late 1930’s! (See accompanying graph for a vivid display of this decline.)

### The Problems and The Promises

The PECE identified inflation as the major economic problem facing Mexico and the rekindling of growth as its principal policy objective. The government accepts responsibility for a large part of recent inflation, contending that it results from sizable budgetary deficits. Policy makers fail to point out, however, that these deficits were occasioned by the government’s inability to tax the incomes of a small but powerful group of rich Mexicans who control most of the country’s wealth. As a result, the government had to finance massive investment programs and limited social welfare programs with inflationary measures, including foreign borrowing. In spite of the avarice of the wealthy, however, government programs continue to subsidize their investment programs in the hopes of spurring economic development, while allowing and even financing the massive flight of capital caused by these same people.

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### The government had to finance massive investment programs and limited social welfare programs with inflationary measures, including foreign borrowing

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Even when government revenues were raised, however, the inherited imbalances continued to make themselves felt. The value-added tax was increased from 10 to 15 percent, tax collection systems were improved, and some levies were imposed on profits. At the same time, the government increased the cost of many goods and services sold by public enterprises and discontinued others or sold them off to the private sector. In spite of this package, the service of the debt itself represents a continuing burden. The government must continue to

borrow additional monies, increasingly from domestic lenders as foreign banks are trying to limit their exposure. Since 1980, the internal debt in pesos has mushroomed almost 350 times, to more than US\$50 billion at the end of 1989, somewhat less than one-half of the foreign debt; but since domestic interest rates were three or four times international rates (down from a multiple of six to seven), the cost of servicing these peso obligations is double that of the foreign debt. Although the internal debt offers a juicy compensation for the continuing support of government policy by the wealthy, to an outside observer it seems an exorbitant price to pay for the inflow of foreign capital which is necessary for the viability of the rest of the economic stabilization package.

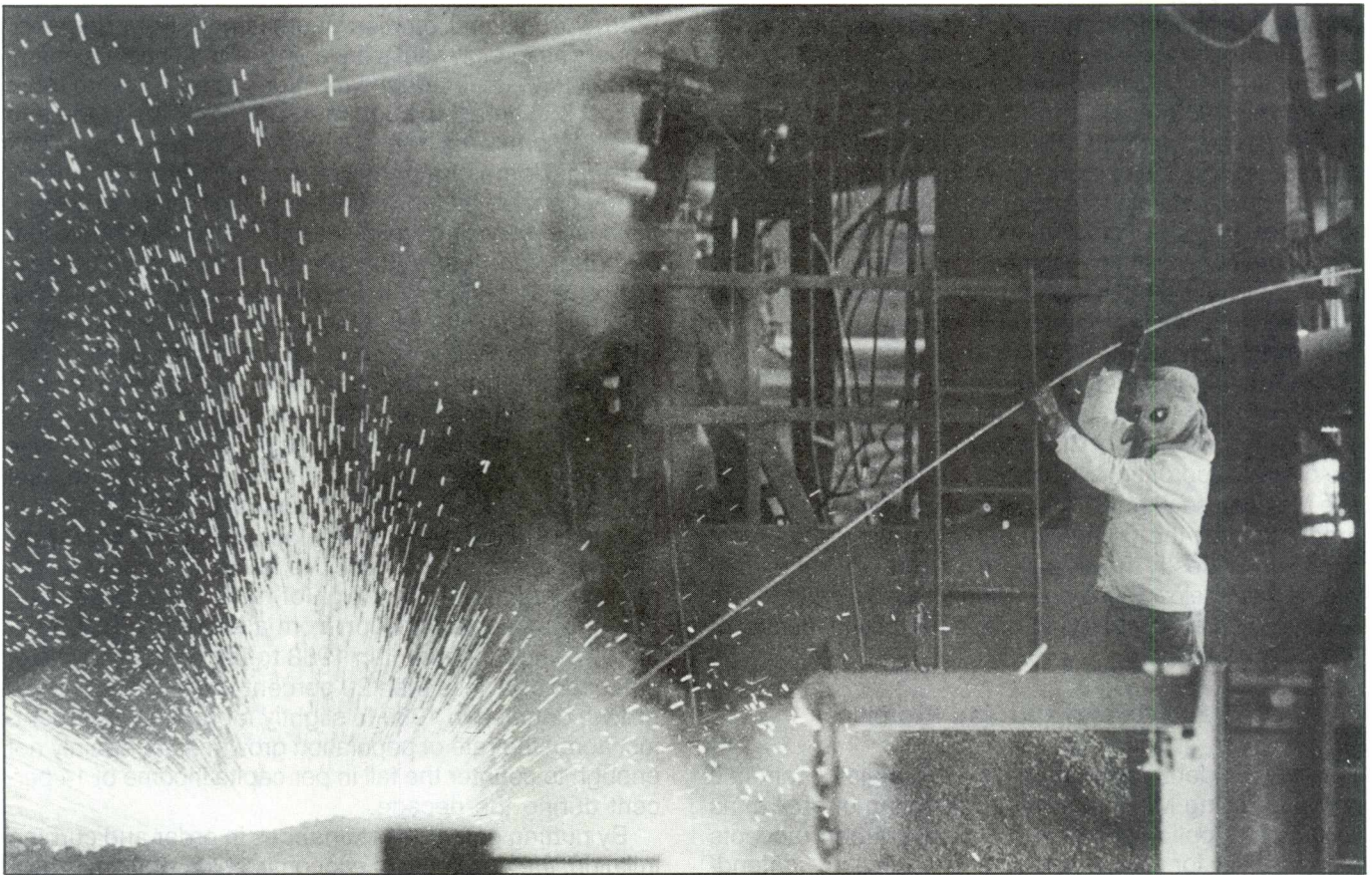
This package of measures by the government was necessary, we were assured, to curb inflation and set the path to recovery. On the face of it, recent history is proving the new team of technocrats correct. By reducing the government’s deficit to about 6 percent of the national product, from a high of more than 15 percent, they have slashed inflation from a searing 160 percent in 1987 and 52 percent in 1988 to the tranquil levels of a decade ago: less than 20 percent for 1989. Economic growth doubled in 1989 to slightly more than 2 percent, just about the rate of population growth and certainly not enough to counter the fall in per capita income of 14 percent during the decade.

By putting government finances in order and curbing inflation, the new team of economic policy makers is convinced that it is setting the stage for economic recovery. Confidence in the government’s ability to manage the economy will stimulate a new wave of private investment—both domestic and foreign—which, together with the opening up of the economy to the winds of international competition, they argue, will create a new, more efficient productive apparatus, capable of competing in international markets and providing better quality goods at more attractive prices to Mexican consumers.

### The Stabilization Package

While raising its revenues and curbing social expenditures, the government asked the rest of society to collaborate in the stabilization effort with differing kinds of sacrifices. After a sharp devaluation (44%) in November 1987, it first offered to freeze the exchange rate and then restrain the slide against the dollar to one peso a day in 1989. Private producers were exhorted to participate by restraining their price increases, especially for those goods which were part of the shopping basket of basic food and household commodities. National trade union leaders acquiesced to demands that wages continue to increase by less than the rise in the consumer price level. The majority of dry-land farmers who traditionally produced basic food stuffs for internal consumption were informed by their representatives on the national coordinating committee that their contribution would take the form of price freezes for their crops.

These “price stabilization” measures were accompanied by a broad range of incentives to encourage foreign investment, expand the off-shore assembly (or maquila) operations, and stimulate exports. The private sector responded with alacrity, increasing non-traditional exports (especially automobiles and auto parts) and restricting its production of goods subject to price controls



The Pacts have demanded greater productivity of workers, while freezing their salary levels. Photo by Marco Antonio Cruz/Imagenlatina.

which are traditionally important generators of employment and basic supplies for the internal market. Small farmers sharply curbed their planting of basic farm commodities; food imports reached record levels and were a major claimant of foreign exchange. For those who still have money, the borders have been opened to a virtual flood of consumer durables as the government went far beyond its initial commitments to liberalize import restrictions in accordance with its 1986 decision to enter the General Agreement of Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

### The Present Danger

But inflation is not the most serious of Mexico's ills nor the key to economic recovery. The decline of real purchasing power and the virtual drying up of domestic private and government investment have provoked a serious depression. In contrast, agricultural and industrial investments for export are booming. For the majority of Mexicans, however, the PECE is one more mechanism to drive yet another set of nails into their coffins.

The danger of ignoring the needs of the majority of Mexicans is a key lesson that should have been learned from history. During World War II, Mexican authorities and producers demonstrated their extraordinary ability to profoundly reshape the productive apparatus to meet the demands of the North American government in a very short period of time. Today, again, producers are demonstrating their zeal in responding to the changing signals

and incentives offered by the authorities. Unlike the earlier epoch, domestic shortfalls in basic foods, raw materials, and industrial products can be readily supplemented by imports for those who can afford them. With the rapid opening of the country to freer trade, foreign consumer goods are crowding the shelves of the upscale markets.

But the majority of Mexican producers and workers must continue to depend on the domestic market for their livelihood. This market has been rapidly eroded. With it, jobs have disappeared and families are developing new survival strategies. The informal service sector is burgeoning, as people attempt to find niches as itinerant merchants, while national chains counterattack with marketing strategies targeted at the shrinking middle and upper sectors. Personal services, too, are expanding. Those with savings are either placing them in the banking system at high interest rates, or in the stock market where annual returns have exceeded 100 percent, or in real construction in anticipation of finding some attractive mechanism for recuperation.

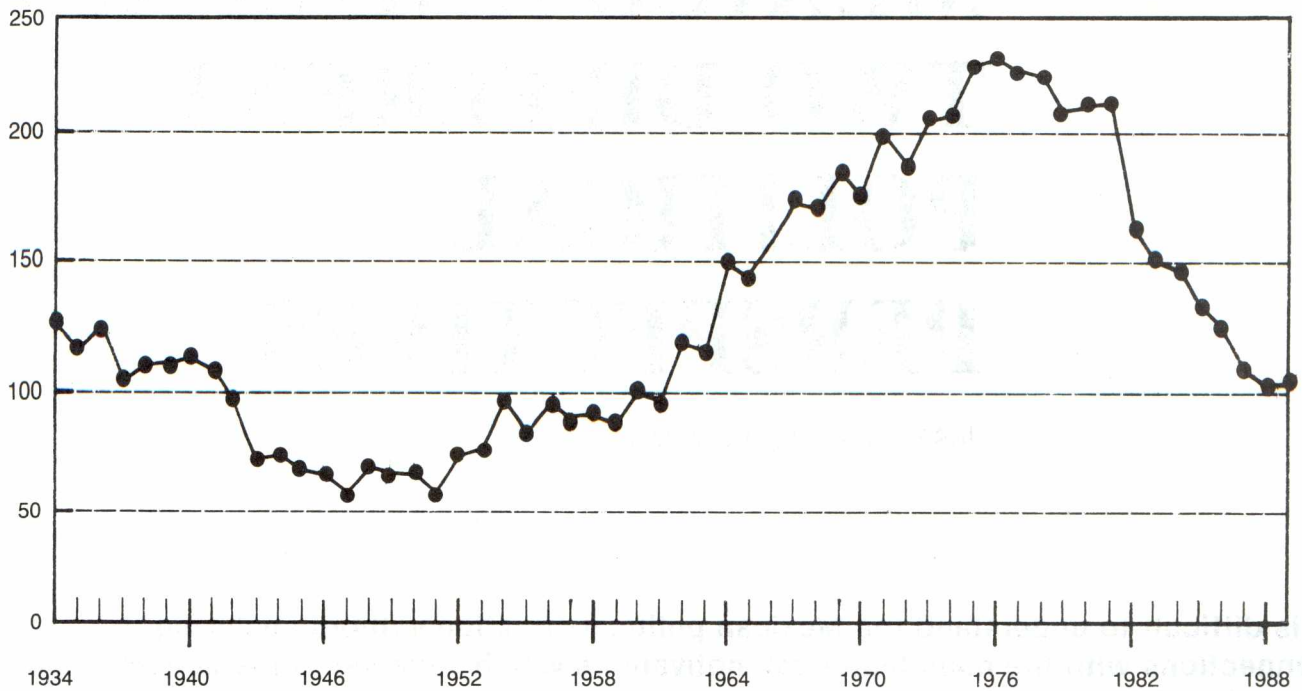
### An Alternative Road

Ironically, Mexico need not be suffering in this manner. The fundamental obstacle to prosperity is the official definition of the crisis as a financial problem. This vision of the problem leads the authorities to search for new ways to restructure the debt, generate foreign exchange which involves the mobilization of existing small-scale



## Mexico: Real Minimum Salaries

1934-1989



SOURCE: National Minimum Salaries Commission. (1960 = 100)

### Small farmers sharply curbed their planting of basic farm commodities; food imports reached record levels and were a major claimant of foreign exchange

producers; the policy makers favor export industries using the latest technologies.

They seem impervious to the claim that the country could also be enjoying a thriving internal market. Idle productive resources already in the hands of the producers would permit them to eliminate more than US\$3.5 billion of food imports and create upwards of 2 million jobs in a very short time. Similarly, idle light industrial capacity could be mobilized to produce consumer goods, construction materials, and light machinery required to supply a newly invigorated domestic market and employ many additional workers.

Such an alternative appears unthinkable to many policy makers. It would require reintegrating the small-scale farmers onto the main stage of the national economy. By offering farmers remunerative prices for their labor to induce them to bring their lands back into commercial production, the country could regain food self-sufficiency. The demand from the rural areas would, in turn, stimulate demand for manufactured goods and services throughout the rest of the economy and benefit every social group in Mexico. The balance of payments

would improve, as would the government budget. Even though it would raise consumer prices, the cost would be small indeed in comparison to the prosperity which such a program would generate; specific programs for the needy would be less costly than present commodity support programs.

The PECE does not presently permit even the consideration of such an alternative. It focuses our attention on the problem of inflation and deceives people into thinking that other ills can be corrected by reducing the rate of price increases. Reducing the rate of inflation by thrusting the country deeper into the throes of depression will only create further problems. A reorientation of our thinking about the crisis is needed. The crisis can be overcome only by mobilizing the productive potential of the country and its people —by permitting them to produce. Mexico has the ability to both continue exporting and reclaim the internal market. Why must the country's leaders continue to make the same mistakes of past decades? □

#### Bibliographic Note:

This article is based on the analysis presented in the latest book by the author, *Distorted Development*, published this year by Westview Press. The essay cited in the text by Stephen Niblo, "The Impact of War: Mexico and World War II", was published as occasional Paper No. 10, by La Trobe University, Institute of Latin American Studies in Victoria Australia. Bortz' work on salaries was published by the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana in Mexico in a collection he edited entitled, *La estructura de salarios en México*, (1986).

# MEXICO AND SPAIN: TWO DIFFERENT POLITICAL PERSPECTIVES

José Francisco Ruiz Massieu

It is difficult to understand the Mexican political situation without analyzing its connections with the main historical motivations which have led to the construction of such a diverse and complex society as ours. Our recent political history has been marked by the domination of one sole political party over a period of sixty years, but this is being questioned today by an electorate which is increasingly critical of the existing system, and by opposition parties with strength and influence enough to aspire to being government parties. In this section, José Francisco Ruiz Massieu, Governor of the state of Guerrero - a state where the opposition has considerable electoral presence - analyzes Mexico's political transition processes, and compares them to those experienced in Spain over the last decade.

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## Mexico and Spain: Nearness and Distance

The almost explosive flowering of Spanish democracy after the death of Franco (1975) and the speedy break up of the last Franquista regime have, in the words of Stanley G. Payne<sup>1</sup>, captivated Western political analysts, especially those in Mexico.

The ambivalent attitude we Mexicans have had towards Spain, be it in the psychological or emotional realms or in the intellectual political arena, has changed considerably since the Spanish Transition (1976-1982) and the dynamic growth of democracy in the peninsula.

The transition from Franquism to democracy was embraced with great enthusiasm in Mexican circles in general and, in particular, by the Mexican government, which made two eloquent gestures: President Echeverría in a controversial measure heatedly denounced the Franco regime for killing several young Basques; and President López Portillo greeted the new era in Spain by officially breaking diplomatic relations with the Republic in Exile.

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Governor of the State of Guerrero

## The Allure of the Spanish Transition

The *Spanish Democratic Transition* was received in Mexico by a long tradition of alienation, stereotyping, and hispanophobia.

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## The political system shaped in Mexico since the Revolution, has never lost sight of its electoral bearings

But, once the transition was underway, the Mexican government, intellectuals and politicians began to approach the Spanish process and reestablish contact with the principal agents in this process.

The allure of the Spanish transition —even greater with the dramatic encounters of other transitions in Argentina and the Philippines— grew quickly after the *Mexican Moment* (1987-1989) which was characterized by



The results of the elections were questioned by members of the PRI and the PRD. Photo by Rosa María Torres.

breakdowns in the Revolutionary party and problems with the political system: the shelving of historically established understandings among the major political figures; the effects of the economic crisis in the electorate; the emergence of the National Democratic Front; and the radicalization of the National Action Party.

This turbulent phase which lasted from July 6 to December 1 1988, led some notable opposition spokesmen to suggest that the new government carry out a *Mexican transition*, that is a *Mexican Transition, Spanish Style*, to the point of abolishing the present party system and installing a multi-party parliamentary system.

The desires of the opposition were motivated by various causes: mistrust and prejudice which led to a total condemnation of the party in power; ignorance of the essential nature of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)—the internal and external understandings which structure it—and of its vigor; the confusion into which not a few leaders of the PRI fell; and a sincere optimism along with ingenious aping which made them forget that political transplants are not viable.

#### The Similarities

There are not many similarities between the Mexican and Spanish political processes; although, in the Nineteenth Century, some points of similarity can be found that are not easily dismissed.

In Spain, save a brief republican interlude, the monarchy has prevailed, while in Mexico, save for two ephemeral parentheses, it is the Republic that has triumphed.

Military leaders in Spain have often become head of state and in Mexico, president. In both countries the military have been virtual arbiters of political life.

The lack of prestige and the ineptitude of the leaders of the two countries—Fernando VII, Maria Cristina, Isabel II, Amadeo, in Spain and above all Santa Anna in Mexico—plunged their countries into political instability and national malaise. Although some fifty years apart, two equally unjust international wars demoralized the two societies last century. The Mexican American War of 1848 mutilated Mexican territory and threw the fledgling nation into a state of frustration while the Spanish American War of 1898 put an end to the Spanish Empire and brutally revealed the degree of decadence into which the old nation had fallen.

**The turbulent phase which lasted from July through December, 1988, led some notable opposition spokesmen to propose that the new government carry out a Mexican transition, Spanish style**

Another characteristic apparently shared by Mexico and Spain in the Twentieth Century is that both were rocked by social movements which were to determine the course of their histories. The Spanish Civil War divided Spain in two and should be considered as a violent schism within the Spanish family. The Mexican Revolution, on the other hand, despite an important phase of civil strife from 1910 to 1920 was precisely that, a revolution which put paid to the old economic, political and social structures, and created new ones.

#### The Imaginary Analogy: the Real Differences

The *Spanish transition*, and on this point I will have more to say, is a restoration of party democracy. In Mexico, on the contrary, we are struggling to strengthen, purify, and update a democratic regime which has been developing, albeit slowly, for the seventy years of the regime founded by the Revolution. The *Spanish Transition* is the transition from a dictatorship, in which there were no elections and therefore no political parties, to a pluralist democracy.

In Spain, the death of Franco and the ascent to the throne of Juan Carlos as Head of State initiated the changes that made a multiparty democracy possible; in Mexico, the reforms which led to the opposition's holding 48% of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies began with the conciliatory political work of Luis Echerverria, and were strengthened under López Portillo with the 1978 Political Organization and Electoral Process Act, which gave greater parliamentary voice to a political plurality, and culminated in the constitutional amendments and laws passed under Miguel de la Madrid.

From the beginning there were no political parties in the Franco regime and those that had existed before, such as the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (Partido Socialista Obrero Español) or the Communist Party (Partido Comunista) fled into exile or were reduced to a completely clandestine existence. The Falange (La Falange Española Tradicionalista) and later the National Movement (El movimiento nacional) were never really political parties but only organs of the State based on corporate structures which grouped the citizenry in order to control them politically and bind them to the State.

The principal goal of these groups was quite obviously not that of electoral politics, which is by definition the aim of a political party. Julian Marias brutally characterizes the Franco regime as follows:

The Spanish Civil War resulted in a total elimination of political liberty, not only in fact but in principal. No government post, at any level, even a town mayor was elective; this extended to professional or academic entities —Universities, Colleges, Academies, professional associations, etc. All printed matter, even a seed catalogue, had first to go through the censors. The same was true for theater, movies, and radio. A safeconduct was necessary to travel to the next town. And one's duly documented and witnessed "loyalty to the regime" was a condition for aspiring to any official post".<sup>2</sup>

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### **The Mexican Revolution put paid to the old economic, political and social structures, and created new ones**

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In Mexico, on the other hand, the Mexican Revolution, even during its violent phase from 1910 to 1920, fostered the participation of political parties in elections: from the National Antireelection Party, which brought Madero to power; to the Liberal Constitutionalist Party, associated with Obregon; to the Communist Party, founded in 1919 to counter the bourgeois-democratic slant of the Movement of 1910.

The political system shaped by the Mexican Revolution, in contrast to that forged by the Spanish Civil War, never lost its electoral bearings. Despite events that might have invited de facto solutions (the civil war of 1914-1920; the Agua Prieta Rebellion; or the disappearance of Obregon in 1928), elections were seen as the only way of legally renewing the right to govern. It is worth remembering that Carranza was elected president in 1917 ending his aconstitutional naming as Supreme Head of the Constitutionalist Army; after the provisional presidency of De la Huerta, Obregon came to power through the ballot. On the assassination of Obregon, Calles handed over the reins to the interim President Portes Gil on the exact legal date, calling immediately for a special election; and so forth.

Another difference which, as it is an essential one, should make us see that the transplanting of the solu-

## **REPORT FROM THE CITIZENS' INDEPENDENT TRIBUNAL**

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Without regard for affiliation or political preference, a group of notable citizens from the political and cultural arena of the country decided to form an independent tribunal that would objectively analyze the results of the July 1989 elections for representatives for the local Congress in the state of Michoacán. At the same time that representatives of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) declared separately that each had obtained the majority of seats, the Citizens' Independent Tribunal proceeded to conduct its own investigation in order to detect even the smallest irregularities that were committed during the electoral process. The results of that analysis as well as the very existence of the Tribunal demonstrated the increasing preoccupation of the civil society to eradicate electoral corruption which, within the Mexican experience, has led to fraud and to a lack of respect for the will of the majority. Due to its importance, but also because it is a unique experience in electoral history in Mexico, we present the final results of the work of the Citizens' Independent Tribunal.

Verdict of the Citizens' Independent Tribunal on the July 2 elections in Michoacán

The results of elections held on July 2, 1989, for local representatives by relative majority and for six representatives by proportional representation for the 18 electoral districts of the state of Michoacán, were analyzed by the CITIZENS' INDEPENDENT TRIBUNAL along with the evidence provided by the PAN, PARM, and PRD, which could not be compared with that of the PRI insofar as this party was not willing to give us access to them either in Morelia, Michoacán, or in the Federal District.

Having as its only intention that of ascertaining the truth of what occurred, the Tribunal—a group of independent citizens exercising our constitutional rights—addresses public opinion in order to make known the results of our labor. We went to Morelia, Michoacán on August 2 and 3 in order to gather evidence, documents, and oral testimonies. According to this evidence, we have arrived at the following conclusions that can only be rectified by comparing them with documents to which the PRI has denied us access.

It is important to note the crushing abstention at the polls, which reached 70% of all registered voters. The problem of abstentionism is not only present in the state of Michoacán but is national. The lack of respect for voting is the principal cause for distrust in electoral processes. Abstentionism is a great threat for the present and the future of the country insofar as it expresses a lack of interest induced by the prevailing political culture. One of the principal causes of the high rate of abstentionism is the vast distrust of the population in the electoral mechanisms controlled by the PRI, and its authoritarian manipulation of voting booths and of district Committees,

with the resulting partiality of the electoral organisms in favor of the PRI. The lack of credibility, the frequency of frauds committed, and the pretense of giving partiality a legal veneer in order to mend or remake electoral reality, is one of the great obstacles on the road to democratic fluidity.

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This Tribunal was able to show that there were great anomalies in the electoral process, attributable to the electoral authorities in order to favor PRI candidates. The opposition parties contested these, but were ignored. In numerous cases of protest, elements introduced by the parties and the candidates were thrown out by decision of the electoral authorities who did not receive proofs, nor accept declarations, nor carry out the due procedures. All of this indicates that the people have been placed in a state of legal defencelessness.

The State Electoral Commission, which selects the five members of the Electoral College, is totally controlled by the PRI. Without a doubt, this affects its credibility.

For the reasons just mentioned, the Citizens' Independent Tribunal has reached the conclusion that the official results of the electoral process are very different from the will of the citizens of Michoacán, because in a considerable number of cases, the voting was not respected.

We include a synthesis of the results in each of the electoral districts. The Citizens' Independent Tribunal, with the civic spirit which encouraged its formation and labor, places the results of its investigation at the disposal of the public. We know that this has no legal value. We are sure that the sense of our deliberations is that the civil society derive the moral and political conclusions that it deems necessary. We have done our work convinced that the example of Michoacán is not limited to that state, but rather reflects the situation of the entire country and that this destroys its democratic possibilities.

#### First district: Northern Morelia

Due to numerous irregularities including polls which were not installed, unjustified annulments, and calculation of illegal votes, very probably the revision of results and the elimination of irregularities would give some 14,000 votes for the PRD and 11,000 for the PRI.

#### Second district: South Morelia

According to the district figure, the PRD won with 10,000 votes as opposed to 6,346 for the PRI. However, the illegal calculation of polls where the counting of votes favored the PRI and the unjustified annulment of polls with votes in favor of the PRD, gives the PRD a smaller majority than it should have. If the counting of votes had been correct, the party representative would have had access to the Electoral College.

#### Third district: Pátzcuaro

The PRD candidate obtained slightly more votes than were officially recognized: PRD, 13,096 votes; PRI, 7,349 votes.

#### Fourth district: La Piedad

The PRD candidate obtained a majority of votes over the PRI candidate. According to the Tribunal's analysis of the legal dispositions applicable in this case, the evidence received and the polls' revision, the official results were illegal, and unduly accorded 7,254 votes for the PRI and 382 votes for the PRD, for which the results according to the Law were the following: PRD, 9,691 votes; PRI, 7,763 votes. The majority vote for the PRD could



Transparent ballot boxes are used in efforts to prevent electoral fraud. Michoacán, December 1989. Photo by Rosa María Torres.

be expanded and the minority for the PRI reduced if due investigation and revision were to occur. The Tribunal recommends revision of the official results in Polls 17 and 23 of La Piedad, 4 of Ecuandureo, 9 of Numarán, 9A and 10A of Penjamillo, and 1 of Zináparo, and also recommends an urgent investigation of the penal, political, and administrative responsibilities for violations of the law.

Fifth district: Zamora

In this district, there were so many irregularities, some in the poll affidavits, others in the district ones, and others detected due to additional information received, that the Tribunal reached the conclusion that article 185, fractions I, II, III, V, and article 186, fraction III, of the Electoral Law of the State of Michoacán should be annulled.

Sixth district: Uruapan

The irregularities committed are not so grave as to alter the overall outcome of the voting, so that the counting of votes can be considered valid in the district affidavits, which give the triumph to the PRD candidate.

Seventh district: Tacámbaro

As opposed to the previous case, the results emitted in the affidavit of the District Committee are 11,387 for the PRI and 6,999 for the PRD. The examination of the poll affidavits compared with the affidavit of the District Committee results in the following: PRI, 6,109; PRD, 6,263, thus favoring the PRD.

Eighth district: Zitácuaro

The violations of the law in more than 50% of the polls indicate the need to annul the election results in this district.

Ninth district: Apatzingán

The PRD candidate obtained a majority of votes over the PRI candidate.

Tenth district: Ciudad Hidalgo

A massive and documented fraud in voting in more than 70% of the 144 polls renders unacceptable the elections results in this district. It is enough to observe that in the official affidavit of the district calculation, not even one of the polls' vote counts was recorded, thus openly violating article 160 of the Electoral Law. Just this is cause enough to annul the election results in accordance with the articles 185 and 186 of the Law, independently of the multiple causes of nullity derived from the reply founded in the vote counts of more than a hundred polls.

Eleventh district: Zacapu

In this district, as in Uruapan (VI) the results of the district count should be accepted because the irregularities observed do not alter the election results which are favorable to the PRD.

Twelfth district: Paruándiro

The district vote count is accepted here which favors the PRD because there are no irregularities which substantially affect the results. However, it is important to note that the PRD candidate obtained more votes than were officially recognized.

Thirteenth district: Jiquilpan

This Tribunal proposes the annulment of this electoral district, based on fraction III of article 186 of the Electoral Law, because of the large number of violations and irregularities committed which substantially alter the preparation, development and results of the election.

Fourteenth district: Los Reyes

The PRD candidate obtained a majority vote over the PRI candidate. In accordance with the applicable legal dispositions, the evidence received and the poll revisions which the Tribunal analyzed, the official results illegally and unjustly extracted 4,029 votes from the PRD and 875 for the PRI so that the results according to the Law are the following: PRD, 9,064 votes; PRI, 7,441 votes. The majority vote for the PRD could be expanded and the minority vote for the PRI reduced if there were due investigation and consequent revision. This tribunal recommends the revision of the official results in the following polls: 10 of Tuxpan, 7, 19, 20 and 21 of Epitacio Huerta, 11 in Senquio, 13 of Tlalpujahuá, and 24 in Los Reyes, and a general revision of the penal, political and administrative responsibilities for violation of the law.

Fifteenth district: Maravatío

The PRD candidate obtained a majority vote in contrast with the PRI candidate. In accordance with the applicable legal dispositions, the evidence received, and the poll revision which the Tribunal analyzed, the official results illegally and unjustly attributed 915 votes to the PRI and extracted in the same way 261 votes from the PRD, so that the results according to the Law were the following: PRD 8,005; PRI, 7,810. The majority vote for the PRD could be expanded and the minority vote for the PRI reduced if there were due investigation and consequent revision. This tribunal recommends the revision of the official results in the poll 11 of Tingindín Municipality, and recommends an urgent investigation of penal, political and administrative responsibilities for violations of the law.

Sixteenth district: Coalcomán

The PRD candidate obtained a majority vote over the PRI candidate.

Seventeenth district: Lázaro Cárdenas

As in the case of the II, VI, XII, and XIII districts, the results in the district affidavits are accepted because irregularities affecting the results were not detected.

Eighteenth district: Huetamo

This Tribunal estimated that given the sum of the polls whose vote count should be annulled in this district due to manifest irregularities and whose results favor the PRI, the official results should be modified with the elimination of votes corresponding to these polls, and in which case, the triumph in the district corresponds to the PRD.

Sincerely  
For the Citizens' Independent Tribunal

Marielaire Acosta, Julio Faesler, Rodolfo González Guevara, Jaime González Graff, Jorge Barrera Graff, Emilio Krieger, Salvador Nava Martínez, Elena Poniatowska, Rogelio Sada Zambrano, Samuel del Villar y Carlos Monsiváis.

tions from the Spanish transition to the present Mexican moment would not be viable: democracy in Spain adopted a parliamentary form which supplanted the absolute monarchy in the nineteenth Century, while Mexico, historically, has adopted a strong presidency.

In Spain a parliamentary system is a relevant restoration of a political constant in the democratic process with roots in the nineteenth Century, whereas for Mexico it would be an inviable implant.

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### **Spain created a new Constitution in 1978, while political parties in Mexico have accepted, tacitly or directly, the 1917 Constitution**

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In Mexico, neither during the party electioneering before July 6 nor in the year following was the abrogation of the 1917 Constitution of Queretaro ever proposed. On the contrary, the platforms and sundry pronouncements

of the major opposition parties, the National Action Party and the National Democratic Front, directly or indirectly incorporated constitutional principals and provisions to which they had long taken exception. Furthermore, the transformation of the Mexican Socialist Party, the third version of the old Communist Party of 1919, into the Democratic Revolution Party caused it to throw off its socialist concepts and tacitly or directly accept the position of the Mexican Revolution.

In modern democracies constitutions serve to bring together the social covenants which unite the essential will of the body politic. The Constitution of 1978 dissolved the Franco regime and the Constitution of 1917 did away with the Porfiriato. Both establish a nation of laws.

The role of the King represents another difference between the Spanish transition and the changes occurring in Mexico. Although the King functions as the Head of the Spanish State with restricted powers, it is recognized that he has in fact played a decisive role in the various landmark decisions in the democratization process through the discreet, and undeniably able handling of the political situation; as for example, the naming of Adolfo Suárez, the proclamation of the Constitution, the defeat of Tejero, and the acceptance of the first Socialist



Voters in Michoacán elect their Municipal President in December 1989. Photo by Rosa María Torres.

Worker government. Juan Carlos carries out the functions vested in him by the constitution with exceptional skill.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, the positions of Head of State and Head of the government are not separate in the Mexican system. The President of the Republic carries out both functions and in so doing embodies the continuity of institutions and governs national life, but at the same time he is himself involved in the wheeling and dealing of party politics, especially in general elections. As is the case with all heads of government in Western democracies, the President is the head of the party in power (PRI) and therefore is exposed to all the conflicts of party politics.

Another change which took place during the remarkably active period of the Spanish transition was that the armed forces, one of the principal actors on the political scene during the Franco regime, ceased to play a major role in the processes of democratization, except for its rash initial, often underground attempts to retain power. In Mexico, this change had already come about in the fifties.

The political, and even the legal status of the Roman Catholic church in Spain has been modified by the transition which withdrew the church's privileges and deprived it of its remaining powers.

In Mexico, on the other hand, the political status of the Church, although it has changed somewhat in the last few years, was defined in Article 130 of the Constitution, the religious amendment, which provided for a sensible coexistence.

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**There cannot be, therefore, a true democracy in which political parties are not the major players on the political scene**

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**The Parties**

It has become a commonplace among political scientists that contemporary democracy is forcibly and inevitably a democracy of political parties, a partitocracy as some have called it, given that it is the parties that constitute the intermediaries between State institutions and society and that help to integrate them to mould popular opinion and to make representative institutions work. There cannot be, therefore, a true democracy in which political parties are not the major players on the political scene.

The Spanish transition which began in 1976, embodied an extremely competitive multiparty system which replaced a regime characterized by some as a one-party system (the National Movement), and by others as a system with no parties at all, given that the Movement was really an organ of the State with the political functions of social control and legitimization of the regime, and not those of participation in the electoral process and the functioning in representative bodies.

The Franco regime prohibited the historical parties, both conservative and liberal parties, as well as the leftist parties, and instituted the Traditionalist Spanish Falanx

(Falange Española Tradicionalista, or FET) as the State party, the sole party, on the Italian Fascist model.

Later, perhaps due to pressure from the Western democracies, the dictator relegated it to a lesser role until the fifties when it became the National Movement (Movimiento Nacional or MN). The Movement was assigned a number of tasks: filling a substantial number of upper positions in the bureaucracy, controlling the trade unions, and broadcasting the ideas and programs of the regime through its propaganda machine.

There are points of seeming similarity between the FET-MN and Mexico's National Revolutionary Party (Partido Nacional Revolucionario or PNR) but their essential nature is radically different.

The FET-MN, from the moment of Franco's coming to power until 1977 when it was dissolved, was a sole party and other parties were prohibited by law. In Mexico, on the contrary, although the election returns and the fact the the PRN held almost all the elective offices made it seem to act as a sole party, the opposition parties always has complete legal freedom of action even at the polls.<sup>4</sup>

The FET-MN was never a party which participated in elections; under Franco, popular representation was never determined by popular vote but only through established State bodies. The PRN-PRM-PRI, on the other hand, has participated in each and every election.

In Franco's Spain the separation of powers was revoked and all institutions (the courts, the government, the territorial entities) were subject to the will of the Head of State; which is why the Movement never carried out the political functions that the PRI has historically exercised.

Having cleared up this point it is useful to review the role of the political parties in the Spanish transition to further drive home our point of an imaginary analogy. The Political Reform Act of 1977, and the demise of the Movement fomented the emergence of new partisan groups and established the legal existence of the parties that had been proscribed.

Two stand out among the first of these partisan groups to appear: the Democratic Center Union (UCD) of Adolfo Suárez, the former General Secretary of the Movement and President of the government, which was a center-right coalition; and the rightist Popular Alliance, directed by Manuel Fraga Iribarne, the former Minister under Franco and an important figure in one of the wings of the old regime. Both groups with obvious shades of difference between them shared the characteristic of distancing themselves in large measure from the Franco regime without directly aligning themselves with the historical rightist parties.

On the opposite side of the political arena we find two long-standing parties: the Socialist Workers Party, founded in 1879 by Pablo Iglesias; and the Communist Party directed by Carrillo, both of which had gone underground in the days of Franco.

The UCD, with the advantage of having at its head the former head of the government, came to power in 1977, although without an absolute majority and in 1982 it practically disappeared, going from 168 seats to 12 in those five years.

Suárez responded to the rapid decay of the UCD as shown in successive local elections by defecting and creating a new party, the Social Democratic Center (Cen-



tro Democrático Social or CDS). The CDS was an attempt to move towards the left-center.

The PSOE, which had shown promising gains in 1977, winning 30% of the votes and seats, received 46% of the vote and 202 parliamentary seats in 1982, and so came to power. The PSOE took full advantage of the charisma of its historic roots but left behind its traditional leaders and moved towards the center avoiding confrontations. This pragmatic tendency has continued during the seven years the party has been in power, much as has been the case, as we all know, with Mitterand's Socialist Party.

In the 1982 general elections, the Popular Coalition, which was formed around Fraga's Popular Alliance, became the second force in the government, winning 25% of the vote and 105 seats. The Communist party which had garnered nearly 11% of the vote in 1979 plummeted in the next elections five years later to a mere 4%; the UCD won only 7% and Suárez's new CDS only 3%.

In Mexico in 1988 the picture was radically different. The PRI, in contrast to the UCD, is not a political coalition. Even though the UCD was created at the instance of the government headed by Suárez, as was the PRN-PRI under Calles in 1929, it is worth noting that at the time of the Spanish general elections of 1982, the UCD has been in power for a scant five years and that at the

time of the 1988 elections the PRI had been in power for six decades.

**It is worth noting that at the time of the Spanish general elections in 1982, the UCD had been in power a scant five years, while in Mexico in 1988, the PRI had been in power for six decades**

The Mexican system of government has one essential difference that has been overlooked by the boosters of the Spanish transition. Spain has a parliamentary system; the Legislative and the Executive branches are so intertwined that all power emanates from the party, or the coalition, that achieves a majority of the seats in the Congress. Mexico has a presidential system which, like in the United States, is characterized by a separate and autonomous configuration of the Executive Branch and the two houses which form the Legislative Branch. Even when a party, or a coalition, achieves absolute majority

## ELECTORAL REFORM

Omar Ocampo

The electoral reform law approved in the extraordinary period of the Chamber of Deputies, from last August to October, was the necessary result of an electoral history in which the electoral process had lost credibility. All the parties which participated in its elaboration declared the reform to be insufficient and partial, especially in the context of presidential elections questioned by the opposition and the presumed electoral fraud which, according to the evaluation of the Independent Citizens' Tribunal, occurred during the recent elections for state deputies in Michoacán.

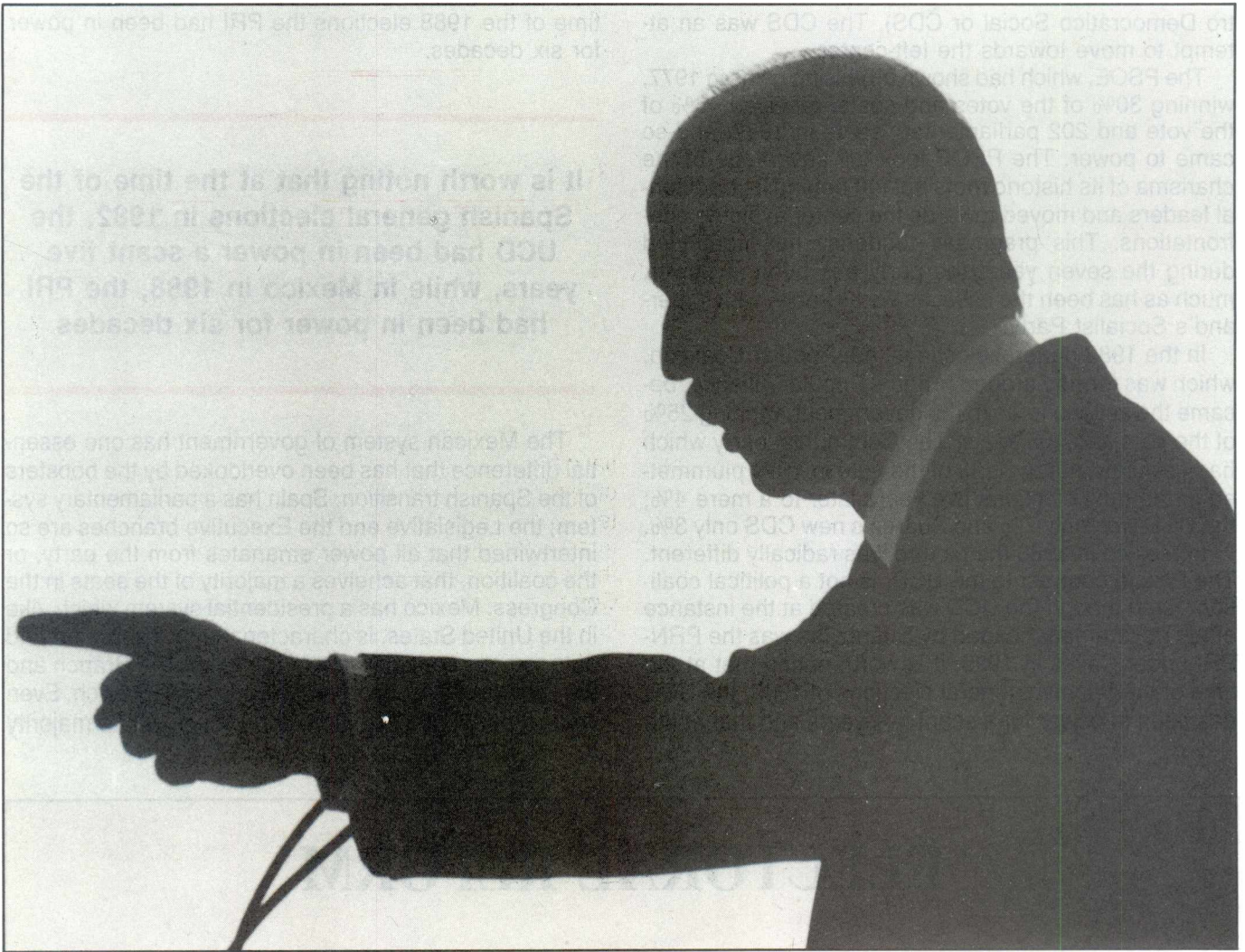
At the beginning of his term, the administration of Carlos Salinas de Gortari proposed, at the express demand of the opposition parties, the elaboration of an electoral reform and the necessary constitutional modifications in an extraordinary period of the Congress. In order to modify the Constitution, the approval of two thirds of the deputies of this body is needed. The task of reforming the electoral legislation and modifying it constitutionally required the establishment of alliances, agreements and consensus in a Congress in which no single party had the majority of votes.

In order to discuss the different initiatives, the Commission of Government and Constitutional Matters of the Chamber of Deputies created two working groups, each made up of six deputies of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI, in power) and four opposition deputies from the parties National Action (PAN), Democratic Revolution (PRD) and the Cardenist Front for National Reconstruction (PFCRN). Although the fact that the working groups contained a majority of deputies from the PRI was declared to be an anti-democratic manner of integrating the groups, the discussion progressed in two general areas: the first concerning electoral organisms, political rights and responsibilities as well as evaluation and procedures regarding electoral conflicts; the second of which referred to the integration and functions of the chambers of deputies and senators, parties and the po-

litical situation of the Federal District, with the proposal to convert it into the state of Anahuac.

One of the themes that produced a great deal of debate was the relation between the executive branch and electoral organisms such as the Federal Electoral Commission. The PRI held that the organization of elections was a task which required the intervention of the Executive, to provide financial and logistic resources as well as to preside, through the Interior Ministry, over the electoral process. The PAN as well as the PRD maintained an opposing opinion. They argued that elections should be organized and presided over by representatives of the legislative branch and they criticized the fact that the Electoral Commission had an overrepresentation of the official party.

At the beginning of the extraordinary period the possibility of an alliance between opposition forces (principally PAN and PRD) to achieve substantial modifications of the electoral system was foreseeable. However, in spite of this initial possibility of an alliance between the two parties, the proposal of the Institutional Revolutionary Party, which received the support of the National Action Party at the very end of the extraordinary period, prevailed. PRI and PAN presented a joint proposal, which was later approved in the Chamber of Deputies in a vote opposed by the PRD and then ratified by the Chamber of Senators: 1) The creation of a new Federal Electoral Tribunal whose magistrates and counsellors will be named by the executive and legislative branches and ratified by two thirds of the Chamber of Deputies; 2) a new national registrar of citizens, which will give out identification cards with photographs, and whose principal function will be to clean out and give credibility to the electoral register; 3) respect for citizens' freedom of political affiliation; and 4) electoral colleges subject to the decisions of the Tribunal.



President Salinas faces the challenge of giving greater credibility to electoral processes. Photo by Marco Antonio Cruz/Imagenlatina

in the Congress, the Presidency can constitutionally fall into the hands of another party. Such is the case at the moment in the United States, which served as a model for our presidential system. The Democratic party dominates the House and the Senate (even in the number of Governors) but the President is a Republican.

In 1982, the oppositions—and not the opposition, given that by the last quarter of this year the National Action Party and the FDN clearly walked different paths—went from 35% of the vote in 1985, to 48%, and in the case of the House of Deputies took 240 of the 500 seats; but the PRI kept its absolute majority, albeit reduced to 52% of the vote and 260 deputies, 20 more than the oppositions combined.

One must also take into account that, this absolute majority in the government of the Federal District and in the District's Representative Assembly, the 31 governorships and in the 31 state congresses, as well as more than 90% of local governments, all of which have to do only with popularly elected institutions.

#### Political Parties at the Forefront

During the first post-Franco years—that is, during the Arias Navarro and Suárez governments—and later throughout Felipe González's two governments, Spanish politicians (the real wonder-workers of the democratic adventure) showed one and all that the backbone of the Spanish transition would be the political parties and that

the party system would be the base of the democratic regime, of Spanish democracy.

The parties, conscious of their responsibility, agreed to bring forth a founding constitution (1978) from the Moncloa Pacts, an event which united the most significant political currents. This Constitution, with the Political Reform Act of 1977, permitted national and local elections, and legalized parties.

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**It is clear that even if the surprising results of the July 1988 elections perplexed many in the PRI, they also unnerved many in the opposition parties**

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Had the principal democratic institutions—the Government, the Judicial Branch, the Constitutional Tribunal, the Comunidades and local governments—not worked efficiently under the aegis of mature political parties, the military menace—which reached a tragicomic level with Tejero—, Basque terrorism and governmental ineffectiveness would have undone Spanish political society, humiliated the transition and the new-born Spanish democracy, opening the way to the real centers of power from the sidelines of the multiparty system.

## ELECTIONS IN MICHOACÁN AND GUERRERO

State elections were held in Michoacán and Guerrero on Sunday December 3, 1989. In Michoacán, these were the third elections in less than 18 months: the federal elections of July 1988, the voting for deputies to the State Legislature in July 1989, and the last elections in December for municipal authorities. In Guerrero, the December elections were for both State deputies and for municipal authorities. The most important parties contending these elections in these neighboring states were the Democratic Revolution Party (PRD) and the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), while the main challenge was the election of representatives of local government in both states, where local landlords (*caciques*) have maintained ancient powers which have obstructed respect for decisions made by the communities. Thus, anger and resentments accumulated over various decades were aired during and after the voting processes in elections once again marked by abstentionism, by various forms of electoral fraud and by incidents of personal revenge.

In Guerrero, the parties except the PRD signed a pact before the elections which was to guarantee electoral transparency, but voting was carried out in the midst of general doubts about this. The Party of the Cardenist Front for National Reconstruction (PFCRN) considered that electoral fraud was generalized in the state elections. As well, old rancors and the tortuous electoral processes, decided upon by officials whose behaviour was not always considered to be impartial, resulted in explosions of violence in various regions—such as Tecpan, Teloloapan, Cutzamala, Taxco and Coyuca de Benítez. This last municipality was the scene of violent combats on January 1, the day that the elected municipal president from the PRD, was supposed to take office. The new year began in Coyuca de Benítez with violent fighting with fire-arms, dynamite and bombs, between members of the PRI and PRD, resulting in the death of four persons, three of whom were members of the

PRD. Police forces disoccupied various municipal offices which had been occupied by the opposition and dissolved demonstrations with violence—for example in Taxco, the National Action Party (PAN) accused the PRI of fraudulently quitting them their victory in that city, and was violently thrown out of the municipal offices, which they had occupied some days before, during the early hours of the morning of January 2 by police who used truncheons and tear gas. This is the second time the PAN has suffered violent repression in dispute of electoral results—last November in Culiacán, Sinaloa, the municipal offices were burned down during fighting after elections.

In Guerrero, according to official figures, 69 of the 75 municipalities of the whole state have been computerized, and assure that PRI won in 56 of them, the PRD in 9, the PARM in 2, the PFCRN in one and the PRT also in one. Six more localities will celebrate extraordinary elections due to the irregularities in the ordinary polls, according to Governor Ruiz Massieu.

The PRD has held dialogues with important leaders of the PRI and of the Government in Guerrero, and has presented computerized voting results which prove the victory of the PRD in 9 municipalities, and is currently demanding the destitution of state authorities and a political judgment against the Governor of Guerrero, José Francisco Ruiz Massieu, for his supposed responsibility in the use of state resources in favor of PRI candidates, and for being the intellectual author of fraud committed against the citizens of Guerrero. Meanwhile, the State Electoral Commission has determined that, apart from the main political parties already mentioned, other political groups have obtained a municipal victory—the PRT (the Workers' Revolutionary Party, which although it is not registered as a political party on a national level, is recognized and allowed to participate in state elections), the PARM (Party of the Authentic Mexican Revolution) and the PFCRN.

In Michoacán, the PRD began the new decade

with the Government of almost half of that state's municipalities, after the State Electoral Commission declared that of the 113 municipalities, 56 has been won by the PRI, 52 by the PRD, 3 by the PAN and 1 by the PARM, while in the city of Uruapan, the elections were declared null and void, and where citizens will face another election soon. In Uruapan, the state's principal commercial center, due to its booming avocado production, members of the business community have traditionally voted for the PAN, which formed an electoral alliance with the PRI, but even so these parties have not been able to establish that they won a clear victory at the December polls.

Violence also broke out in various regions of Michoacán, such as in Zitácuaro, Benito Juárez and Jungapeo, among others, where political battles took place. Although the majority of municipal governments were assumed pacifically by their new authorities, some communities have parallel municipal offices, following the refusal of one party to recognize the other's supposed victory. In Benito Juárez, local members of the PRI and PRD made their own arrangements, desobeying orders from party headquarters: they agreed to divide local territory, population and budget. The same is occurring during the first few days of the new year in other communities, and in this way the permanent threat of violence has been detained. Even so, although the electoral process has now ended, some thirty municipal offices are still occupied in Michoacán, due to various causes, principally because of fraudulent actions committed against members of the PRD—which party has strong affiliations in Michoacán, birthplace of General Lázaro Cárdenas and of his son, PRD leader and presidential candidate in 1988, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas.

JUAN LUIS CAMPOS

The parties' efforts to come together as the principal agents of this new political life, pushing away the privileged Franquist agents such as the armed forces, upper-echelon bureaucrats, the clergy and heavy-weight capitalists, made it possible for social conflicts that are natural to systems in transformation, as well as political demands, to find an outlet in the parties themselves, and kept violence locked away in the Basque question.

The scant year that has gone by is not enough to measure accurately the role played by political parties in the Mexican moment, given that electoral behavior is very dynamic, as is the morphology of parties in any democracy. Nonetheless, it was clear that even if the surprising results of the July 6 elections perplexed many in the PRI, they also unnerved many in the oppositions.

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**Each society is clearly building its own democracy, but each by its own path, rhythm and with its own solutions**

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With one side perplexed and the other unnerved, dysfunctions occurred: various opposition factions' behavior on September 1 (President De la Madrid's last report to the nation) and on December 1 (President Salinas' inauguration) made it clear that their aim was to block political institutions; and that working out a basic con-

sensus between the party of the absolute majority, the PRI, and the opposition was not probable; and much less, an understanding with the Executive Branch that would assure a political foundation on which the new government could build its program. The outcome was clear: the atrophy of the Congress, which for all practical purposes enacted nothing during its first ordinary session (September-December, 1988).

In 1989, one saw the disarticulation of the National Democratic Front and the transformation of PMS into the Democratic Revolution Party (PRD). This transformation can be explained as a dramatic act of survival and change of direction in the light of having gotten only 4.5% of the vote.<sup>5</sup> As I have already pointed out, the PRD is heir of the Communist Party of 1919.

The other FDN parties, each in its own way, have split with Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and again, each in its own way, have begun to reach preliminary understandings with the PRI government.

The PAN has acted ably, consistently and even maliciously, as befits a party which would be a loyal opposition and which would negotiate its contribution to whatever tack the Mexican political system may take. On December 3, it began a dialogue with the PRI government which, in spite of all its ups and downs, has not been suspended.

**Epilogue**

The similarities are so weak and the differences so marked between the Spanish transition (1976-1982) and the Mexican moment that to postulate a Spanish-style Mexican transition can be but a polemical device or the result of the heat of a political moment. The deep nature—the true nature—of the Franco regime and the Mexican regime, as seen in the parties which are the great agents in Mexican and Spanish political life, makes it clear that the changes that have taken place in recent years are most certainly headed towards the building of each society's democracy, each by its own path, rhythm and with its own solutions.

Even if July, 1988 is a milestone in the Mexican democratic process, it does not mean the downfall of a political regime, but rather implementation of political institutions that the party in power and the other parties have managed to put together through years of patient and lucid political work.

One last conclusion to do away with the imaginary analogy: the PRI is not the UCD, nor is the FDN Adolfo Suárez; nor can Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas be considered Mexico's Felipe González. And so: the Mexican moment is not the Spanish transition; it is all just an imaginary analogy. □

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup>The North American political observer (*El régimen de Franco*. Alianza Editorial 1987) identifies several Franquist regimes throughout 40 years.

<sup>2</sup>*España inteligible*. Alianza Universidad. 1985. pp. 374-375.

<sup>3</sup>Article 58 provides that "the King is the Head of the State symbol of its unity and permanence. (He) arbitrates and moderates the regular functioning of the institutions".

<sup>4</sup>Vasconcelos' National Democratic Party also took part in the first presidential elections the PRN ran in.

<sup>5</sup>One must remember the distribution of opposition votes in 1988: PAN: 18.3%; PPS: 9.4%; PDM: 1.3%; PFCRN: 9.5%; PRT: 0.5%; PARM: 6.2%.

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# DEMOCRACY IN TEACHERS' UNION WILL HELP RESOLVE EDUCATION CRISIS

The Mexican education system is currently undergoing changes which were unimaginable a year or two ago. On the one hand, a project of modernization fostered by the federal government is under way, while on the other, 1989 saw mass mobilizations of teachers demanding better salaries and democracy within their trade union, the National Union of Education Workers (SNTE). The teachers of this movement for democracy, members of the dissident group known as the National Coordinator of Education Workers (CNTE), have had some victories, mainly the resignation of the would be 'life-long' leader of the SNTE, Carlos Jongitud Barrios, and some improvement to their salaries. However, these victories are not a total solution to the problems of teachers, nor to those of the education sector as a whole. Reporter Arturo Cano Blanco, who is also a primary school teacher, interviewed separately representatives of the two sides in the union conflict: Elba Esther Gordillo, who succeeded Jongitud as General Secretary of the SNTE, and Jesús Martín del Campo, leader of the democratic teachers' movement, the CNTE.

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I am convinced that we have to modernize, that is, modify attitudes and make profound changes with the consent of all those involved in education

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Mexico has an education system with some 25 million students, from kindergarten to post-graduate level. However, according to researcher Gilberto Guevara, there are another 25 million Mexicans who have not completed primary school.

These two facts reveal one of the principal contradictions facing teachers and their trade union, the National Education Workers' Union (SNTE). The great majority of teachers at basic and middle levels of education, and an important number of higher education teachers, belong to this organization. The SNTE has recently seen great changes, especially since massive mobilizations of teachers in April and May 1989 - and these changes are opening the way to the possible participation of teachers in a transformation of education which will help in the construction of a juster and more democratic society.

With the dismantling of the group Revolutionary Vanguard (see Voices No. 11), which dominated the union for 17 years, and which decided the fate of millions of workers and controlled vital zones of the education department's administrative apparatus, people such as Elba Esther Gordillo and Jesús Martín del Campo have come to the front of the teachers' movement. They represent, from opposite trenches, two of the main forces most directly involved in national education.

The main problem in the education crisis lies in the teachers' loss of autonomy in decision making



Elba Esther Gordillo, General Secretary of the Education Workers' Union. Photo by Laura Cano.

Professor Elba Esther Gordillo (1945) is General Secretary of the National Executive Committee of the SNTE. She was appointed to this post following the events of April and May last year, although she has occupied various positions in the union since 1971. Professor Gordillo has also had a political career in the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) - she was organization secretary and also general delegate of the party in the state of Chihuahua. She was a federal deputy and until April 1989 she was head of the Gustavo A. Madero delegation in Mexico City. Jesús Martín del Campo (1948) studied to become a teacher in the National Teachers' School, and went onto the higher level of this school with a specialty in history; later he studied two Masters degrees in History, in the UNAM and in the National Anthropology and History School. He began his trade union activities in 1967 and was a founding member and is today an important leader of the National Coordinator of Education Workers (CNTE), an organization of dissident teachers. He is currently Organization Secretary of one of the most important sections of the teachers' union, Section 10, which is made up by teachers of the middle and higher education levels in Mexico City.

How would you describe Mexico's education system to foreign readers?

*Elba Esther Gordillo:* It is an education in a country which has had a great demographic explosion and which needs an education system that serves as a

# CHALLENGES TO IMPROVE EDUCATIONAL QUALITY

Omar Ocampo

The centralized control exercised by the State over education as well as over many other points, has led to evident backlog and a negative situation in the present educational system. From this point of departure, the administration of President Carlos Salinas presented early in its history, the project for reform and modernization for 1989- 1994, a program given form in the National Plan for Development (PND).

These reforms, according to the PND, respond to real needs in Mexican society since 'the social transformations (...) have accentuated factors with negative impact on school productivity and student continuity and on educational services'. In this way, using the very words of the Plan, to modernize means to better the quality at all levels, from pre-school to postgraduate studies, technical educational, adult education and training programs, and special education.

In this respect, the National Plan for Development proposes the use of modern social communication techniques, as the radio and television have proven to be efficient and mobile support units for education.

As regards the de-centralization proposed in the Plan, the scheme deals with educational resources and service transfers to local governments in order that these react to the reality existing in each state; also, it is hoped to avoid social desintegration and fragmentation insofar as the federal government will maintain its managing posture in relation to Study Plans and Programs well as in their evaluation, transfer and recognition.

For some observers and analysts, the third task proposed by the Plan creates some doubt. This task refers to the "promotion of alternative and complementary forms of social financing of the educational task". Does this mean giving financial influence to private initiative? If so, then, under what conditions? In this sense, the Representatives' Assembly of the Federal District proposed an increase in education spending corresponding to 8% of the Gross Internal Product, but the PND is not clear in what way it will maintain its administrative management within this educational modernization.

All of the previously mentioned proposals were affirmed by President Carlos Salinas de Gortari in his first State of the Union address, and went beyond this because he analyzed the educational situation with regard to teachers: In April and May (of 1989), the teachers demonstrated for union re-organization and better benefits. The prolonged suspension of classes awoke an increasing unrest among parents and students. The government scrupulously respected the right of teachers to demonstrate, made an extraordinary effort to respond to the economic demands in the face of economic restraint by granting the highest wage increase of the decade in recognition of the fall in the standard of living. As regards the above, there is an impressive figure contradictory to that spoken by the President: the teachers' wage deterioration is close to 76% from 1976 to 1989. Returning to the presidential address: "There is no substitute for education in economic and social modernization. It is the highest priority sector in the government's duties. We have already begun a new stage in education in Mexico. This program maintains that a universal, useful, and high quality primary educational level must be achieved, and that it is a right defined by revolutionary proposition and is a modernizing task. The educational re-definition of the secondary and the high school levels promote links with social and community necessities. In the universities, we seek the organization and financing for innovation and excellence. Society believes in the proven vocation of the teacher. We are committed to their excellence. We will expand the open and non- formal systems of education. For the justice and progress we seek, we will broaden the options available to all Mexicans..."

The Representatives' Assembly itself proposed to re-structure study plans and programs, to respect the third article of the Constitution with regard to the Church's intervention in education, to raise the standard of living of teachers, and to achieve an increase of 8% of the Gross Internal Product for education.

The debate regarding educational modernization has been a long one. But teachers have been excluded from it; they are a sector of vital importance since they are the actu-

al givers of education, and they know the system's deficiencies and the potentially beneficial reforms.

If we take into account some figures regarding this point, we could note that the reformist future is not so encouraging; in adult education, the National Institute for Adult Education (INEA) recognized in 1982 the existence of six million adults who can neither read nor write, and in 1989, it reveals a figure of four million. This would indicate a reduction in illiteracy even though in 1982 figures show 13 million persons who had not finished primary school, and in 1989, 20 million adults who had not completed it. In 1982, seven million had not finished secondary school, and by 1989, 16 million had not. If we synthesize these figures, in 1982, 26 million adults were included in these three categories, and in 1989, 40 million were included. This points to a 70% increase in the adult education problems over a six year period.

As regards basic children's education, according to figures provided by the general director of the Mexican Center for Infant Rights, Andrea Barcena, 14 million children are enrolled in primary school, but another 14 million children have to work and have not even enrolled at this level.



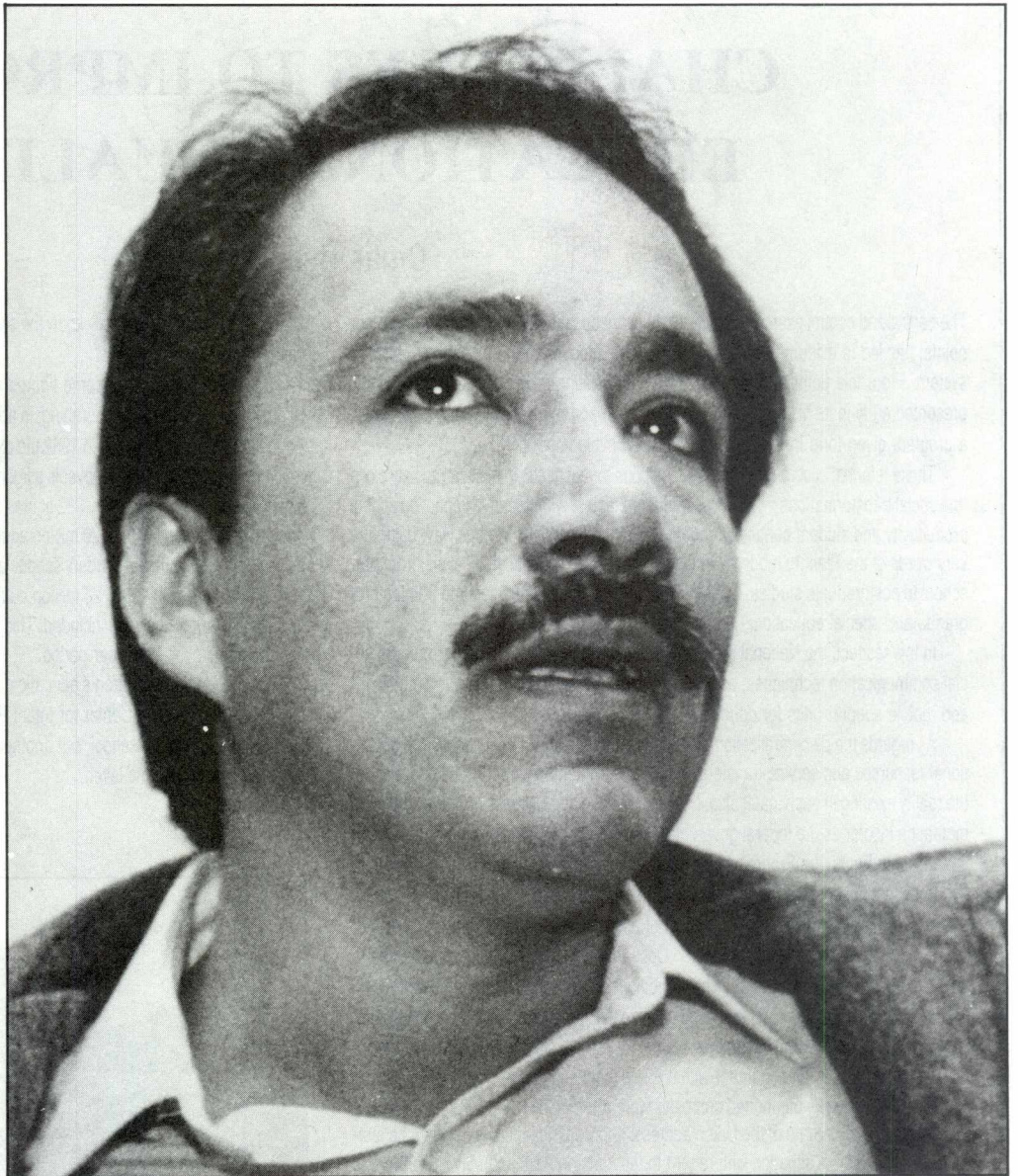
Teachers from the democratic groups, marching in Mexico City to give thanks to the general population for its support.

Photo by Angeles Torrejón/Imagenlatina.

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The teachers have a right to a better salary and the trade union has the obligation to demand it

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Jesús Martín del Campo, a leader of the dissident teachers' movement. Photo by Laura Cano.

lever for social benefits; because education should be an instrument not only of knowledge, but also of restitution.

We have been informed that the 1990 budget will have a 40% increase: it is of great importance that this money really reaches those areas which most need it. Because in a country like ours, with ethnic groups, with an urgent need to respect the culture but also to guarantee better health, housing and well being, there is a need for education which teaches its population to be productive for its own benefit.

It is also a system which needs to regionalize itself: it has been a long time since we had a text book which speaks to the pupil about his or her own home state, and this means that the students become disconnected from their origins. And people without a memory can have many serious problems.

*Jesús Martín del Campo:* As a system which has always been treated politically: the demands of the population have been attended in order to achieve a political justification, rather than to develop an educative project for a modern nation. This has been done so as to generate an image abroad of a government which attends to the needs of its population. Another sign of this kind of treatment is the state's use of employment: the Mexican Education Department (SEP), is a bureaucratic, stagnant dependency, it is the state department with most employees, but this does not automatically translate into the best attention to education needs. And it is the way it is because the employee of the SEP has been used as a pawn in support of government policy, not only in education but in all fields.



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**The school is no longer the most important socializing agency, it has given way to the mass media**

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In relation to education levels we can make the following summary: during the 20's and 30's attention was given to alphabetization, and this went on advancing into primary education, so much so that in the 1960's there was a fair expansion of this level, which covered most of the demand in urban areas, with a certain unfulfilled demand in rural zones. In secondary education - still speaking in quantitative terms - the system managed to fulfill 70% of the demand. Just as in all Latin American countries, there is a pyramid in education which gets narrower until education at the top, at post-graduate level, is for an elite.

Generally I think we can speak of an education system which is very bureaucratized, which has grown quantitatively but which still has great deficiencies in attending other needs of the population, beyond the number of students who have passed or failed exams.

**The commentary that the situation of Mexico's education system is of great concern has become a commonplace, but: what characteristics do you see? What is your opinion about the critical viewpoints presented by the teachers' union, and what role does this union have in education?**

*Elba Esther Gordillo:* Firstly, to accept that there is a crisis, because there is no national education plan and there is a lot of disarticulation between the different levels. Here there is a real problem concerning youth, because even though official statistics do not recognise the fact, there are serious levels of unemployment. And this means that we should revise the technical aspect so as to provide youths with guarantees of development possibilities which will assure them a minimal level of well being when they finish their studies.

Concerning the proposals made by President Salinas on education, I am convinced that we have to modernize, if by this we understand the modification of attitudes and the making of profound changes with the general consent of all those involved in education processes. It is not enough to unite a group of experts to discuss methodology and planification - we need a more democratic school, right from the lowest levels. That is, modernization plans must be worked out with the consensus of teachers, parents and the trade union.

We are going to study and revise the plan, that's why we are insisting on the formation of committees in each school so that they study this education program. We are concerned that it might turn out to be, yet again, just another six year plan, because this does a lot of damage to education.

*Jesús Martín del Campo:* In the field of declarations, everyone agrees that education is in crisis - this was seen in terms of quantity since the 1960's, and in terms of quality, since the 70's. While the government sees the problem mainly in terms of products (the number of drop-outs, the number of successful students, etc), those of us who work in education see the problem as a combination of factors, from the economic to the cultural, where the main issue lies in the teachers' loss of autonomy in making decisions on education.

The national leadership of the SNTE recognizes the education crisis, but from the viewpoint which follows government proposals. Because at the moment it urgently needs to show initiatives which are in advance of reports from the government and from dissident groups, it is trying to make some new moves. It has more a sense of anticipation of politics and publicity than an in-depth proposal on education.

There is a lot of debate on this point, because in its desires to anticipate, the national leadership of the SNTE even takes proposals made by the dissident teachers and empties them of content and meaning. One of these is the idea of re-evaluating the teaching profession, which came from the democratic groups at academic levels, and which the SNTE has now made its own. For us, a re-evaluation of the education worker means an historic revision of the experiences of Mexican teachers, studying those aspects which can help the teaching profession recuperate its place in society. It also involves localizing those factors which have caused a blockage in the teachers' creative capacities, and finding out why the profession has become extremely routine and bureaucratized. On the level of declarations, it sounds like the same discourse, but it has very distinct implications and consequences.

Illiteracy Rates in Mexico, 1980		
Age	Male	Female
15 years old or less	14.1%	17.6%
15-24	5.8%	7.4%
25-44	11.4%	18.1%
45 and older	22.8%	32.99%

Some days ago I interviewed some 20 teachers about what they could do to improve the quality of education. All of them attributed the system's deficiencies to the lack of funds and to bad programs. What causes this attitude of the teachers? What makes them distance themselves from their work in this way?

*Elba Esther Gordillo:* In this problem there is something at the bottom which has to do with the political and trade union effervescence that we have experienced recently. It is the question of the dignity of being a teacher. I am convinced that the great problem of modernization is, has been, and can be, letting teachers be simple bureaucrats.

I do not agree that the salary is the most important factor in the making of a better teacher. Obviously as a human being he or she has the right to a better salary - and the trade union has the obligation to demand it - but the teacher should be formed in a different way: he or she should have a certain mystique.

There is a problem of dignity which is the responsibility of governments and of the union leadership. We need to re-evaluate our functions, and become totally aware of what these imply. On this point I always talk about something which has impressed me: one of the governments which paid teachers least was that of President Lázaro Cárdenas. Once, the teachers were planning a demonstration and they invited President Cárdenas to their national council meeting. Cárdenas avoided going, because he knew the teachers would demand better salaries, but he sent them a letter where he



Elba Esther Gordillo promised profound democratic changes in the teachers' union. Photo by Laura Cano.

said: "Teachers, there is no money, but you are the Revolution: go out and make it".

*Jesús Martín del Campo:* It is a defense mechanism. The identity of the teacher has been so badly treated, that they are not even given the rank of professional. The career has lost status, for some it is a sub-profession, a technical career, a second class job. Socially it does not have the importance it used to, it has been displaced by other activities. Thus, there is a defensive attitude: "those responsible for everything are the authorities, which are bad, the programs, which are bad, and the union leaders, who are also bad". This defensive attitude could be hiding a sensation of powerlessness and a questioning about how to resume the teaching work with a new sense of direction. However, what the teachers pointed out to you is real: the programs are inadequate, they are reformed without consulting the teachers, and often they are mixtures of new theories which are not compatible with each other, while many are just six-year fashions.

But the other problem is how to assume responsibility - in so far as teaching is not a technical activity - for the relation between teacher and students, between teachers and knowledge. We need to resolve the problem of the teachers' commitment without entering into fields of accusation and blame. We also need to recognize those limitations of the teachers due to their formation.

**For better or worse,  
the trade union had  
an important role in  
the state of today's  
education**

#### Expenditure in Health and Social Security as a Percentage of the Gross Internal Product

1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
3.6	3.6	3.0	2.8	2.8	2.4

Source: IV State of the Union Address, statistical appendix.

**What distance is there between the teacher of the 1930's, who confronted the great challenge of taking education to all the isolated regions of the country, and the Mexican teacher of the 1990's?**

*Elba Esther Gordillo:* Plenty. We have to understand that societies evolve. In today's country of more than 80 million better informed inhabitants we demand another kind of professional. What would be worth seeing is if the teacher of the 1930's who had so much mystique and who managed transcendental actions in the rural school, did that because they knew a lot or earned a lot. But neither of these is the case - it was because they had a different emotion, affection, they knew they were transformers.

In contrast, the teachers who graduate today, go to a marginal area and discover that what they were told in school does not coincide with reality. They arrive in schools where there is no blackboard, no chalk, but besides, they become involved in the same problem because they also become marginalized, not only materially, but also culturally.

How is it possible that we teachers do not have cultural, editorial programs, nor actualization systems? What most concerns me are the schools which form the teachers: those who become teachers should do so because they have the vocation, not because they think they will earn more money or so as to later go to university. Because the moment comes when the teacher realizes that the job goes beyond the classroom time, and that the salary is not going to solve his or her problems, and then comes a period of frustration.

*Jesús Martín del Campo:* We have to recognize the first difference between the 1940's in Latin America and the societies we live in today: the school is no longer the most important socializing agency, it has given way to the mass media. This has a succession of negative effects on the teaching profession: as an individual, the professor is an almost unknown subject, an anonymous being in the huge numbers of teachers in the big cities, although he/she still has a certain image in the rural areas. But in both cases the teacher has been put

# NATIONAL EFFORTS TO MODERNIZE EDUCATION

Gisela Salinas

In October 1989 the government of President Salinas announced its education policy in the Program for the Modernization of Education, 1989-94. This followed the national debate on the modernization of education, a debate that lasted several months and gave the opportunity to teachers, parents, and those in charge of educative institutions to give their opinions on the issues involved.

The 1989-94 Program is part of the President's project to modernize Mexican society in all its aspects. Thus, "education will be a lever of transformation if Mexicans can find there the means to develop new capacities: the capacity to generate a liberating and efficient productive structure with the help of scientific and technological know-how; the capacity to strengthen social solidarity, national identity and scientific and technological culture; the capacity of workers to acquire and humanize new forms of plural and democratic participation; the capacity to perfect services so they work efficiently for the well being of the population".

To modernize education, according to the Program, means: "revise and systematically rationalize education costs and at the same time order and simplify mechanisms for management and administration; it will call for innovations in procedures, imagination of

new alternatives, action and political decision, solidarity and consensus to serve the general interest".

Leading Mexican education researchers see the situation of the country in this field as critical. During the last six year government, it was announced that the Education Department (SEP) was able to attend 100% of the demand in primary education. The present government admits that nearly 300,000 Mexican children, 2% of the total, have no access to primary school, while nearly 800,000 primary school students abandon their studies each year, and 1,700,000 children from 10-14 years of age are not registered in the education system at all. The high level of failures and drop outs in primary education (see Chart 1), indicates a difficult social and educative reality.

The number of Mexicans who have not finished primary school or who have not even had access to education, according to the Program, is 24.4 million (see Chart 2). Education researcher Guevara Niebla, writing in the national newspaper *La Jornada* (22-Oct-89), had the following comment about this situation: "This makes us think that objectively, the system has produced more people with no primary education than it has produced students who finished primary school, and that the effort needed to attend to this

demand would be almost equivalent to the efforts carried out by the state in its entire education system".

Currently, there are almost 26 million students enrolled in the education system, with one million teachers in 154,000 schools and institutes. The Program recognizes that "the achievements of Mexican teachers have been extraordinary". From 1921 to the present, the illiteracy rate dropped from 66% to 8% and the percentage of Mexicans who have attended primary school rose from 22% to 98%. However, the Program talks about the need "to impart better education, carry out profound modifications of our education system to make it more participative, efficient and of better quality, that is, more modern".

According to this way of thinking, the formation and actualization of teachers constitute a fundamental task of the educative modernization and require the "establishment of promotion structures so as to reconcile the sense of service, appropriate in the teaching profession, with better standards of living" (from the Program for the Modernization of Education). That is, "we should have teachers with the best academic preparation and a sense of vocation who incorporate themselves with maximum enthusiasm to the processes of educative modernization" (José Angel Pescador, Rector of the Nation-

al Pedagogical University).

Mexican teachers, who in spite of their "extraordinary achievements" are punished with miserable salaries and a corrupt and anti-democratic trade union leadership, managed to break the traditional balance of power in the education sector this year, with national demonstrations. Following these mass teachers' movements in April and May, and the triumphs achieved by the democratic teachers, their opinions about their work has taken on a new meaning.

Any education project should take the teachers into account. The modernization program for 1989-94 defines the following challenges: decentralization, number of students not enrolled in the school system, structural changes, establishment of links between schools and the productive apparatus, scientific and technological advances and investment in education according to new necessities. These challenges cannot be met without dignified economic justice for teachers, nor without their free and creative participation in the processes of modernization, which otherwise would be only an official project with great intentions, but lacking in real opportunities to make transformations in the complex reality of Mexican education.

CHART I  
SCHOLARITY INDEX

	1984	1989
Primary School (of every 100 students)	48 did not finish	46 did not finish
Secondary School	26 did not finish	30 did not finish
Tertiary Education	50 did not finish	49 did not finish

SOURCES: 1984: National Program for Education, Culture, Recreation and Sport, 1984-1988.  
1989: Program for the Modernization of Education, 1989-1994.

For many years, the trade union bureaucracy and that of the Education Department fed off each other. No innovations could be made during that matrimony of the two bureaucracies

CHART II

## ADULT EDUCATION DEFICIT

	1984	1989
Illiterates	5.7 million	4.2 million
Did not finish primary school	15 million	20.2 million
Did not finish high school	7 million	16 million
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>27.7 million</b>	<b>40.4 million</b>

SOURCES: 1984: National Program for Education, Culture, Recreation and Sport, 1984-1988.  
1989: Program for the Modernization of Education, 1989-1994.  
(Figures refer to all those aged over 15.)

aside, and teachers thus join in the complaints of the family and the church, which have also been displaced as socializing agencies.

In this general framework there is another problem: our education system separated teachers' education from the University, thus creating a second class network for teachers. In other times, this allowed children of people with low incomes to study a career that was both short and socially useful. But in the long run, the repercussions have been negative and only the other professions are recognized as "real".

Efforts have been made - though so far only at bureaucratic levels - without immediate results, to give the rank of university degree to the teaching career. So far this has only served to stall enrollments in teachers' colleges.

Finally, in contrast with the teachers of the 1930's who did not have much knowledge but who did have social recognition, the teacher today lacks both, being backward both in rank and in academic formation.

**What role has the SNTE played, and how important is its trade union structure in the education system? How responsible is the SNTE for the current panorama in education?**

*Elba Esther Gordillo:* I believe everyone has been responsible. But I think there has been a mistake made about the trade union. The SNTE, because of its character as educator-worker, should make proposals in education, it should have a say in the improvement of the profession, take care that it be concerned not only with money, it should be a class grouping, a more committed trade union. In this, I don't think we have yet found the way.

But I think that, for better or for worse, the trade union had an important role in the state of today's education. Now we should be looking to the future, that is where the key lies. In the SNTE there are very young teachers, mature ones and very old ones, all with their various academic proposals.

*Jesús Martín del Campo:* For many years, but especially since the years of the Revolutionary Vanguard, the trade union bureaucracy and that of the SEP were superimposed and vinctuated as complementary bureaucracies. One fed off the other, the two co-existed in a symbiotic relationship. The growth of employment in non-fundamental areas of the SEP favored all the clients of the Vanguard of the SNTE, and vice versa.

The consequence is stagnation, as the huge number of people who received wages without working made the SEP inefficient. Some two years ago an internal struggle began there, firstly in order to get rid of Revolutionary Vanguard representatives in vital areas.

This is related to the two currents which exist in the Education Department: one, modernizer, made up mostly of people who arrive with a new Cabinet, with each new Education Minister, the other, a conservative nucleus made up by those who say they know education, and who - not by coincidence - are associated with the Revolutionary Vanguard. No innovations could be made in this panorama, in this period of matrimony of the two bureaucracies. And thus, the responsibility they have for the situation of our education system is direct and very considerable.

**You head a trade union made up mostly of women, but which traditionally has been in hands of men. What implications does this have for you and for the trade union?**

*Elba Esther Gordillo:* We women still have to jump many puddles. Sometimes, dealing with bureaucrats, politicians or with the dissidents, one notices that they think that a woman can be weak and vulnerable just because she is a woman, that she will be incapable of making decisions, or will lack serenity. They think our emotions will beat us. That's why we women have a great challenge to demonstrate that we are capable of being leaders.

Here there is something related to education. Even though it embarrasses us, or it is difficult to accept this truth, if there is so much machismo in this country it's because there are two great people responsible: the mother and the teacher. In the classroom we tell them that boys' tasks are one thing, and the girls' another — we are not educating with equality. This is one of the reflections we have to make for the modernization of education. □



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# UNPROTECTED CHILDREN: The Myth of Human Rights

It is an undeniable fact that children occupy a great space in the field of human concerns. As adults, it is probable that we see in children a reflection of our own infancy. And it is perhaps for this very reason that we continue to repeat painful patterns. But today the human society has to consider changing the world of children, by recognizing their human rights: various national legislations and international covenants already exist on the protection of children, but in reality, our concern for children is not much more than that, as our societies still have high infant mortality rates, illiteracy rates and in many regions, children have to work instead of playing and going to school. The diverse problems faced by children today, outlined in this article by UNICEF consultant Boris Yopo, make us realize that it is time to stop just worrying, and to start acting in the defense of children's rights.

*"In the midst of a noiseless emergency, approximately 280,000 children die every week on this planet"*

James P. Grant  
Executive Director -UNICEF

A long time before the United Nations organization was born, one of main concerns of the international society was the welfare of children. In 1924, the League of Nations approved the Declaration of Geneva, the Rights of the Child, and when the Commission of Social Development of the United Nations elaborated its First Programme in 1984, one of its first recommendations was

that when the study of the Letter of Children's Rights was resumed, it should assign more importance to the Declaration of Geneva and moreover, transform the document into an instrument of the United Nations, which should contain the principal characteristics of the most recent concepts of child welfare.

A draft of the Declaration prepared by the Commission of Social Development was sent to the General Assembly after the Commission of Human Rights had examined it and offered certain revisions. On November 20 1959, the Assembly approved and proclaimed the "Declaration of Children's Rights". This "Declaration" established a Code of Laws for the welfare of all children "without exception" and: "Without distinction or discrimination of race, color, sex,

idioms, religion, political opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or any other condition of himself or of his family". These rights are classified in 4 categories: civil, cultural, economic and social.

In 1979, the National Assembly proclaimed the year 1979 as the International Year of Children, specifying that the year should have the following objectives:

- 1) Offer a context for the defense of children and increment the awareness of their special needs.
- 2) Spread the acknowledgement of the fact that programs for children should be a vital part of plans for economic and social development.

Moreover, the Assembly implored governments to strengthen their



efforts for the long lasting improvement of the welfare of their children, with special attention to the more vulnerable or disadvantaged groups.

### The Cruel and Coarse Reality

Almost 30 years after the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, the world scenery could not be more brutal and desolate, in this precise moment there does not exist a human group where human rights are more systematically violated than in the case of the child, should they live in a surrounding of poverty or not, in "ill developed countries" or in technical and industrial societies. Both from the quantitative and qualitative viewpoint this statement is true and can be validated at any time.

*Each day 40,000 children die on this planet. This makes a total of 280,000 children in one week or 14,560,000 yearly. These children die unjustly due to causes absolutely under our control, in the face of the indifference of the world society, already thoroughly alienated in a terrifying individualism.*

A recent report from UNICEF points out:

"From the ethical point of view nothing changes because of the fact that these millions of children should die in one or other moment or place". But this means that in certain cases their misery is not reflected by a camera lens, and therefore this implies that their deaths do not constitute news and that the world is not ashamed or obliged to do something for them.

*This drama of millions of children exploited or unjustly murdered in a major number of countries, has been entitled "A Silent Atrocity"; "The Invisible Problem"; "A Noiseless Emergency"; "The Useless Sacrifice".*

Nothing is more terrifying to the human conscience than the forgotten and imposed death of these children by an unjust

**There does not exist a human group where human rights are more systematically violated than in the case of children, should they live in a surrounding of poverty or not, in "ill developed countries" or in technical and industrial societies**

economic and social system which condemns millions of children to death or to a degrading life even before their birth.

*If the mighty world policy to arm itself should yield 5 percent of its astronomic inversion in the armaments industry, which reaches 980 thousand millions of dollars, 90 percent of the lives of those 14,560,000 children, who die unjustly and uselessly each year, could easily be saved: that is, the lives of 13,204,000 children. The cost of one nuclear submarine equals the global educational budget of 23 African countries for the term of 1 year. These countries have a total population of 160 million children of school age; while the money spent each year on weapons and other military items in the Middle East would be sufficient to finance the immunization of the whole world against traditional infectious mortal diseases. If the 500,000 high level scientists who work today in the armaments industry should direct their knowledge to socially productive services they would also collaborate to diminish this atrocity.*

Nevertheless, besides those 14.5 million children who die of hunger, malnutrition, diarrhea, or for lack of vaccines, there are millions of children who survive and subsist in marginal conditions or in extreme poverty.

### Latin America: Street Children

Very realistic estimations elaborated by UNICEF at the beginning of 1980, show that approximately 50 million children live and work in the great cities of Latin America. These children are subject to the working conditions of marginality, poverty and violence on the part of the 'mass society'. Practically none of the countries of the region, escape this drama which is the other side of the coin of the processes of 'modernization' which these countries are living. Brazil shelters 12 million of these children (*meninos da rua*), Colombia 9 million (*gamines*), and Mexico 8 million (*pelones*).

*These 50 million children do not constitute a real danger to the governments. Because of their lack of political organization they cannot exert pressure to reclaim their most elemental human rights.*

The children that tramp the streets of Latin American work in the most varied occupations to survive. These occupations vary from selling newspapers or chewing gum in the streets, to the practice of prostitution—open or disguised on the part of girls, or homosexuality on the part of boys.

### Sexual Exploitation of Children

Sexual abuse and violence against boys and girls is another crude reality which mankind has to confront. A recent study carried out by INTERPOL shows that the traffic of boys and girls for sexual trade exists in 69 countries. These children are led to participate in all kinds of sexual activities: from pornography to the practice of sexual relations.

*The sexual exploitation of children is equally severe in the industrialized and in the "ill-developed countries".*

*In the latter, poverty is the principal cause whereas in the former there is a conjunction of psycho-sexual pathologies.*

**Approximately 50 million children who live and work in the great cities of Latin America are subject to working conditions of marginality, poverty and violence**

Two North-American authors, Daniel Campagna and Donald Poffenberger, published a book entitled *The Sexual Trafficking of Children*, (Auburn House, 1987), where they point out that the traffic and sexual trade with children in the United States exceeds one million minors under 14 years of age. They point out

moreover, 'that girls between 8-13 years are very desirable merchandise'. In the year 1986 there were, in Switzerland alone, 30,000 rapes of children under 12 in accordance with the figures supplied by "International Defense for Children".

In Third World countries, due to the endemic poverty and misery, the exploitation and sexual violence exerted with boys and girls is equally disastrous. The prostitution of minors is openly observed on the streets of Bombay and Taipei as well as in Nairobi and in Santiago, Chile. There are estimates that in Thailand there are 14,000 girls, under 14 years old who make a living from prostitution. In Manila there are around 15,000, and a recent investigation made in Brazil by a sociologist, in the 8 largest cities,

revealed terrifying results: 300 thousand girls, under 15, live from prostitution. In Colombia the case of the 'Paraguera girls' (infant prostitutes) is famous and their number easily exceeds 100 thousand. There are abundant cases of 'boys-men' in the streets of Brazil, Honduras and México, who have been contaminated with the terrible AIDS disease by homosexual men, both nationals and foreigners.

**The Children of War**

Children are always the most innocent victims in armed conflicts, results of ideological processes that they will never comprehend and that do not concern them in any way.

The Conference on "The Condition of Child Victims of Conflicts in Africa" held in Nairobi on June, 1987, under the sponsorship of UNICEF and the African Net for the Prevention and Protection of Children Against Abuses and Forlornness (ANPPCAN), served as a framework to analyze the drama of child victims of war deeply and conscientiously. On this occasion, Dr. Arabang Maruping pointed out that "around 20 million persons, children and women in their majority, have died in 150 armed confrontations, practically all in under-developed countries, since the Second World War". She also informed that 'civil uproars and political violence have affected about 4 million children in one third of the African countries'.

In a recent conference dictated in London by Dr. James P. Grant, Executive Director of UNICEF, he pointed out that in Angola and Mozambique, approximately 360 children die daily, as a consequence of war. "It is as if a Jumbo jet full of children should crash to earth daily", he added. There are, therefore, 130 thousand children murdered each year, which leaves us petrified and without any explanation from the part of the "military strategists". This has caused UNICEF to decide to launch a campaign to sensitize international public opinion on the situation of minors victims of Apartheid in South Africa. We are witnessing the



An estimated 8 million children have been abandoned in Mexico City. Photo by Rodrigo Flores.

destruction and dehumanization of an entire generation. "It is almost a genocide", stated Max Coleman, a militant for the defense of Human Rights in South Africa.

It is estimated that in Lebanon 40 thousand children have died in the last ten years of war: "No illness has ever killed so many children during the same period", asserts one of the physicians who works in the Palestine refugee camps. During the Israeli invasion in 1982, 20 percent of the wounded civilians who were admitted to the hospitals of Beirut were minors, under 15 years, and more than 10 percent of them died as a consequence of wounds, without counting those that arrived already dead at the hospitals.

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**"Around 20 million persons, children and women in their majority, have died in 150 armed confrontations, practically all in under-developed countries, since the Second World War"**

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"A decisive fact that we must analyze is that war is not included in the classification of public or international health as a cause of infant mortality". For this reason, there is no adequate device to recopilate and divulge statistics related with this issue", states Dr. Amal Shama, Director of the Peditry Department of the Berbir Medical Center in Beirut.

The campaigns of the counterrevolution in Guatemala and El Salvador, and the agressions of the "contras" in Nicaragua also generate effects which are wicked to children. The Supreme Court of Justice of Guatemala, points out in a recent document that military actions "have left at least 100 thousand orphans whose ages vary from 2 months to 12 years, and who have

no economic support. These orphans are from the conflict areas in the Departments of San Marcos, Sololá, El Petén, El Quiché, and Las Verapaces".

*The aggression launched against the legal and legitimate Government of Nicaragua has cost this country around 50,000 victims, of whom 22,000 are dead. Of these 1,553 are children and youths. Besides, the conflict has left 1,542 children and 1,665 youths crippled. There were 1,236 children and youths kidnapped, whose whereabouts are unknown, and 180,000 children displaced by war.*

In Peru, unofficial figures estimate that some two thousand children have lost all their family since 1980, when 'Sendero Luminoso' began their activities in the Peruvian mountain range. Meanwhile, the Commission of Relatives of Vanished Prisoners estimates that at least 3 thousand children, out of a total of 10 thousand persons, have disappeared in the last five years in the areas of emergency in that same country.

The aforementioned drama resembles that which the Argentinians suffered during the years of military dictatorship. The mothers and grandmothers of the "Plaza de Mayo" continue their struggle up to this time demanding of the Government and Armed Forces the restitution and identification of the vanished children. Furthermore, it has never been possible to establish with certainty the exact number of children found in a cemetery near the city of Buenos Aires, who had been shot by the armed forces.

*In Uganda the children are called 'Kadogos' (small)... There are about 3,000 soldiers, boys and girls, whose ages oscillate from 8 to 15 years, who fight within the context of a non conventional civil war, which they have not promoted.*

The famous American newspaper "The Christian Science Monitor" in a special 24 page report entitled: "Children in the

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**The ILO estimates in 200 millions the number of minors who have to work in the world in order to survive**

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Darkness: The Exploitation of Innocence" (June 30, 1987), states that the situation of "child soldiers, who learn to kill before learning to read and write, constitutes a bitter reality of the military career."

### Working Children

Working children make up another category of the exploitation that different societies have been exerting on children. An investigation carried out by the International Labor Organization (ILO), estimates in 200 millions the number of minors who have to work in the order to survive. According to this study, in Latin America the quantity of children who have to work oscillates between 12 and 26 percent of the economically active population; in Asia they represent 11 percent, and in Africa 17 percent. Many of them have to carry out dangerous tasks, for example, work in the mines and in the manufacture of explosives; others are employed as cheap labor in industries which do not respect the established regulations of health and social security.

### The Study Concludes

"These are the tasks that force children to grow up prematurely, and not those that are assigned to them in the familiar agricultural activities, and which force them to live a cruel life without perspective for improvement".

Undoubtedly, the greatest number and percentage of working children is living in the Third World. Nevertheless, the *Christian Science Monitor* points out that the problem is also present in the highly industrialized countries. It is

estimated that in the United States there are 800 thousand children laboring as migratory agricultural workers. Other investigations carried out along the United States-Mexico border found that around 100 thousand Mexican children under 15 years of age are working the agricultural fields of Texas.

Practically nothing has been done to become acquainted with the reality of girls who are employed as domestic servants. This is another underworld where human rights are still "tierra incognita". Nevertheless, knowing the realities of the Third World, and that of Latin America

in particular, there remain few doubts that the contingent of young domestic working girls must rise to many millions. This is another drama that the human conscience should remember some day.

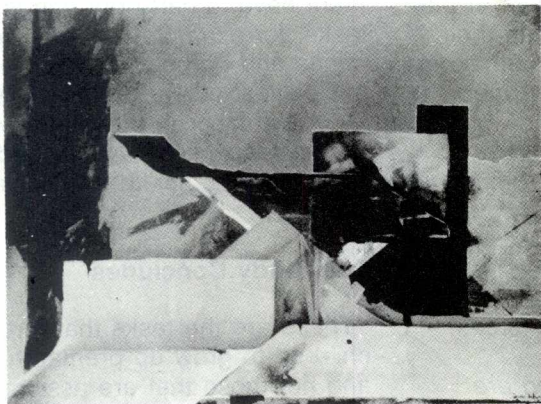
**The Challenge of the Fulfillment of Human Rights**

This short essay has presented the serious problem of the violation of the human rights of all children, including those who are unprotected or abandoned. Children's rights have been proclaimed but there are absolutely no means to sanction violations. The great question is

WHY, why are there so many violations to children's rights? And again, in what consists a right that has no means of enforcement?

Undoubtedly, the moment has come for the world society to meditate carefully over this "silent cruelty" which is exerted against millions of defenseless children and human beings, and to have the courage to press forward from "what we can do" to "What we are going to do". □

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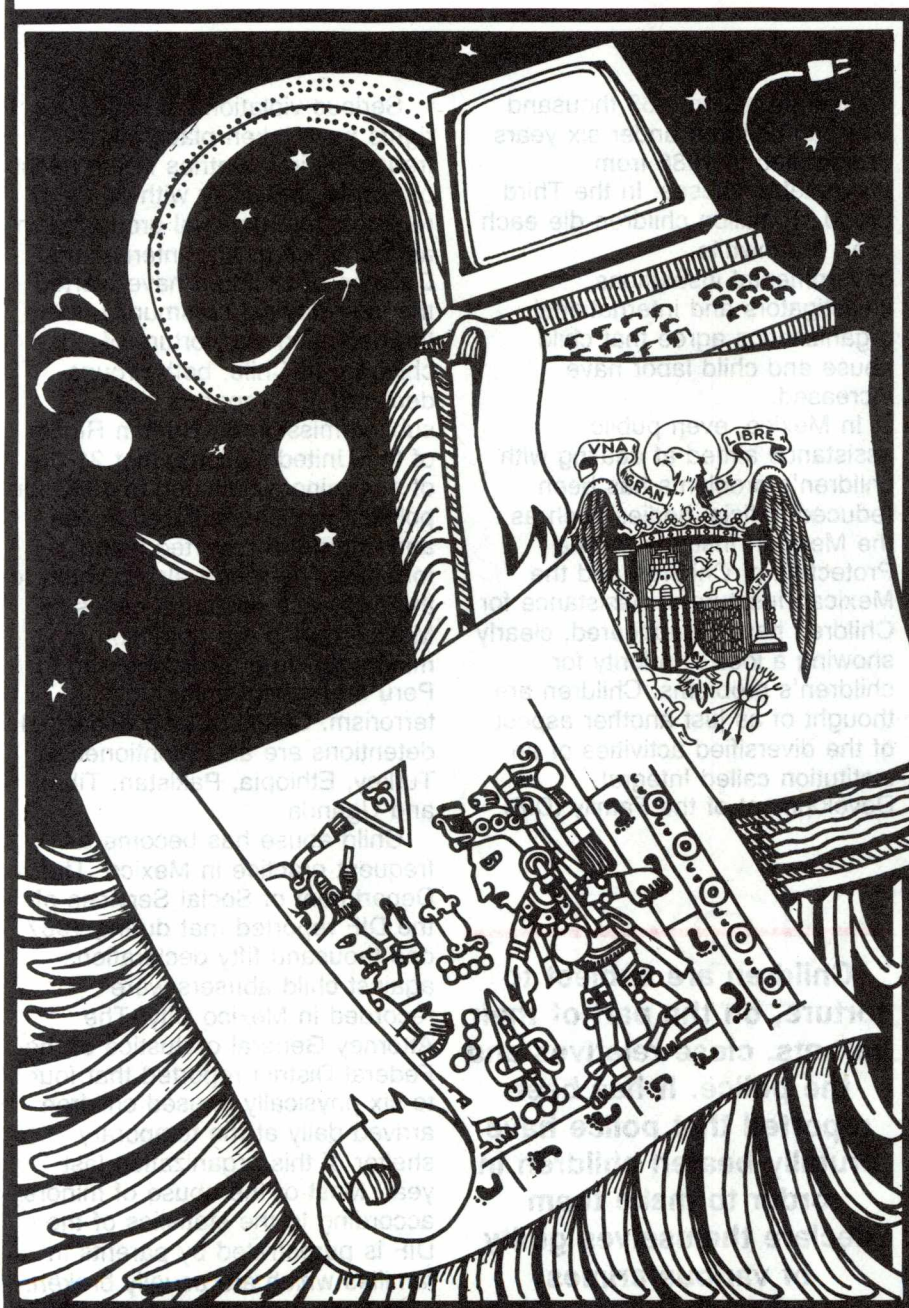
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Jorge Luis Sierra

# THE VERY SURVIVAL OF INFANTS IS THREATENED

Beyond the idealized image which we have of them, Latin American children survive in spite of economic and political circumstances which destroy any possibility of development and restrict their rights as subjects; although their rights are recognized in pacts and legislation which guarantee fundamental human rights, they do not have sufficient support or the strength to demand their rights on their own.

Transformed into the cause of every aspect of Latin American life which includes loss, anguish or precariousness, the foreign debt and austerity measures have placed children and their future last on the list of problems which society must resolve. According to the Division of Information and Public Affairs of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the current policy being applied by many governments that protect financial institutions to the detriment of social reform in favor of the poor has produced as a consequence a rise, in some countries, of child mortality, child malnutrition, increased abandonment of children and diminished access to education.

As for nutrition, this phenomenon has a numerical representation which forces both government and society to take

immediate action: 185 thousand Mexican children under six years of age died in 1986 from preventable causes. In the Third World 15 million children die each year. Meanwhile, governmental institutions, investigators and international organizations agree that child abuse and child labor have increased.

In Mexico, even public assistance aimed at dealing with children's problems has been reduced: official bodies such as the Mexican Institute for the Protection of Children and the Mexican Institute of Assistance for Children have disappeared, clearly showing a loss of priority for children's problems. Children are thought of as just another aspect of the diversified activities of an institution called Integral Development of the Family (DIF).

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**Children are subject to torture, on the part of their parents, close relatives and the police. It has been reported that police have brutally beaten children in order to make them declare themselves guilty of various crimes**

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Serious violations of children's rights have taken place more frequently in countries in the midst of armed conflict or with de facto regimes. International groups such as Men's Earth and International Defense of Children have alerted the international community about the detention and torture of children. In Chile, both groups declared in a report to the subcommission on Human Rights of the United Nations, that 21 out of 144 minors detained in 1987 for political reasons suffered abuse and another 6 reported being tortured. The report also pointed to the existence of torture cases in Mexico during the detention of minors for drug trafficking and in Peru for matters linked to terrorism. Cases of long and cruel detentions are also mentioned in Turkey, Ethiopia, Pakistan, Tibet and Uganda.

Child abuse has become a frequent practice in Mexico. The Department of Social Services of the DIF reported that during 1987 one thousand fifty declarations against child abusers were recorded in Mexico City. The Attorney General of Justice of the Federal District reported that four to six physically abused children arrived daily at the temporary shelter of this organization last year. Most of the abuse of minors according to the statistics of the DIF is perpetrated by parents in families which are usually broken.

In spite of the large number of cases that go unreported, child

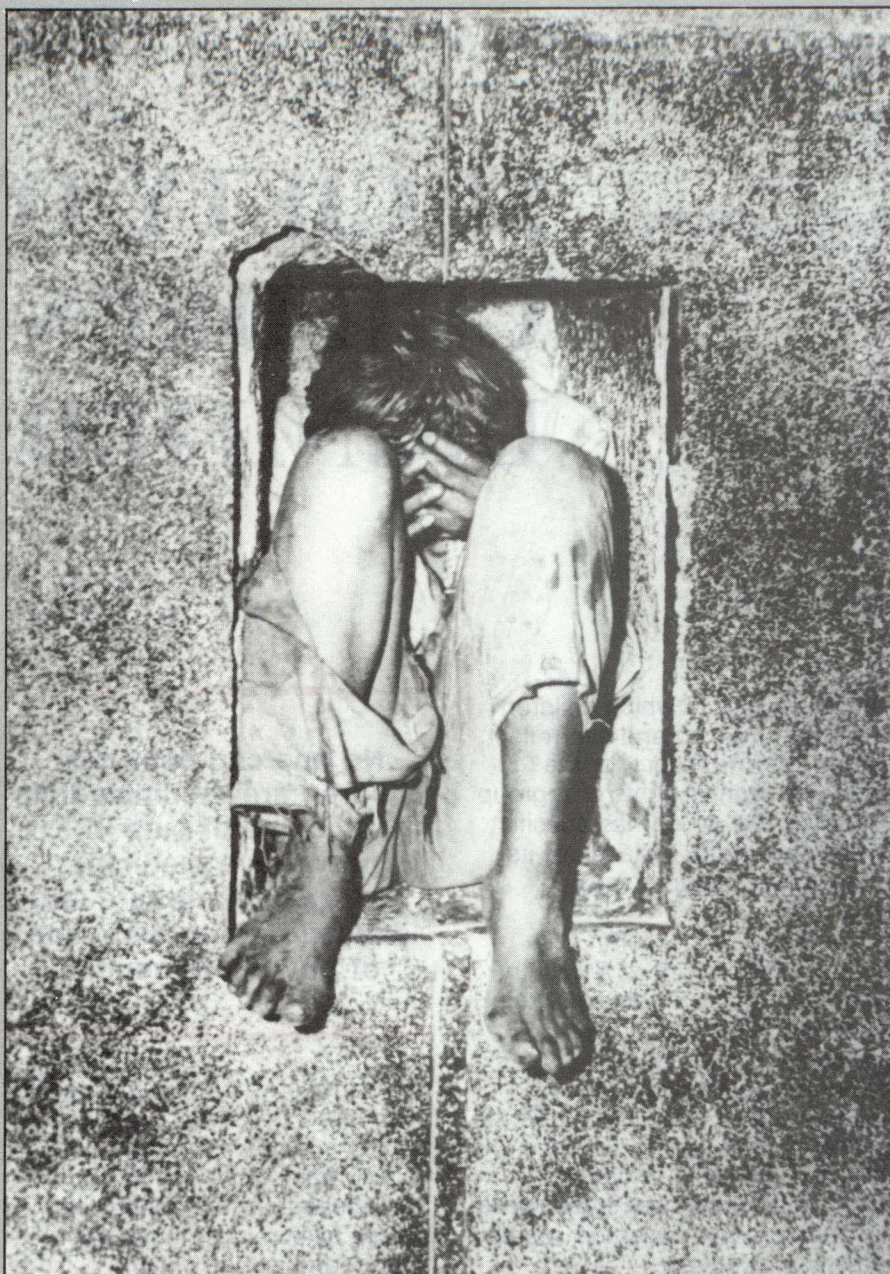
**The current policy being applied by many governments that protect financial institutions to the detriment of social reform in favor of the poor has produced a rise, in some countries, of child mortality and malnutrition, increased abandonment of children and diminished access to education**

abuse can be seen to be a phenomenon which is not only common, but growing. Because of the type of lesions suffered, human rights investigators have proposed the substitution of the term abuse with the term torture.

In effect, the Mexican Constitution prohibits all acts of violence - such as whippings, beatings, marks, and torments - which can be made against someone. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as the International Pact of Civil and Political Rights and the Declaration about the Protection of All People against Torture, clearly state that "no one will be subject to tortures, punishment or cruel treatment which are inhuman or degrading".

Children are subject to torture, on the part of their parents, close relatives, and the police, according to Evangelina Lara, Director of the Rehabilitation Center for Minors who are Legal Offenders of the state of Mexico. Lara reported that various minors arrived at the Center "brutally beaten by the police in order to make them declare themselves guilty of various crimes". The director added that these children had refused to make legal declarations against their attackers because they or their families had received death threats.

The Institution for the Defense of Minors and the DIF stated that from January to April of 1989 the organization had received 6 thousand reports of child abuse.



**Child in the belly of concrete.** Photo by Héctor García, Foto Press.

Millions of children lack the conditions which make possible healthy and dignified development. According to the Institute of Education for Street Children, there are close to 8 million abandoned children in the metropolitan area of Mexico City; 70 percent of them are sometime drug users, and the remaining 30 percent are alcoholics, delinquents or subemployed. Moises Vidales, coordinator of the institution, explained that constitutional guarantees for minors are not enforced.

Even though the Mexican Constitution contains guarantees which protect the fundamental

rights of man, it does not contain explicit references to children's rights. Some Mexican legal experts consider these rights to be implicit in the Constitution and that it would only be necessary to elaborate a special code. Nevertheless, various Mexican organizations that protect children's rights have recently insisted on the necessity of revising the Constitution and creating a code which systematically organizes the inherent rights of Mexican children, especially those which protect children up to six years of age. □

Martha Recasens

# SOCIETY OWES ITS CHILDREN A DIGNIFIED LIFE

The conditions in which children are born, grow up and live reflect the degree of respect for the particular human rights of a group within society which has specific needs and which because of its vulnerability requires special protection.

To assert that children represent the future of a country may seem to be an obvious truth. However, when the lack of disposition on the part of governments to guarantee children's elemental rights and the almost nonexistent conscience on the part of society in general to defend and recognize these rights is observed, this assertion seems more like a fantasy.

Nothing expresses this contradiction more eloquently than the one hundred fifty thousand children who die every year before reaching five years of age<sup>1</sup> and the millions of abandoned children who have made the streets their home, where they develop and take refuge, and show signs of creativity and inventiveness. Apart from these two extreme situations, millions of children live, while not totally abandoned, without the possibility of going to school, on an insufficient diet, victims of social and political abuse, must work although it is prohibited by law and without any protection or regulation of working conditions,

*Sociologist, Co-ordinador of the Children's Rights Project of the Mexican Human Rights Academy.*

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**No one can deny that children are the immediate victims of cuts in preventive medicine, maternal-infant care and education programs, and of poverty in general**

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and some of whom are tortured or even killed by judicial authorities or by the United States border police. Many more suffer torture and abuse from the adults who should take care of them, are bought and sold in child trafficking, are exploited sexually or are induced to take drugs. Finally, there are children who have to reject the cultural values of their particular ethnic group because the dominant culture does not recognize it and has imposed other values on them. We must ask ourselves, what proportion of some forty million minors who live in Mexico, enjoy a decent life?

The relationship between the present situation of this under 18 age group and the future of the country is something which should be a topic of concern for governmental authorities and society at large. Closing our eyes to this reality could have incalculable consequences.

The International Convention on Children's Rights, approved in

November 1989, implies a qualitative change because for the first time children are considered as subjects instead of objects as far as their human rights are concerned. However, it took the international community ten years to arrive at a consensus on this topic, during which time 145 million children of the world died in the face of apparent indifference on the part of international society.<sup>2</sup>

The distance between the approval of a legal instrument and the actual observance of it is very great, and in the case of human rights we know the terrible contradictions between what is declared and what is actually done. Without a doubt, an enormous effort to raise society's consciousness about the urgent need for concrete action in defense of children's rights is needed. The Convention's success will depend to a great extent on this effort.

## Constitutional Recognition

In this country it was not until the beginning of the 1980's that a child's right to "the satisfaction of the necessities of mental and physical health" was included in the Constitution.<sup>3</sup> In many people's opinion, this statement is extremely simplistic and wrongly delegates this obligation exclusively to the parents, detracting from the importance of what should be the State's



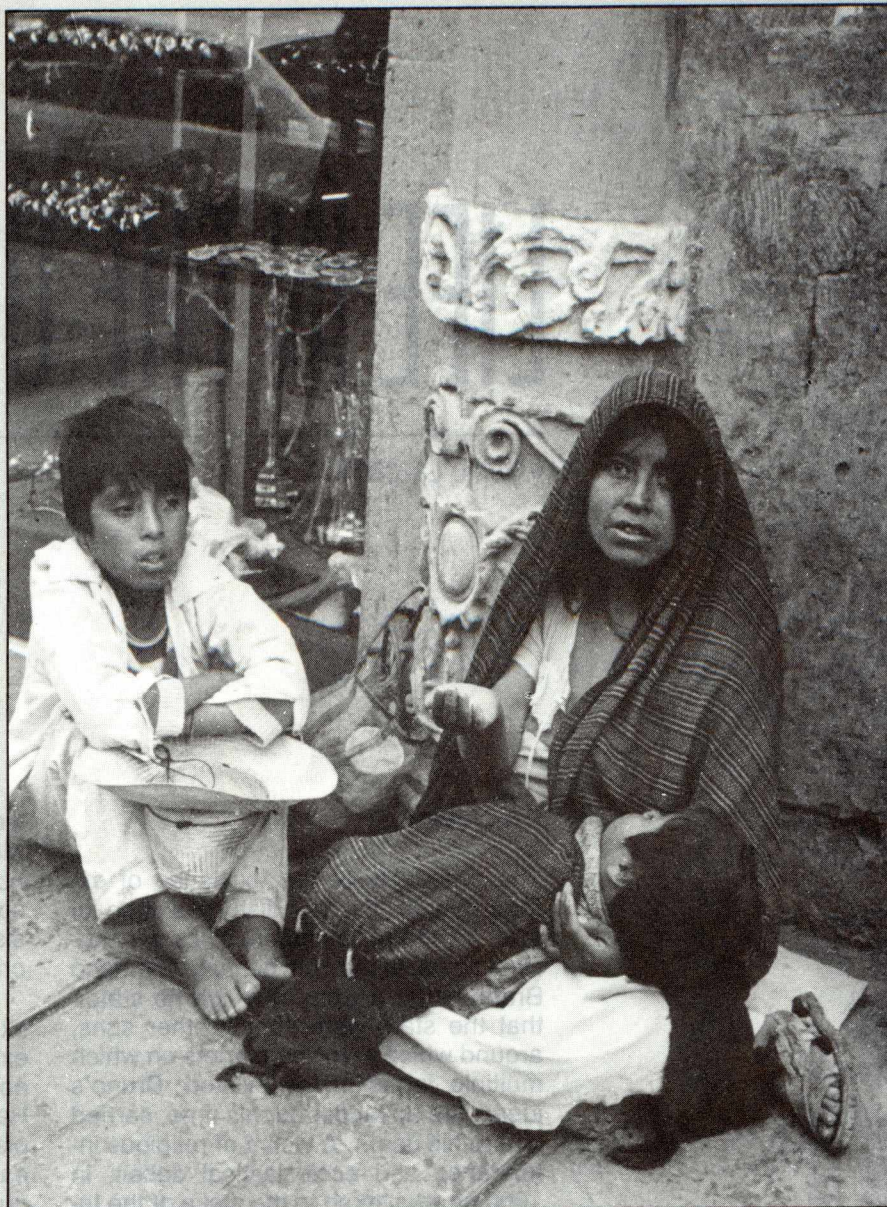
**Millions of children live, while not totally abandoned, without the possibility of going to school, on an insufficient diet, victims of social and political abuse, must work, and some of them are tortured or even killed by judicial authorities or by the U.S. border police**

responsibility for these needs and rights.

Scattered throughout the vast Mexican legislation there are fifty-some laws concerning children, but a considerable number of them, besides being out of date, refer to legal procedures related to parental relations and reduce the child to the status of a mere object. The lack of effectiveness of this legislation was brought to light in October of this year when a public forum about the situation and rights of children took place in Mexico City. This forum was proposed by the Assembly of Representatives of the Federal District and one proposition which received widespread support was the creation of a protective code for children which would include all laws referring to minors and eliminate contradictions that exist in the present legislation.

In another vein, the quality of life of the majority of the population has deteriorated as never before. Fundamentally, this has been the result of the application of a series of economic measures, most importantly the reduction of public spending, a fact which is recognized even in official circles. Added to this are the negative effects of these measures on employment and salaries. Putting aside the reasons which are used to justify these economic policies, no one can deny that children are the immediate victims of cuts in preventive medicine, maternal-infant care and education programs, and of poverty in general.

Recently, the Federal budget for 1990 was made public and in it an



**And the rights of children?** Photo from the Hermanos Mayo Archives.

increase in public spending is established. It is obvious that the levels of health and education programs will only be able to recuperate the levels reached a decade ago if this tendency continues. Meanwhile, nearly a whole generation of Mexicans, who were born fifteen years ago, have suffered the consequences of this situation.

The statistics are terrifying and speak for themselves, but until now they have only created sensationalism and seem to be quickly forgotten.

A society's development can be measured in many different ways. With current scientific and technological advances and the unfolding of democratic aspirations of many peoples, new indicators have emerged. But it cannot be denied that the proportion of

children who enjoy normal mental and physical development reflects both the degree of satisfaction of basic necessities for the population in general and the concern of its government and of society for the future of new generations. □

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# LIFE IN THE UNIVERSE

Antonio Lazcano

## Exobiology

The possibility of the existence of extraterrestrial life has disturbed men of science and philosophers since very ancient times. In the 16th century, Giordano Bruno wrote a work in which he stated that the stars were simply other suns, around which revolved planets on which multiple forms of life existed. Bruno's ideas, too advanced for his time, carried him to his death. A victim of religious intolerance and ecclesiastical deceit, in 1600 he was taken to the stake of the Inquisition in Rome.

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**The development of space exploration has, for the first time in history, allowed us to have access to other bodies of the Solar System, as well as to directly examine existing conditions on other planets**

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Little by little, ideas similar to those of Bruno began to spread among men of science; Kepler, Newton and many others

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Researcher of the Science Faculty. National Autonomous University of Mexico.

were certain that life existed on other planets. In the majority of cases, however, these ideas were no more than speculations that lacked any scientific basis that could solidly withstand careful criticism.

Arrhenius' theory of panspermia, for example, implicitly includes the notion of extraterrestrial life. Nevertheless, it was not until the formulation of Oparin-Haldane's theory, which satisfactorily explains the origin of living beings on the earth, that men of science had an adequate frame of reference which gave a scientific foundation to the possibility that other forms of life originated and developed in other parts of the Universe.

Scientific study of the possibilities of extraterrestrial life have given origin to exobiology, a discipline that is based on theoretical and observational theories of astronomy, which little by little have demonstrated that the formation of planets and stars similar to the Sun is a relatively frequent event in a galaxy; as well as the analysis of chondritic meteorites and observation of the interstellar medium have demonstrated that organic compounds that determined the appearance of life on Earth are extraordinarily abundant in the Universe and that they constitute a spectacular example of the chemical evolution of matter.

On the other hand, the development of spatial exploration has, for the first time in history, allowed us to have access to other bodies of the Solar system, as well as to directly examine existing conditions on other planets.

The analysis of lunar samples was deceiving in a certain sense; the Moon has



Orion. Giant cloud of gas and dust, similar to that which originated our Solar System. Photo from *El redescubrimiento de la Tierra*, Conacyt.

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**Does life exist on Mars? It is possible that the answer is 'yes'. Mars is a dry, cold planet, and certainly less favorable for the development, of life than the Earth itself**

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turned out to be a body practically lacking atmosphere, in which life never developed and where it has also not been possible to find organic molecules, such as amino acids. The absence of these molecules on the lunar surface is undoubtedly due to the constant bombardment that it suffers from the solar wind, particularly by protons that crash against the Moon's surface at great speeds.

Mercury, the planet closest to the Sun, is also apparently not a very appropriate place for the origin and development of living beings. It possesses an atmosphere of very low density, and the high temperatures on its surface prevent the water found there from maintaining a liquid state. In these conditions it is reasonable to suppose that it is a sterile planet, just as the Moon.

#### Venus and Mars

Of all the planets that exist in the Solar System, the most similar to the earth is Venus. The sizes, masses and densities of both planets are very similar; in addition, they are located at distances from the Sun that are in some way comparable.

This similarity of characteristics made some scientists believe that organisms could exist on the surface of Venus; however, the large quantity of

clouds that exist in its atmosphere prevent the examination of its surface and this question remained open for a long time, until spatial satellites sent by the United States and the Soviet Union landed on Venus.

The satellites revealed a series of surprising data on the surface conditions of Venus. In the first place, they demonstrated that the surface temperature is approximately  $600^{\circ}$  K, which confirmed observations that had already been carried out by radio astronomers. Furthermore, it was found that the atmospheric pressure on Venus' surface is close to 100 times greater than that of the Earth, and finally that the chemical composition of its atmosphere is radically different from that of the Earth; carbon dioxide constitutes between 90 and 95% of the atmospheric gases (compared to only around 0.33% of  $\text{CO}_2$  in the Earth's atmosphere), in addition to containing small quantities of water vapor and some sulphuric acid.

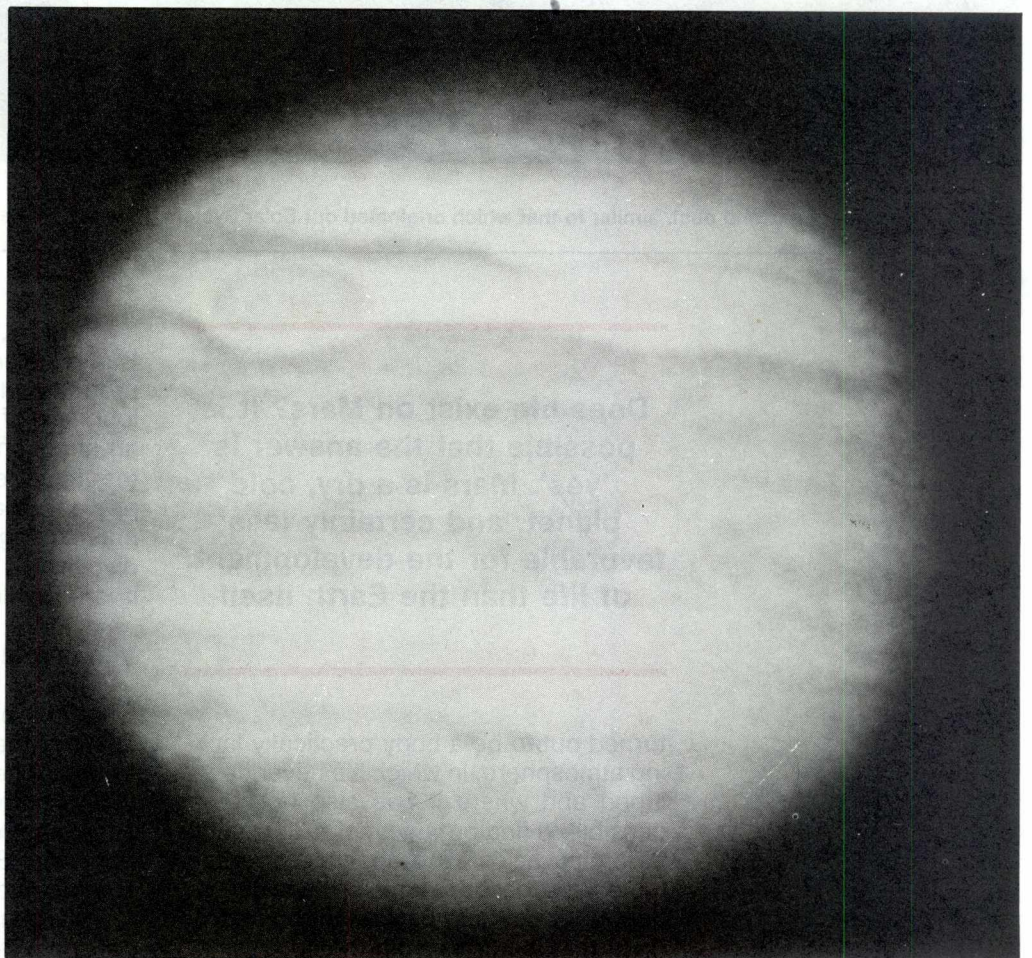
A temperature of  $600^{\circ}$  K as exists on Venus is capable of melting lead; it is also

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**In spite of the fact that the outer atmospheric layers of Jupiter are made up of a great quantity of ammoniac ices and ices of other compounds, a greenhouse effect also exists which raises the temperatures of the outer layers**

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capable of destroying any cellular system such as those that we know on Earth. Although it has been suggested that perhaps Venus could have had some forms of life on the poles, where temperatures are lower, or else life adapted to live in the upper levels of its atmosphere, these possibilities are highly disputable and the most certain is that Venus lacks life forms.



Jupiter in the eye of Voyager I. Photo from *El redescubrimiento de la Tierra*, Conacyt.

Mars, in contrast, is a planet further away than the Earth from the Sun. Although its radius is close to half that of the Earth's its density is approximately the same as that of our planet. On the other hand, Mars has an inclination of  $24^\circ$  from its rotational axis with respect to the plane of its orbit, which results in the existence of annual seasons.

During these seasons, it is possible to perceive changes in the polar caps, which advance toward the equator of Mars during the winter and retrocede during the summer. These caps are made of water, covered by a layer of solid  $\text{CO}_2$ . During the spring it is possible to note changes in coloration, that for some time were believed to have been due to the possible development of forms of vegetation and that now it is known are the result of chemical changes in the components of the Martian soil.

The atmosphere of Mars is very thin; artificial satellites that have explored this planet reveal that at ground level its density is very low, compared with that of the Earth. Among the gases that form its atmosphere are above all  $\text{CO}_2$ , but small

quantities of ozone, water vapor and nitrogen also exist, together with miniscule quantities of other elements, such as argon.

For some time it was believed that the surface of Mars was literally covered by a multitude of canals, and there were many people who attributed their supposed existence to intelligent forms of life. Although this turned out to be false, photographs of Mars taken from artificial satellites that have orbited around that planet have revealed the existence of what seem to be dry river and stream beds, and that these were perhaps formed by liquid water.

Does life exist on Mars? This is a question that has been asked repeatedly. It is possible that the answer is 'yes'. Mars is a dry, cold planet, and certainly less favorable for the development of life than the Earth itself. Nevertheless, many experiments demonstrate that different forms of vegetal life such as lichens, mosses and different types of microorganisms could survive in similar conditions to those existing on the surface of Mars, which are simulated in laboratories.

## GALILEO GALILEI AND GIORDANO BRUNO AND THEIR IDEA OF SCIENCE

Rocio Alatorre

The figure of Galileo Galilei is of capital importance not only for his discoveries and contributions in the study of physics, but because he set the bases of the concept of "science", and it was due to him that the concept of "experimental method" was born.(1)

Galileo put a stamp on scientific activity, that of experimentation, which decisively marked the ideology which would later dominate in scientific development. There was an important event before the time of Galileo: the so-called "Copernican Revolution" during the Renaissance. Nicholas Copernico, in his book *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium*, published in the year of his death, 1543, proposed a system of spheres revolving around the Sun, not around the Earth, as had been conceptualized up till that time,

thus introducing the idea that our planet rotated and demonstrating that this new system could explain numerous astronomical observations.

The implications of this revolution took time to infiltrate the consciousness of that era, but little by little they were taken up by various philosophers and astronomers, including Giordano Bruno who, inspired by the new helio-centric system, conceived the idea of an infinite and open universe.

Bruno and Galileo became spokesmen of Copernico's ideas; Galileo has been rendered justice by history, but this is not the case with Giordano Bruno, and it is worth asking why this is so.

The historian Francisco Yates,(2) who investigated the story of Bruno's life, proposes that Bruno was a follower of an-

cient hermetic, magical and Kabbalistic traditions. Several historians have guessed that Giordano was greatly influenced by Neoplatonism and that he practised various occult customs. Is this the only reason why this philosopher has not been taken into account?

### Dogma or Heresy

Filippo Bruno (1548-1600) was born in a place near Naples called Nola. At an early age he entered the Dominican order and adopted the name of his metaphysics professor, Giordano.

Very soon he began to question various ecclesiastical dogmas, which led to him being suspected of heresy; thus he was forced to flee and then travelled constantly from place to place propound-

ing his cosmological concepts. Finally he was imprisoned in Venice in 1592 and died on the scaffold seven years later without ever renouncing to his convictions.

Yates' arguments help explain why Bruno was almost totally eclipsed by Galileo, but we wonder if there was no other issue in the background. To answer this question we have to take up a matter mentioned at the beginning of this article, that of "scientific method".

Another historian who studied Bruno's life, John D. Bernal,(3) proposes that Bruno "was a martyr for freedom of thought rather than for science, as he never made experiments or observations, but he insisted up to the end in his right to draw conclusions which he sustained supporting himself on scientific facts".

Everything would seem to indicate that Galileo, the experimental scientist, has been honored by history, while Bruno, because of his somewhat hermetic ideas, and especially because he did not follow rigorous scientific techniques, has been disdained.

### Magic, Philosophy and Science

Pierre Thuillier (1) exposes a grand paradox about the experiments carried out by Galileo, citing various authors who express doubts about whether this philosopher-scientist was really in conditions to carry out integrally all the experiments which he relates. These authors also observed that, given the margin of error which Galileo's experiments might have had, they were not so relevant in the development of his theories: that is, the conception of his ideas was made first, and his experiments were perhaps of a secondary nature.

Maurice Clavelin proposes that Galileo could have considered possible the "rational intuition" of the "essences" that is, he might have held a purely speculative vision of nature's make-up and structure. Yet we have just seen that precisely for this reason, John D. Bernal disqualified Bruno when he described him as "more a martyr for freedom of thought than for science".

This does not mean that Galileo did not carry out experiments; several of his manuscripts give us faith of these, but it does open the possibility of conceiving the idea that we can examine and interpret nature through other channels, not only through that of scientific experiments. Where do magic, philosophy and science begin and end? In some cases of very specific knowledge, it is relatively easy to delineate these three areas, but in other cases the difference is fairly slight.

Giordano Bruno definitely had a more spiritual idea of cosmology, but Galileo did not entirely escape from this.

Carlos Maya A. (4) states that Bruno's ideas "are more than a beautiful metaphor. They constitute a conception of nature's abundant vital force". And he adds: "it is difficult to evaluate the ideas of this genial heretic ridding ourselves completely of all (pseudo) scientific prejudice".

We are not trying to judge either Galileo or Bruno—this was already done by the Inquisition, when both philosophers were found guilty; rather, we are pondering the idea of science which we have gradually developed and which today governs us.

Do we really have a science which is totally free of magical concepts, of intuitions and inspirations? Can we draw a really clear line between where our reason and our spirit begin and end?

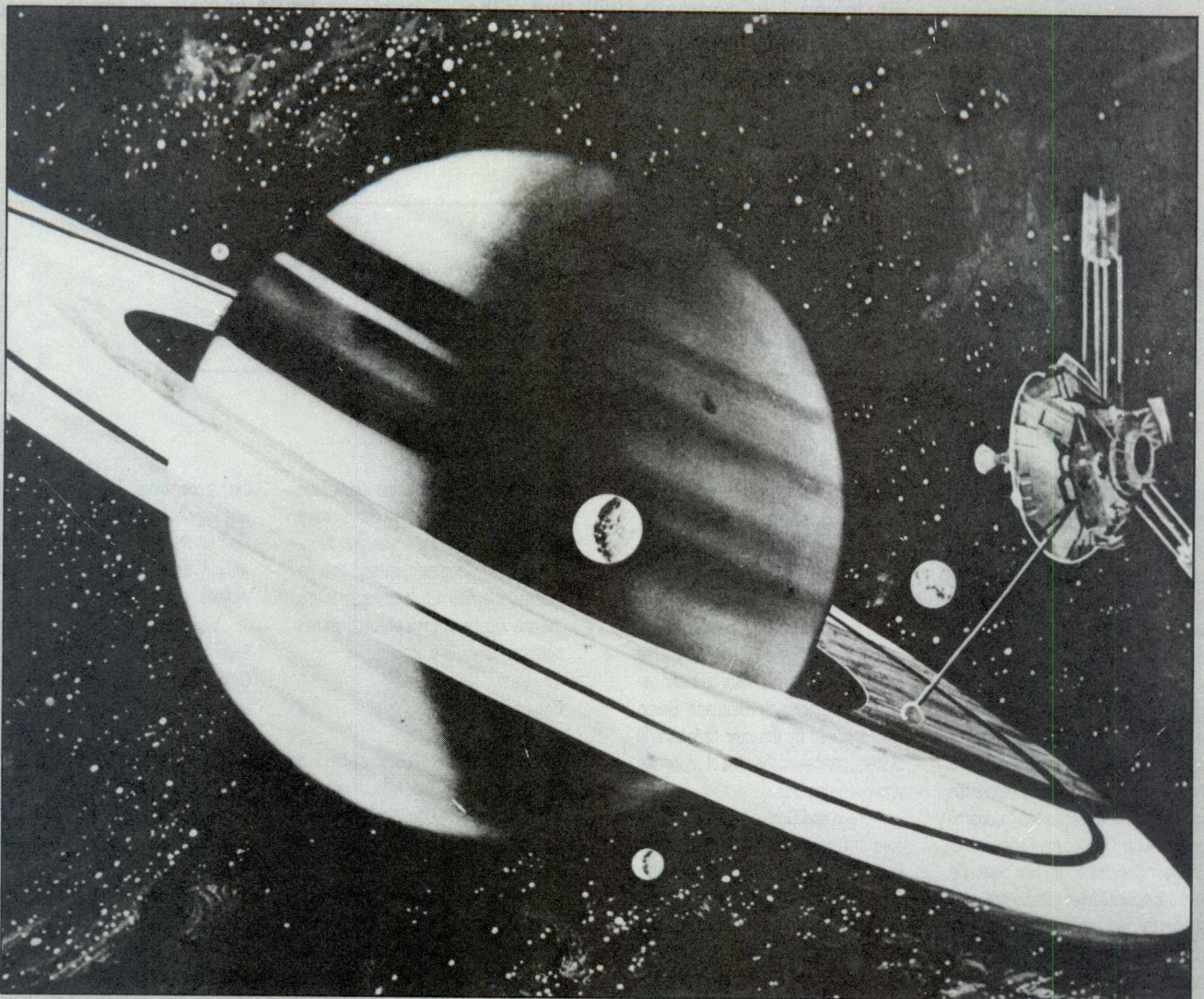
Probably, had we followed the Brunian line of thinking, our "science" would be other (if we would call it science), although we won't venture to say whether it would be better or worse. But what is

a fact, is that in our scientific development where reason rules over every other circumstance, we have sometimes been led into a blind alley, at least up to the present moment—for instance, the disastrous effects of nuclear and biological warfare, the extinction of species, etc. That is, it has left us unable to understand what is our role in nature.

However that may be, Bruno and Galileo had the honor of searching for knowledge and of advancing in this search, and each left us a philosophical and historical legacy in science.

### Notes

- 1 Thuillier, P. "Galileo y la Experimentación", En: *Mundo Científico*. Vol. 3, No. 26 pp. 584-597.
- 2 Thuillier, P. "Mártir de la Ciencia o Iluminado? El Caso Giordano Bruno". En: *Mundo Científico* Vol. 8 N. 81: pp. 618-622.
- 3 Bernal, J.D. 1979 *La Ciencia en la Historia* México: UNAM y Ed. Nueva Imagen, p. 693.
- 4 Maya, A.C. 1989. "Muerto Galileo... ¿Volverá Bruno? En: *ICYT*, Vol. 11, N. 149 pp. 10-12.



Pioneer II near Jupiter. This planet has organic substances. Photo from *El redescubrimiento de la Tierra*, Conacyt.

## The Outer Planets

Beyond the orbit of Mars there are many other bodies in the Solar System of interest in our efforts to understand the processes of the origin of life on Earth, and of possible exobiological implications; nevertheless, temperatures in this part of the planetary system are apparently too low to permit the appearance and development of live organisms.

In spite of the low temperatures, some bodies, such as Jupiter and Titan (one of Saturn's moons), can be places where processes of chemical evolution, similar to those that preceded the origin of life on Earth, are occurring. Jupiter is the most massive planet of the Solar System, and although superficial analysis would eliminate it as a place of interest from the exobiological point of view, due to its high gravity level and its low temperatures, its atmosphere is composed of methane, ammoniac, hydrogen and water, which make it comparable to the secondary atmosphere once possessed by the Earth.

The atmospheres of the outer planets, in particular that of Jupiter, are probably composed of gases that formed part of the solar nebula. In spite of the fact that the outer atmospheric layers of Jupiter are certainly made up of a great quantity of ammoniac ices and ices of other compounds, a greenhouse effect also exists which raises the temperatures of the outer layers.

### Exotic Biochemistries?

In spite of the extraordinary diversity that is observable in the living world, there is a fundamental biochemical unity among all terrestrial organisms, which depend, among other factors, on the chemical properties of carbon and the utilization of water as a solvent. Nevertheless, some authors have suggested that in other parts of the Universe, forms of life with totally different chemistries to those of terrestrial life could exist, which would permit them to survive environmental conditions in which life as we know it, would not even be able to originate; a possibility that sometimes is mentioned, for example, is that of the organisms that would use ammoniac as a solvent, which has a freezing point lower than that of water and that thus would be able to remain in a liquid

state on planets where water would be solid; or else, in contrast, forms of life based on silicon or sulphur, which could resist temperatures much higher than those that terrestrial organisms could survive without burning up.

As interesting as these possibilities might be, it is not very probable that organisms with biochemistries based on different elements other than carbon exist.

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**Some authors have suggested that in other parts of the Universe, forms of life with totally different chemistries to those of terrestrial life could exist**

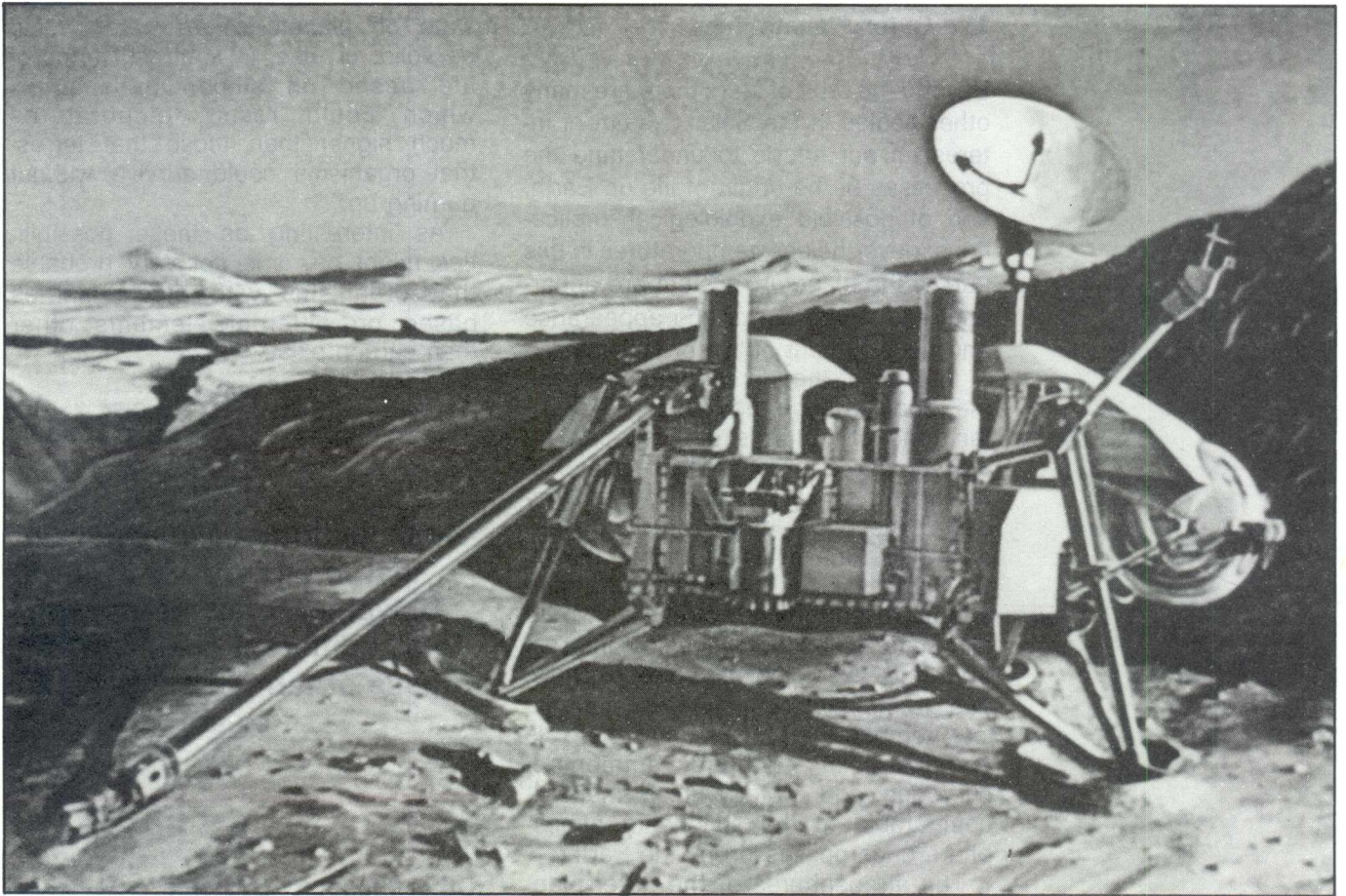
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### Other Planetary Systems?

Although for much time it was believed that the formation of the Solar System had been the result of some relatively uncommon event in the galaxy, such as the collision of two stars, in contrast, today astronomers are inclined to believe that the origin of planetary systems such as our own may be a common process in the evolution of dense clouds of interstellar material.

How many planetary systems exist in the Milky Way? This is in reality a difficult question to answer; unlike stars, which emit light, planets only reflect light that they receive from the Sun. This translates into almost insurmountable difficulties in the direct observation of planets associated with other stars, although we may indirectly detect them from gravitational disturbances in the movement of the stars around which they revolve. Several stars exist in the vicinity of the Sun which seem to have associated dark companions with masses comparable to those of Jupiter and Saturn, and other bodies with dimensions comparable to those of our planet perhaps might exist.

A large number of stars in the galaxy are found forming so-called multiple systems, where if planets exist



Viking mission. Searching for life on Mars. Photo from *El redescubrimiento de la Tierra*, Conacyt.

ted, it would be difficult for biological systems to develop. A planet associated with a multiple system would surely have very complex orbits which would distance it too much or bring it too close to the stars, which would result in great variation in temperature, which would in turn prevent the appearance and development of life.

Very massive stars apparently do not have associated planets, the presence of which it is possible to deduce indirectly through the speed with which the stars revolve. In the case of the Sun, this revolves slowly, while the planets possess the greater part of the total angular movement of the Solar system; on the other hand, the periods of evolution of very massive stars are relatively short, given that they quickly transform their hydrogen into ice, which prevents the emergence of living beings when the star undergoes a series of violent changes during its evolution. Stars of lesser mass, in contrast, emit such little energy that the planets associated with them would with difficulty have the radiation necessary for the appearance and development of life.

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**Only in our galaxy there are approximately  $2.5 \times 10^{11}$  stars with characteristics similar to those of the Sun, around which could exist planets where life might have originated**

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In spite of all of these restrictions, only in our galaxy there are approximately  $2.5 \times 10^{11}$  stars with characteristics similar to those of the Sun, around which could exist planets where life could have originated.

Such a high number of stars of solar type has brought many a scientist to ask on how many planets of the galaxy could life have emerged and evolved until the appearance of societies whose degree of development were comparable or even greater to that achieved by human societies on Earth.

Do other forms of intelligent life exist in the Universe? Today there are many



scientists who respond affirmatively to this question, and who believe that it is valid to attempt to communicate with them. Certainly the distances that separate stars from one another seem to nullify all possibility of direct contact; but it would be possible, in principle, to detect interstellar messages sent by radio bands that terrestrial radiotelescopes could receive. The few attempts carried out up to now have had negative results, which is not surprising.

How to communicate with other forms of intelligent life that exist in our galaxy? Where do we begin to listen?

How to recognize and interpret an interstellar message that we may eventually capture? In reality, these are questions for which many answers may exist. Messages that have already been sent from Earth toward outer space using radiotelescopes were designed under the assumption that any extraterrestrial civilization with a degree of technological development would allow them to capture and interpret them correctly. □

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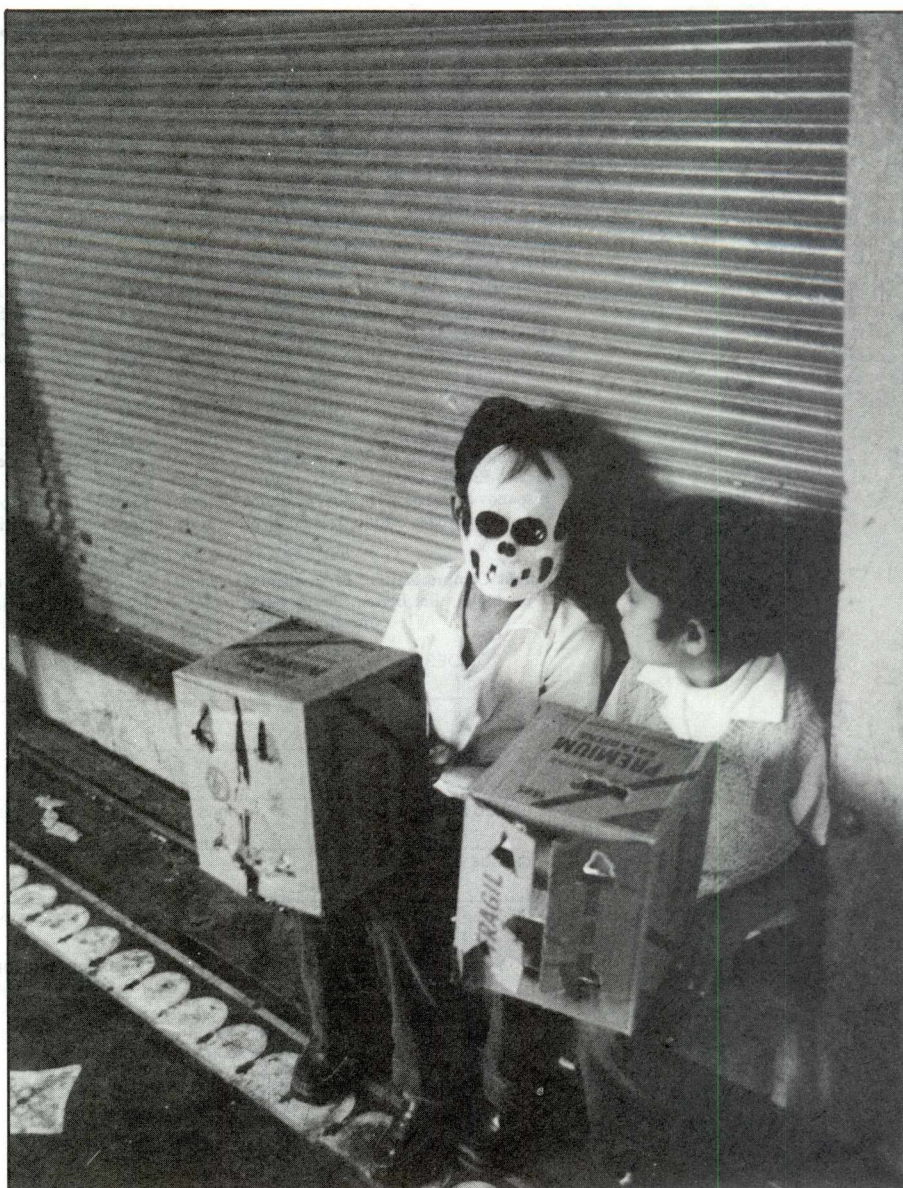
# THE DAY OF THE DEAD IN MICHOACAN

Death is a common word in Mexican vocabulary, graphic representations, crafts and traditions. Few peoples have such a cult to death as exists in Mexico, where people joke, play and pursue death as if it were a faithful companion. It is present in many actions in family and social life. Death is a necessity, only that while some flee its presence, others seek it and render tribute. What is the cause of this attitude towards death? In what parts of Mexico exist the strongest traditions of celebrating death? In this article we will only mention some groups which inhabit the state of Michoacán and their ceremonies on the Day of the Dead.

## The Celebration has Pre-Hispanic Origins

Michoacán, a state in the western part of central Mexico, has a special celebration, especially in the areas populated by the Purépecha, Nahuatl and Mazahua indigenous groups. The rites begin on October 31 and continue through November 2, with altars in honor of the dead adorned with flowers, food and drink, and visits to the cemetery.

The Purépecha area is located in the western Sierra Madre, in the neovolcanic zone and around some lakes, such as Pátzcuaro and Zirahuén. The Purépechas are the largest indigenous group in Michoacán.



Children in Mexico City on the night of November 1.  
Photo by Marco Antonio Cruz, Imagenlatina

**The indigenous people considered that people died so as to later wake up from a dream to begin a new life as spirits or gods**

In the native cultures, death was conceived as a heaven where all who were born, returned, including the gods. When their gods began to decline, the people thought that chaos was governing the earth. The Resurrection was represented by corn, and the dead were given drinks on the basis of the belief that the dead would be comforted by these as the corn plant is comforted by rain. The indigenous people considered that people died so as to later wake up from a dream and begin a new life as spirits or gods.

There are currently diverse anthropological opinions about the origins of the "festival of death" as it is held today in Michoacán, especially on the island of Janitzio, in the lake of Pátzcuaro. Some historians and anthropologists attribute it to pre-hispanic cultures, while others find the philosophical bases both in indigenous and Spanish colonial customs, and in the fusion that has occurred of these traditions.

### **The Fusion of Two Cultures**

When the Spanish arrived in Mexico, the Purépechas were the second most important group after the Aztecs, because of their cultural development, their great territorial expansion and their advances in the art of war. In Michoacán, the colonial administration led by Fray Vasco de Quiroga established schools and hospitals for the entire population - the hospitals served both for the sick and as refuges for travellers, and were economically self-sufficient. The state created schools for the teaching of Spanish, of the Gospel and to introduce new craft techniques.

The Spanish idea of death was based on the resurrection of the body, with two distinct destinies after death: heaven or hell. The possibility of going to hell was greatly feared and this generated an aversion to death.



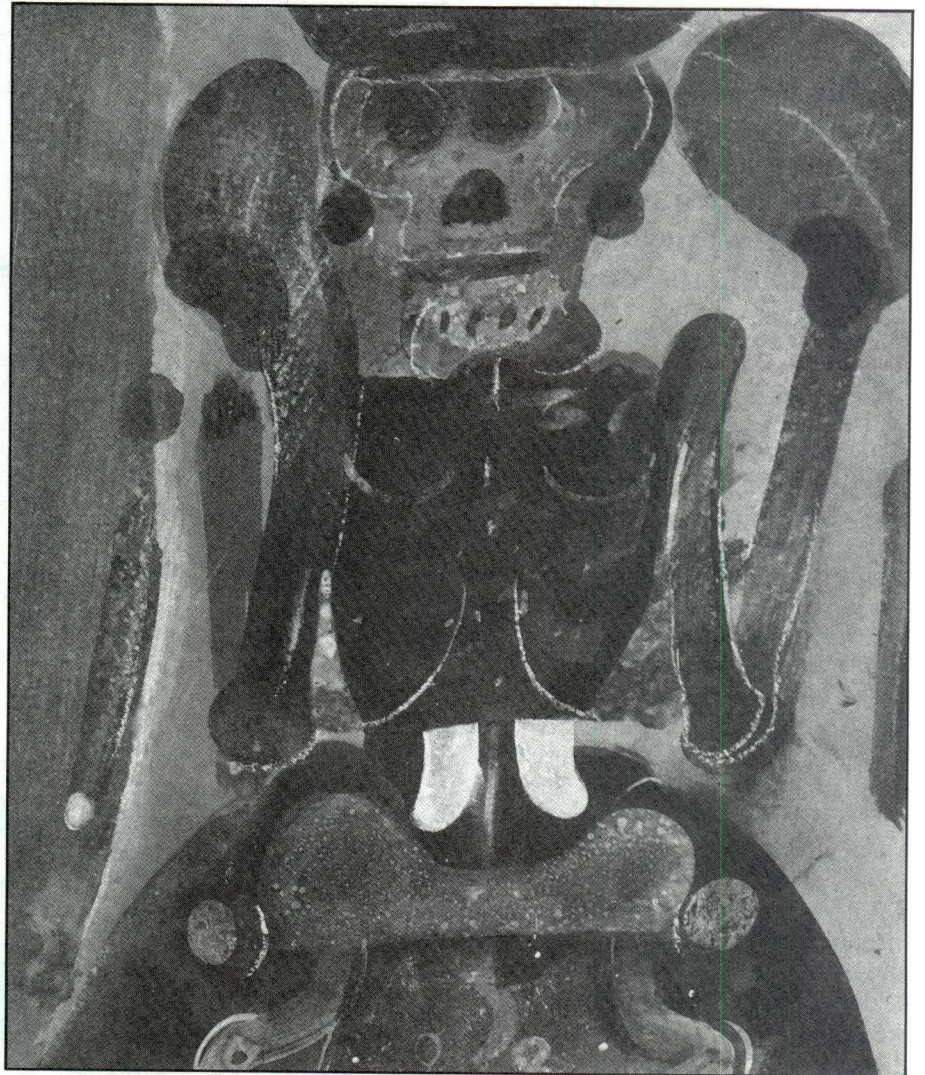
**The Day of the Dead in Zacapoaxtla, Puebla.** Photo by Marco Antonio Cruz, Imagenlatina.

**The Spanish colony imposed the form and dates of celebration, but indigenous philosophies were not so easily altered**

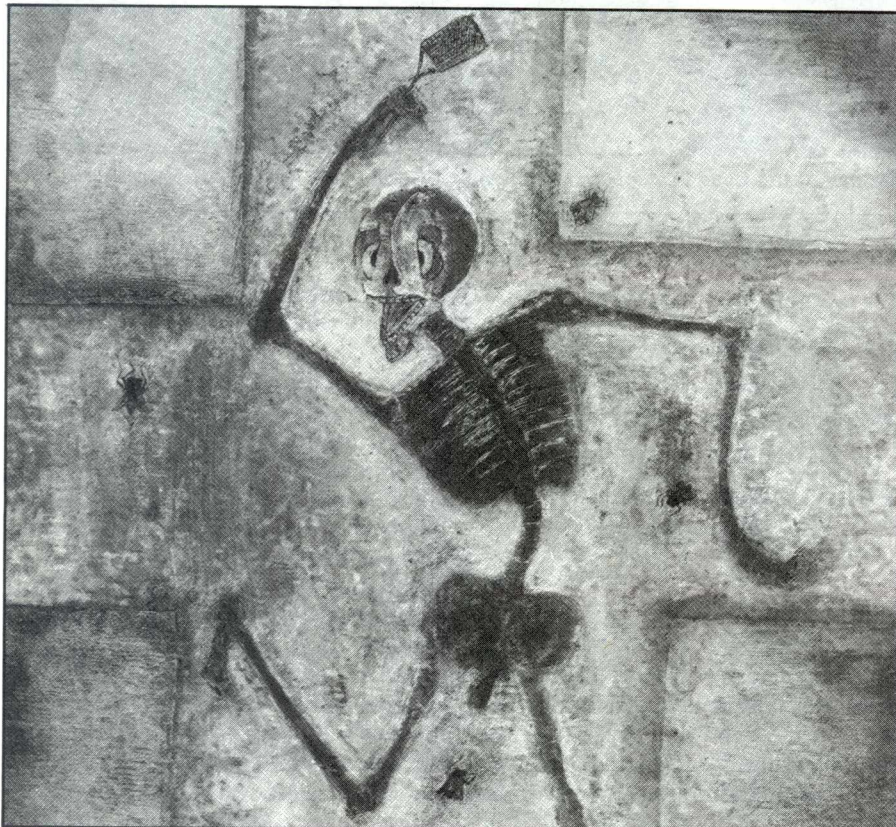
Different government, productive processes, language and religion were imposed by the colony, and the Catholic religion set the dates when a certain saint should be venerated and the manner of doing so. That is, the

Colony imposed the form, but indigenous philosophies were not so easily altered, and the conception of death of both cultures became mixed. The remembrance of the dead was converted into a Catholic celebration, with the observance of rites indicated by the Church and the incorporation of elements from native indigenous beliefs and customs.

On the Day of the Dead, homemade altars are adorned with candles, flowers, food, drink, images of saints and even clothes, all this serving as provisions for the dead in their journey beyond death. The ceremonies of the first two days of November also include visits to the cemetery and dances. The candles represent the light



**Muerte Catrina (1989) by Roger von Gunten.** Photo courtesy of the Juan Martín Gallery, Mexico City.



**Death with a fly swatter (1989) by Francisco Toledo.** Photo courtesy of the Juan Martín Gallery, Mexico City.

which will guide the spirits which return to earth to spend one night with their relatives.

These beliefs and customs are so strongly rooted that in 1943, when the volcano Paricutín erupted, the inhabitants of Parangaricutiro or San Juan de las Colchas, refused to abandon their town, in spite of the burning lava, because their dead relatives "would be left alone with no-one to look after them and receive them" on their annual visit.

The success of the new life of the dead person is considered to depend on the funeral service; if a soul is abandoned at this point it runs the risk of being changed into a "Nahual", a kind of animal spirit which will return to the native town or village and cause harm to its inhabitants.

The indigenous people believe that the dead person must receive offerings of flowers, candles, food and drink during the first three years after death. After this period has ended, the spirit no longer has its own personality, but becomes fused with the completeness of one single Spirit. There is no doubt that this thinking belongs to the pre-hispanic idea that the dead person has to make a long and painful journey to

**The success of the new life of the dead person is said to depend on the funeral service, when the soul must not be abandoned**

the place where he or she will live forever. The presence of the offering will help the dead in this journey to the "beyond". After their death, the dead person becomes a supernatural protector who judges, advises or mediates in the life of their relatives.

**Michoacán Today**

The places most visited by tourists today in Michoacán for their natural beauty and for the high quality production of craft work in copper, wood, wool and clay - are Ihuatzio, Tzintzúnán, Pátzcuaro, Janitzio, Paracho and Huecorio, where various traditional activities are still practised, for example, the ancient ball game is

played in the archeological ruins of the ceremonial center in Ihuatzio.

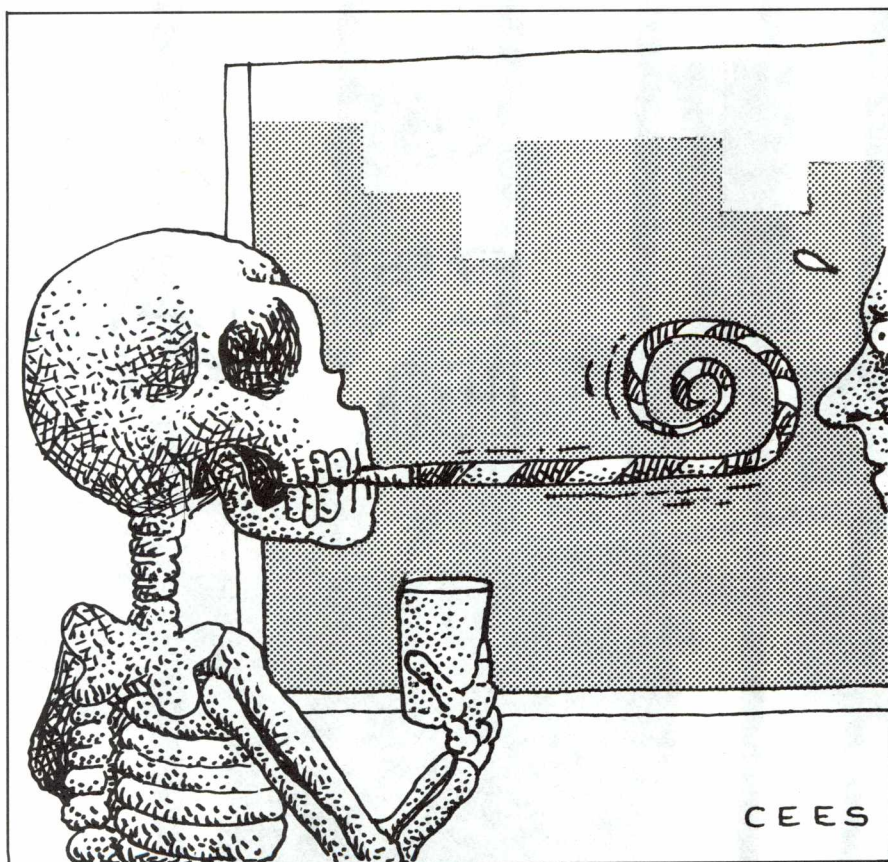
On the shores of the lake of Pátzcuaro, duck hunting was a traditional activity during centuries, but due to abuses by hunters with powerful fire-arms, less ducks are arriving from their migratory journey from Canada. The indigenous people used to use a kind of arrow to hunt, and traditionally make a duck soup to place on the altar on the Day of the Dead.

On the night of November 1, the darkness is filled with flickering candle light and the perfume of the orange marigolds. The first day of November is specially dedicated to dead children and to the "little angels" who died before birth, while November 2 is dedicated to the memory of dead adults.

On this day, boats transport hundreds of local people and tourists from Pátzcuaro to the lake's island, Janitzio, where the night long ceremony is held, in spite of the cold and humidity.

Airline companies which service Morelia, capital of Michoacán, located 310 kilometers from Mexico City, are booked out for these dates many months ahead. Hotels in Morelia, Pátzcuaro, Uruapan and other towns are also filled with visitors who arrive from many parts to participate in this colorful ceremony.

There are no social distinctions in this honoring of the dead. All join together, each with his or her own vision, in a festival of peace. □



*Obras de Elena Garro*

LA SEMANA DE COLORES

*novedad*

REENCUENTRO DE PERSONAJES

TESTIMONIOS SOBRE MARIANA



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Jorge Luis Sierra

# 150 YEARS OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN MEXICO

Just a year after the public announcement of its existence, photography arrived in Mexico with the Frenchman Louis Pr  rier, who brought with him the invention that caused amazement in the world of the 19th century. The French had earlier discovered the daguerrotype, a technique which demanded long expositions of light on a plate of copper covered with silver. This immobile and fixed technique was only suitable for taking photos of architectural views, monuments, still landscapes and portraits of people, whose peaceful attitude hid the metallic supports fixed behind the neck of the person being photographed.

The earliest daguerrotypes preserved in Mexican archives are far removed from being an aristocratic hobby - because at that time the rising bourgeoisie used to take advantage of the immobility of the daguerrotypes to project an image of stability of themselves - and reflected the social reality of the country: *The Tomb of Lieutenant Colonel Henry Clay Junior, during the U.S. invasion* - taken in the cemetery of Saltillo, Coahuila, in 1947 by an unknown author; or *The Execution of Maximilian: the Waiting*, a work signed by Fran  ois Aubert in 1867. Another daguerrotype by Aubert - *Maximilian's waistcoat with bullet holes* - demonstrates that photography in Mexico, besides being an artistic expression with its own motifs, was an important part of the political culture of the 19th century.



The artist, prisoner: David Alfaro Siqueiros, Mexican muralist. Photo by H  ctor Garc  a (1960).



Life in High Society. Photo by Héctor García (1943).



The hand of the artist: José Clemente Orozco. Photo by Héctor García (1945)



Judas in Ixtapalapa, Mexico City. Photo by Héctor García (1979).



Mexico City, October 1968. Photo by Héctor García (1968).

### Today, photography has embraced artistic, journalistic and anthropological styles

Then followed the development of other techniques - such as the portrait, which reproduced models with an atmosphere which gave them a character of sculptures, the visiting card, post card albums and stereoscopes, which were important fashions in the early days of photography. Later, other elements became evident, such as the use of photography by explorers and scientists who gave the new art an anthropological use: Carl Lumholtz used the camera in his studies of ethnical groups; Teoberto Maler in his register of expeditions to the pre-hispanic ruins of Yucatán and Veracruz, and E. Ybáñez y Sora, with erotic photos of the Chontal Indians.

The last third of the 19th century brought with it the instantaneous photo, with greater precision and sensibil-

ity than the earlier techniques. Thus, photography was able to register important social events of the turn of the century and of the Revolution - crucial moments which led to the development of a new kind of photographer, the reporter, who would document for history nearly 30 years of civil war in Mexico.

The post-revolutionary epoch was characterized by the diversity of modes adopted by photographers - some continued working commercially and attended the demand for portraits, others were faithful to the journalistic tradition begun by the Casasola family and continued later by the Mayo Brothers, while a third generation of photographers began a search for the aesthetic possibilities offered by the new art, braving the dominance of nationalist painting which seemed to obscure the initial attempts of artistic photography.

However, the evolution of photography in Mexico embraced artistic, journalistic and anthropological styles. A new generation of Mexican photographers included Tina Modotti, Manuel Álvarez Bravo, Ignacio López, Héctor García and others, while it

### Photography was an important part of the political culture in 19th century Mexico

would be impossible to name the many photographers working today, with great artistic quality and professionalism, for fear of omitting too many names.

On this occasion, *Voices* presents part of the photographic work of Héctor García, of whom the writer Elena Poniatowska was to say: "Héctor García devoured life before life devoured him". This selection is made in representation of the 150th anniversary of photography in Mexico, which was celebrated here with numerous exhibitions all over the country. □





# HISTORIA DE LA CUESTIÓN AGRARIA MEXICANA EN 9 VOLÚMENES DESDE 1800 HASTA 1982

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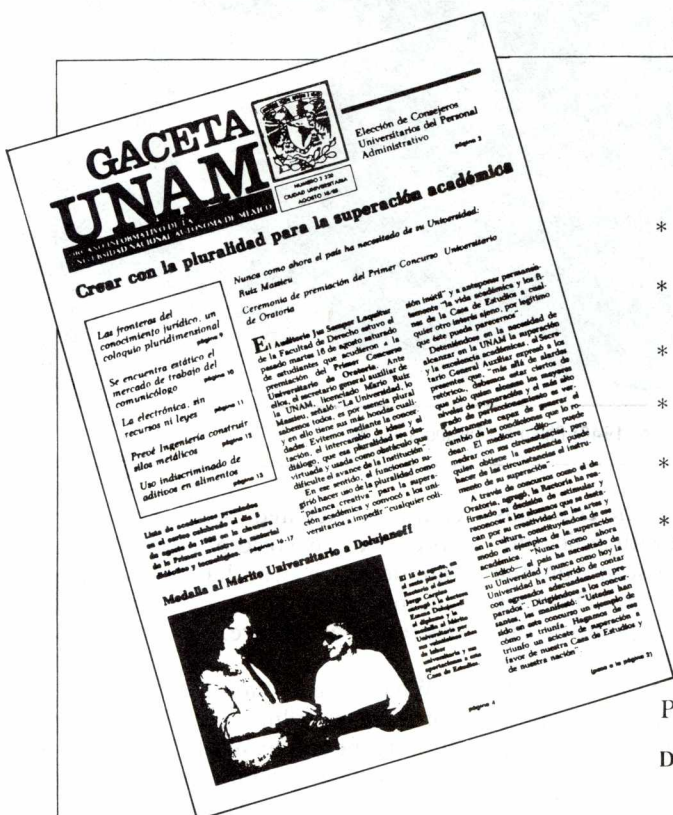
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# A LOOK AT BLACK FILMS

Laura Rustrian Ramírez



Pedro Armendariz and Andrea Palma in *Distinto Amanecer* (Julio Bracho. 1943) Photo by Alejandra Novoa.

“It’s about the dynamics of violent death”, was Nino Frank’s commentary on *cine noir* —a genre filled with stories of extortion, robbery, drug trafficking, perversions, statements and all those characteristics which surround a violent death.

A basic characteristic of black films is that the action and the violent death are seen from the point of view of the

protagonists, that is, of the criminals themselves, in contrast with police movies, where the action is seen from the official police point of view. There are other differences worth pointing out between police movies and black films; in the former the police force is made up of brave and honest men ready to act and able to penetrate the criminal world, while in the latter, the film is made from within the criminals’ context, the police are corrupt and rather stupid. Considering that this vision might bring them certain problems, the creators of *cine noir* created another

character, located between law and order and the world of crime, the private detective, who has few scruples, committed only to himself and to his desire for adventure.

What is *cine noir*? When was it born? Black films were born -I say born- at the end of World War II. Born as a possible system, a possible genre, in an articulated way. There are always precedents: in this case we could mention *Underworld*, directed by von Sternberg (1928), and *Scarface* by Howard Hawks, (1931). But the real



Black films are characterized by violence exercised both by criminals and by those in charge of administering the law. *La sombra del Caudillo* (Julio Bracho. 1960) Photo by Alejandra Novoa.

birthing process began in 1941, with *The Maltese Falcon*, by John Huston. Black films have their origins in the English and north American police novelists, such as Dashiell Hammet, whose book *The Maltese Falcon* was adapted to make the first great film of this genre.

Authors such as Hammet, Chandler, Cain, Burnett and others came to Hollywood on calls from producers who saw a possible salvation of the film industry in these police novels

with their stories of corrupt police, dark and rainy streets, exotic bars, daring men and insensitive women. Film producers were looking for new themes, a new genre, which did not demand big budgets or famous stars.

And thus we have the beginnings of *cine noir* in 1941 with *The Maltese Falcon*, a cheap movie filmed almost always in interiors, with few characters, no extras, no technical innovations, with one star and another one who made his debut. Any analytical or

historical study of black films begins, develops and ends with this New York personality: Humphrey Bogart.

After 1945, there is a verbal confrontation, a collision between the bourgeoisie in power (represented by the United States) and the bureaucracy in power (represented by the Soviet Union). The infamous Senator Joe McCarthy began his witch hunt in the United States, and put north American intellectuals in the position of having to choose between making movies or losing their mansions. We know as an historical fact that, apart from counted exceptions, the north American intellectuals were faithful to their class (the bourgeoisie) and to their role as intellectuals. That is, they kept on making movies and kept their mansions. But this is to touch on a series of personal stories which only marginally affect the problem. The fact is that McCarthyism temporarily prohibited all political discourse in north American film.

Black films arose from this impossibility of political discourse. The situation explains the search for marginality as a concrete political choice. The world of organized crime is distinct, it is an invention of the great city bred from the new metropolis. It is an underworld, underground. In film -as in everything- the break with cultural duality, the refusal to assume imposed cultural roles, is represented by isolated events, by personal adventures. Black films do not escape this duality, this birth as opposition to the pre-existing system.

The genre matured and gave recognized norms and characteristics to the concept of the criminal gang: the slouched hat, the overcoat with the turned up collar, the solitude of the characters, the persecution they suffer, their laconic dialogues (different from the westerns, whose characters have more humor), the climate of defeat, specific settings (pool tables, game rooms, dark streets, innumerable card games). All these elements give black films an independence and exactness in construction, which brings them into existence as a possible genre.

There are also various famous figures associated with black films: Bogart, Richard Conte, George Raft, Sterling Hayden, Veronica Lake and others.

The marginality of black films is not a marginality in the film world, but a search for real worlds which exist outside the existing legal system. This is the contradiction which cuts short the life of *cine noir* as a genre. Due to this contradiction at birth, to this co-existence of its own elements and its vocation of reality, *cine noir* does not exhaust its possibilities of reflection (in contrast with north American comedy). The castration of the political discourse (McCarthyism) made a fusion between film and the criminal gangs, resulting in black films.

*Cine noir* does not have the long life of the western, nor the intensity of American comedy. Its literary origins weigh it down, but so too does its search for a new reality. Black films look towards the crime world, they do not dare to examine themselves.

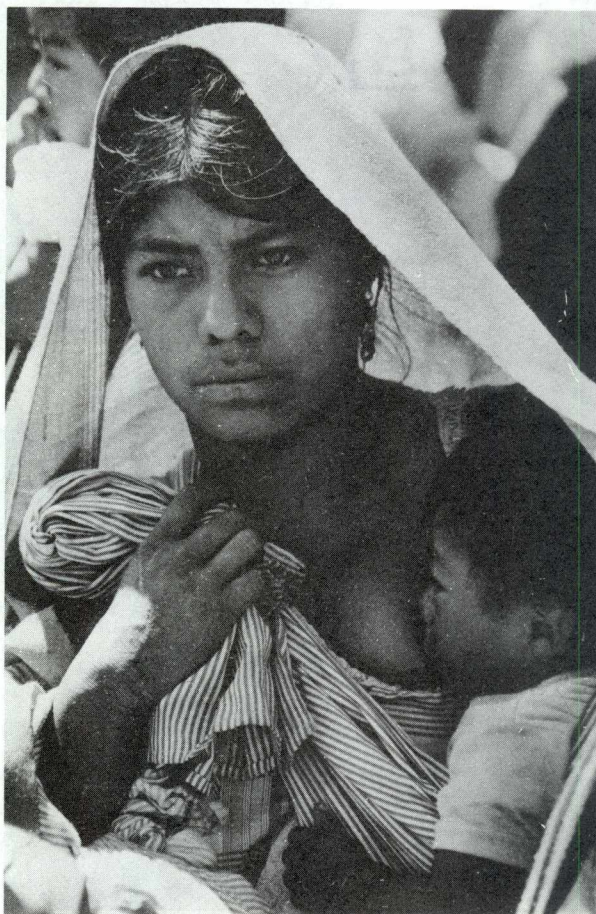
Nevertheless, *cine noir* searched for its birth as an independent system, and curiously enough, this was not in the U.S. but in France, as late as the 1960's, with the director Jean Pierre Melville -who adopted his surname because of his admiration for the author of *Moby Dick*, Herman Melville. J.P. Melville was the genial arranger of the elements placed in his hands by north American black films. An unusual person - film maker before the "new wave" (Godard, Truffaut, Chabrol)-he died in 1973 from a heart attack before he reached the age of 60. His death also meant the death of his genre-*cine noir*.

In this case we cannot speak of an author and his style on the one hand, and films grouped in the genre on the other. Here the fusion is absolute. If *cine noir* reaches the category of a genre, it achieves its absolute emancipation exactly when the other two grand film genres, comedy and the western, were collapsing, and at his point we must admit that *cine noir c'est Jean Pierre Melville!*

Melville began working on other people's stories, and gradually created his own universe which would emerge with greater force in a second stage, marked by extraordinary simplicity and poetic atmospheres. With Melville, French movies have their own aesthetics, which although similar to the north American model, break with this in many aspects. His last three films were written by Melville himself: *Le samurai*, *Le Cercle Rouge*, *Le Flic*;

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the first two are maximum expressions of his style, and have influenced his many followers.

Although it can be said that black films are specifically north American and French, and that they generate a series of characteristics in their visual style, themes and personalities, Mexican film also participated and collaborated in this genre: for instance, the film *Distinto Amanecer* (A Different Dawn) by Julio Bracho (1943), where the city is discovered as an essential character, takes certain elements from *cine noir*, so as to give greater reality to the portrait of the city. The action takes place during one night and the city offers its most varied social contexts, but the protagonists do not find the desired solidarity and safe refuge; they only confront corruption and death. Another example from this epoch would be *En la palma de tu mano* (In the Palm of your Hand), by Roberto Gavaldón, film director from Chihuahua in northern Mexico.

In 1978 the film *El Complot Mongol* (The Mongol Complot) was made, directed by the Spaniard Antonio Eceiza and based on the novel of the same name by Rafael Bernal. Here the story is reinforced by the ambiguous and shadowy atmosphere of the city. Meanwhile, film director Arturo Ripstein, together with Vicente Leñero, adapted Luis Spota's novel *Lo de Antes*, and the result was one of Ripstein's best films: *Cadena Perpetua* (Condemned for Life), which exposes the scandalous and cynical corruption of Mexican police. *Motel* by Luis Mandoki and *Nocaut* by José Luis García Agraz are another two Mexican films with characteristics and narrative rhythm very similar to black films.

Talking about his film *Nocaut*, García Agraz comments: "this film came from my fascination with black films and especially with certain films such as *The Big Sleep*, *White Heat*, *Mean Streets* and *Taxi Driver*. While these are most representative of the genre *cine noir*, I tried to recall some Mexican films as a visual reference. I knew that Mexico City has all the formal elements for making a film with the visual and thematic characteristics of *cine noir*. Mexico City becomes a trap, a cross roads with no way out for the

personality who tries to flee from his destiny."

Film critic Nelson Carro had the following comments about black films: "The first surprising thing about *Nocaut* is its formal quality. The production is impeccable and makes excellent use of the locations in the city's central districts before dawn. The general atmosphere is very effective, and Angel Goded's photographic work, extraordinary. ...It is rare to see a Mexican film where the boxing fights seem real (along with the fact that in this case they are reduced to a few short scenes), and where the physical and moral choices of the characters are understood without useless reiterations, where the car chases achieve the dizzying speed and movement that has always characterized them, a film where the ellipses play an important part - where, moreover, one ends up believing in the existence of scenes not shown, one accepts that they happened. As in the case of *Motel*, in *Nocaut* we have a re-elaboration of elements from *cine noir*: a cornered individual commits a crime and is pursued by the police and by a series of gangsters connected with boxing, drugs, cabarets and burdels. Fear, money, the power of the enemy, all make it impossible to find a safe refuge - friends betray him, and the city becomes a labyrinth where all the exits are closed. Finally the protagonist, Rodrigo Sarancho, loses strength and gives up, and the circle closes."

Tomás Pérez Turrent comments about the director García Agraz that "he knows how to tell a story, how to give it tone and atmosphere, how to make real characters and establish relationships with a few indications, how to give the set and the decorations certain weight, a real existence. (Mexico City, before this film, was virtually non-existent in the film world.) His black universe is frequently touched with humor, he directs his actors with confidence." □

## BOOKS

### INEQUALITIES AND CHALLENGES IN MEXICO'S EDUCATION

Jorge Arturo Borja

What developmental model has the Mexican educational system followed? Has the Mexican government fulfilled the educational directives proposed in the third article of the Constitution? Will the educational system satisfy the demands of growth and quality required for the next decade? These and other questions are addressed by Juan Prawda in his book *Achievements, inequalities, and challenges in the future of the Mexican educational system*.

With the professional experience gained in executive positions in the educational sector during three presidential administrations, along with the critical passion of a social planner seeking to correct present faults and anticipate future needs, Prawda achieves an analysis of the origins, development and expectations of the Mexican educational system. Aided by statistical tables and cartoons, he ironically observes a worrisome social reality —that the educational model followed by the country for one half of a century is wrung dry and is incapable of offering fresh solutions to old problems. From different perspectives, he examines historical errors, the poor distribution of resources, the backlog in scientific education, the bureaucratic and union complexities contributing to the

fossilization of the system, and he proposes immediate actions to avoid the disaster that is closing in.

Through a rapid historical account, Prawda reveals the operative necessities that gave way, during José Vasconcelos' time as head of the Ministry of Public Education, to a centralization propitiating disproportionate contrasts in educational attention. These contrasts were not just in the difference in the quality and quantity of education between the rural and urban zones, but also in the deficient disposition of resources which, by aiding the improvement of basic primary and secondary education, are used to sustain a costly higher education which does not efficiently fulfill its original purpose. Within this point of view the two-year-old discussion regarding *University of the Masses versus Academic Quality* (1987), helped create a university reform and student movement (CEU: University Student Council), even though these repercussions were ignored by the author. He does comment on other phenomena present in student movements of the last 20 years, such as the lessening importance of higher education as a factor in social mobility and the consequent disillusionment of the middle class whose hopes for upward rise are dashed.

On the basis of the statistics presented, a conclusion is given which contradicts the "good intentions" of the third article of the Constitution, by demonstrating that higher education in crisis-ridden Mexico becomes more elitist every day. Of every 100 children starting primary school in the country, only 55 will finish that level within the given six year lapse. Of these, 47 will continue to secondary school, but only 35 will complete the three-year period and of these, 28 will continue to high school, but only 14 will graduate. Only 13 will continue for a higher degree, and slightly more than 5 will finish their studies, with only three obtaining their diploma within a reasonable period of time. The educational sector, one which suffers greatly, has become obliged to face its commitments with less resources and means, with slender budgets barely covering increasing needs caused by demographic increase and

transformation in the country. The last data in this book regarding the 1987 federal budget show that only 3.6% of the Gross Internal Product was destined to education, a percentage which decreased relative to the 5.5% assigned to this sector in the 1981-1982 period, which is less than the 8% recommended by the UNESCO.

In other chapters in the book, the author deals with problems related to the organization and functioning of the Ministry of Public Education. He also mentions the parallel process of development of the National Education Worker's Union, which, nourished by a disproportionate sectorial increase, has created power ceilings at national and regional levels which inhibit putting urgent changes into effect, such as educational decentralization.

Unfortunately, the author does not state in writing the surprising tilt in power relations inside and outside the union, caused by the fall of the ex-leader Carlos Jongituz Barrios, nor the problems that the general secretary of the SNTE

union, Elba Esther Gordillo, has had with the union dissent represented by the National Coordination of Education Workers in their demands for union democracy and wage increases.

The final and overly ambitious propositions of Juan Prawda revolve around the decentralization of the education system, the ranking of national education priorities (paying more attention to basic student education, which trains them for production and for activities related to scientific development) the use of complementary financing sources for high school and higher education, and, above all, as an indispensable condition for the previous proposition, the strengthening of the democratic life of the country. □

*Achievements, inequalities, and challenges in the future of the Mexican educational system* by Juan Prawda. Colección Pedagógica Grijalbo, México. 1989.



## HISTORY OF COMICS IN MEXICO

Jorge Arturo Borja

This first volume of *Puros Cuentos* is a delightful journey through six decades of Mexican history, seen through the eyes of three generations of creators of cartoon characters. This survey begins with turn-of-the-century lithographs and culminates with the first comic strips from Post-Revolutionary Mexico of the 1930's. Parallel to the genealogy of the Mexican cartoon is the historical development of a people in search of their identity. *Puros Cuentos* tries to probe the quicksand of a barely studied popular genre, while it also tries to rescue well-loved images that were features of an incipient Mexican culture.

In spite of the proportionally large editions of cartoons, of their wide distribution among different social groups and their invaluable role as the written medium of greatest dissemination in the country, a systematic, well-documented chronicle of the comic book has been lacking. It was in December of 1987 when the exhibition *Puros Cuentos: La historia de la historieta de México* (Pure Comics: The History of the Cartoon in Mexico) presented work carried out over more than two years by a group of researchers from the National Museum of Popular Culture on this vast, barely explored field. Three volumes were to be published from this exhibition, which "covered more than nine hundred square meters with comics from diverse sources," and the first of these tomes is already on sale.

The first part of the book deals with what may be considered the prehistory of the Mexican comic, the roots of which go back to religious prints brought by the Spaniards to America. Their recurrent themes were demoniacal images with which the missionaries inaugurated an exaggerated style that permeated an entire era of popular Mexican journalism. From the beginning the Spanish style adopted itself in New Spain and gave rise to a type of picaresque illustration that the Inquisition was responsible for persecuting, albeit unfruitfully.

There are abundant references to outstanding engravers such as José G. Posada, who in publications of the Popular Publisher (Antonio Venegas Arroyo) revealed an unmistakable aesthetic style, summed up daily life and mixed it with the magic of the extraordinary. He created the famous

dandyish skeletons that constituted the most accurate allegory for the decadence of the Porfirian period.

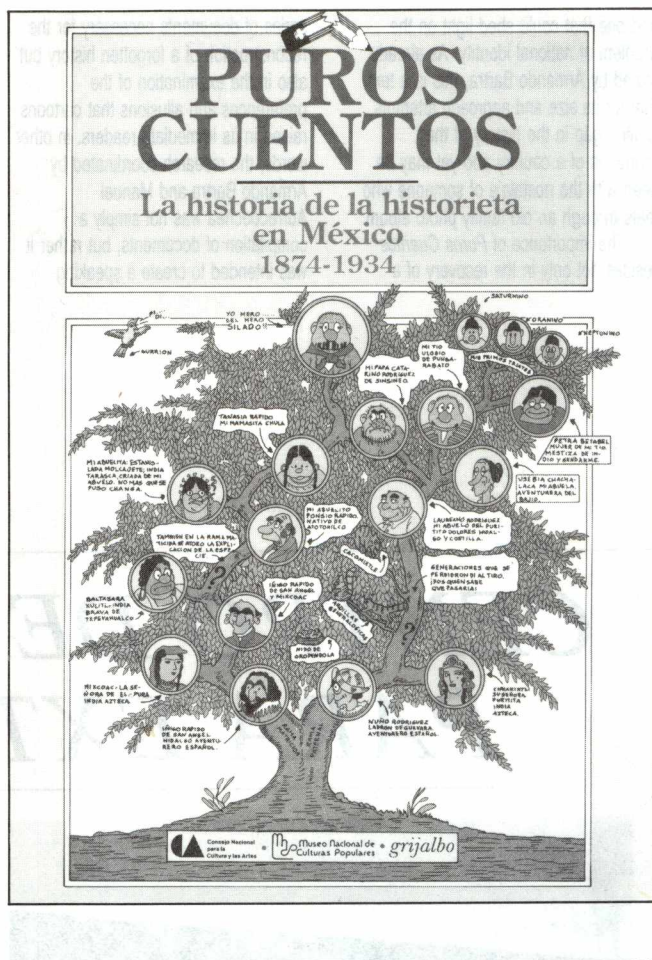
Accompanying him was an outstanding generation of cartoonists, who in exercising their right to criticize, risked their freedom, if not their very lives. Draftsmen such as Jesús Martínez Carreón and Santiago Hernández who from *El Hijo del Ahuizote* (Son of the Otter) lashed out with ferocious satire against the ineptitudes of the Porfirian regime.

The newspaper *El Imparcial* (established in 1896), began the use of graphic supplements in Mexico. With these, a new space was opened to the following generation of cartoonists, who were more interested in cultivating a pornographic humor aimed at a mass public than in illustrating their own political ideas. Ernesto García Cabral, Rafael Lillo and José Clemente Orozco began their careers in these supplements and in frivolous magazines.

During the armed movement of 1910 Mexican journalism changed radically. The strict enforcement of the Law of the Press forced most of the opposition newspapers to close. *El Diario del Hogar* (The Home Daily), *El Sufragio Libre* (Free Suffrage), *Redención* (Redemption) and *El Constitucionalista* (The Constitutionalist) ceased publication. Political agitation had repercussions in commercial press cartoons which openly became Porfirian supporters and at the fall of Díaz they brought about a counter-revolutionary campaign. Protected by the opening that the new government granted to the press, newspapers became dedicated to mercilessly caricaturing Francisco I. Madero and his cabinet. Lilo, Cabral and Orozco illustrated the most reactionary criticisms with a well defined style that enriched the aesthetic conception of the Mexican cartoon. The tragic ten days (when Madero was assassinated) and Victoriano Huerta's rise to power left them without themes and without the possibility of continuing to publish satirical drawings against the government.

In the heat of the dispute, newspapers were created that served as mouthpieces for the different factions in conflict. *La Vanguardia* (The Vanguard), *La Cucaracha* (The Cockroach), *El Zancudo* (The Mosquito), in spite of their ephemeral existence opened the doors to cartoonists, who years later would distinguish themselves for their role in developing formal and thematic aspects of the Mexican cartoon.

The second part of *Puros Cuentos I* is an exhaustive inventory of the new cartoon and its authors, who from 1919 under the influence of revolutionary nationalism, included local details in



their cartoons. Immersed in a renewed cultural spirit characterized by the emergence of the masses as protagonists and recipients of social change, cartoonists participated in this collective enthusiasm by using popular figures in their drawings. Sunday supplements began to substitute services that had provided them with foreign cartoons for the work of Mexican cartoonists who were given the enormous task of transforming the prototypes from the United States with native imitations that in some cases surpassed the original.

In the 1920's the great muralists executed outstanding works as cartoonists. Orozco collaborated with the newspapers *L'ABC*, Rivera was a well-known creator of vignettes in popular publications, Siqueiros held a public exhibition in the Iris Theater in which he drew sixty different caricatures in September of 1927. The public paid two pesos per person to see such an extraordinary act. From *El Machete* (The Machete), José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Diego Rivera and Xavier Guerrero began producing popular prints aimed at the growing urban proletariat.

This first great boom of the Mexican comic was characterized by the

proliferation of cartoons and the acclimatization of foreign prototypes of aseptic language that slowly were displaced by popular picaresque characters and their colloquial language. Two major currents dominated local production: one that was devoted to caricaturing the simple life of the common people represented by series such as "*Chupamirto*" (Hummingbird) by Jesús Acosta or "*Mamerto y sus conocencias*" (Mamerto and his Know How) by Hugo Tlighamann, and the other current that expressed the dreams and adventures of that same group of people, including for example "*Segundo I Rey de Moscavia*" (*Second I King of Moscavia*) by Hipólito Zendejas. Series belonging to these two currents were also published, such as the celebrated "*Don Catarino y su apreciable familia*" (Mr. Catarino and His Considerable Family) which continued until the 1950's.

Today, after a daring struggle between national and foreign production—which will be the theme of volumes II and III—cartoon characters have learned to share the universe of the imagination. After years of indifference on the part of scholars of culture, cartoons have merited attention in the form of a book that analyzes them as a unique phenomenon of popular culture,

and one that could shed light on the problem of national identity. As already stated by Armando Bartra, this is a text that for its size and approach attempts to fill a gap in the history of the formation of a country and yet may be seen with the nostalgia of someone who leafs through an old family photo album.

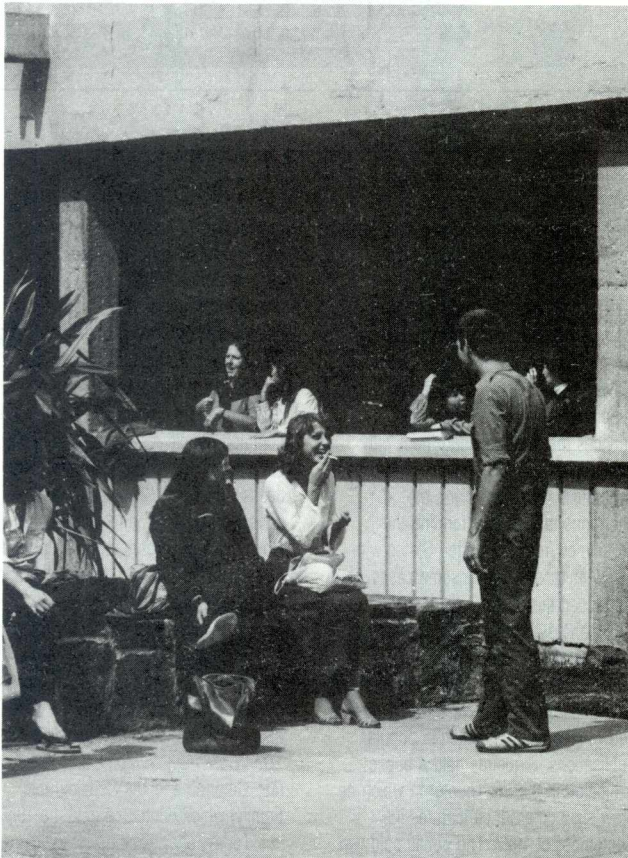
The importance of *Puros Cuentos* resides not only in the recovery of a

series of documents necessary for the reconstruction of a forgotten history but also in the examination of the preferences and allusions that cartoons raised in its immediate readers. In other words, the research coordinated by Armando Bartra and Manuel Aurrecochea was not simply a compilation of documents, but rather it was intended to create a speaking

portrait of the different generations that grew up reading and learning to read through cartoons. The result is an immense gallery of well loved portraits of two hundred ninety one pages and more than four hundred illustrations that tell the story of a Mexico that no longer exists, or of a time already past and of a society that lives through constant changes.

**Puros Cuentos I. La Historia de la Historieta en México, 1874-1934 (Pure Comics I: History of the Cartoon in Mexico, 1874-1934)** by Juan Manuel Aurrecochea and Armando Bartra. Editorial Grijalbo, Dirección General de Publicaciones del Conaculta and Museo Nacional de Culturas Populares, Mexico City, 1988. □

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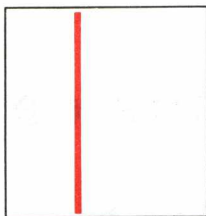
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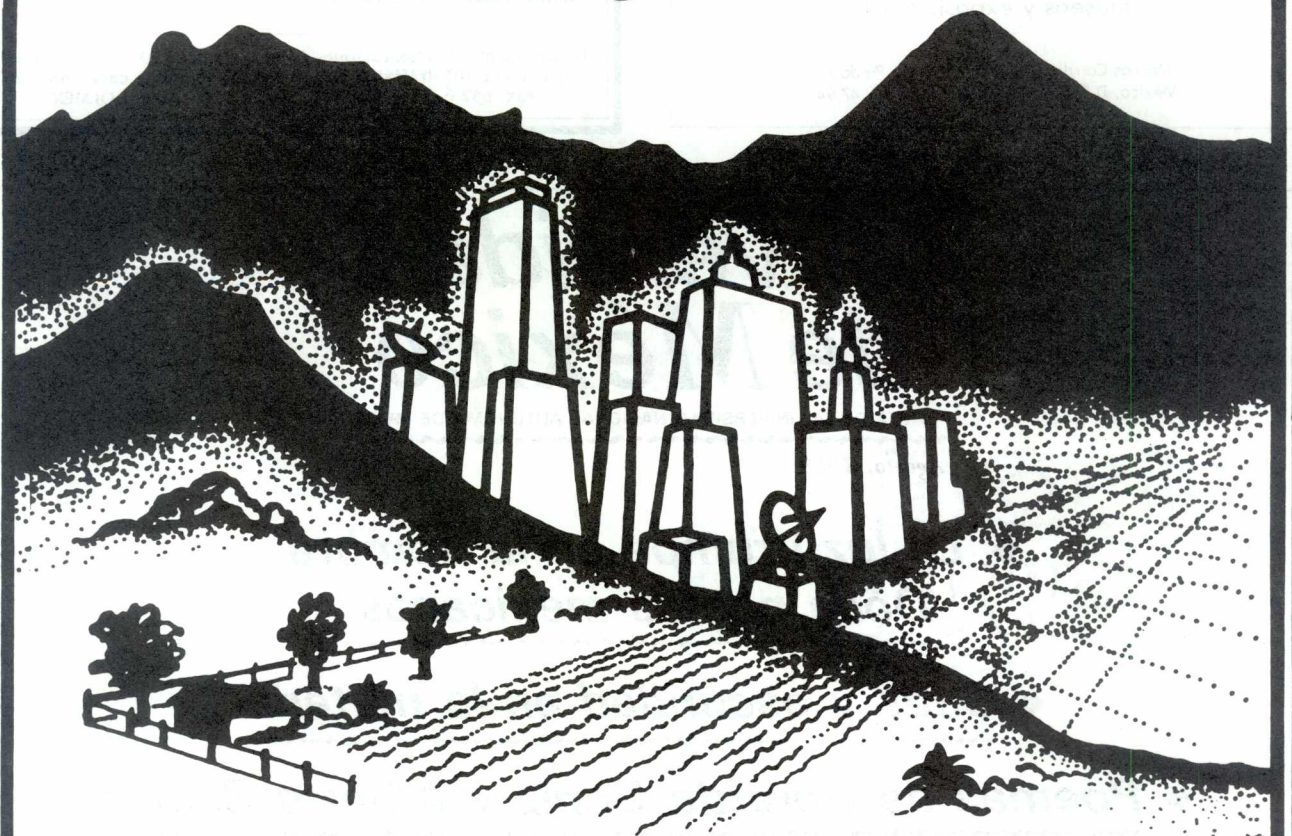
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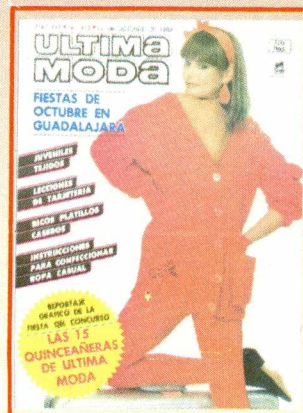
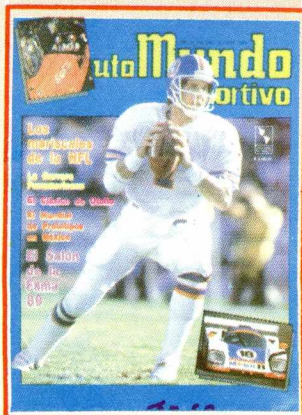
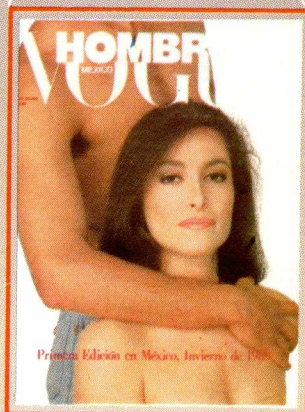
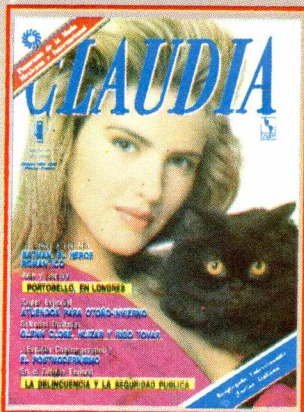
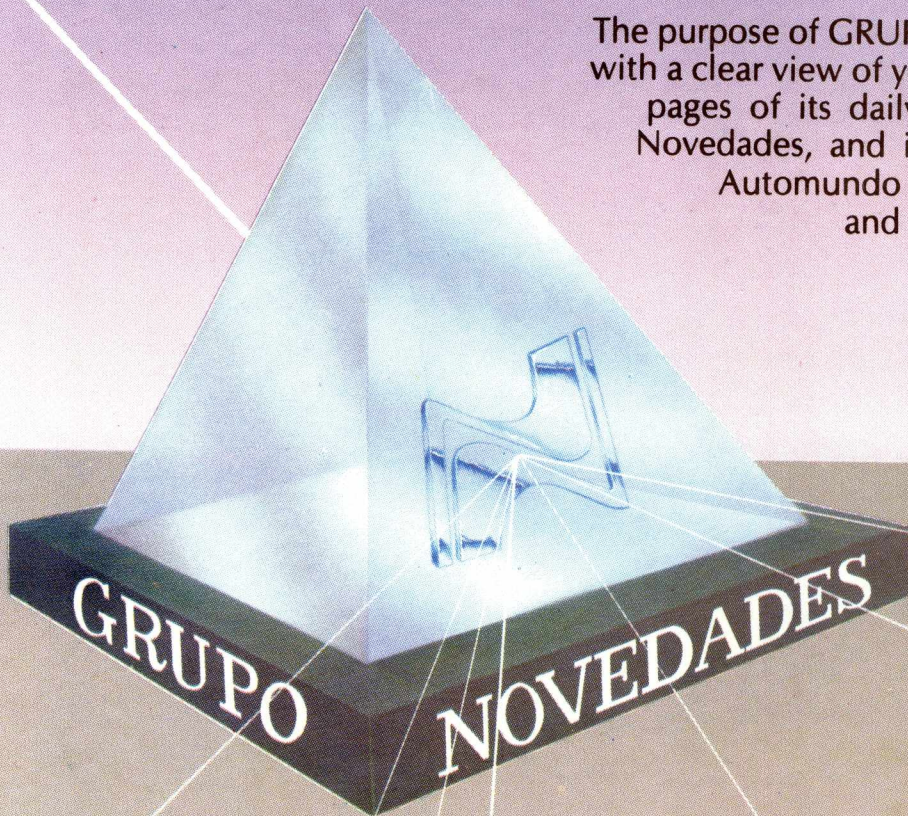
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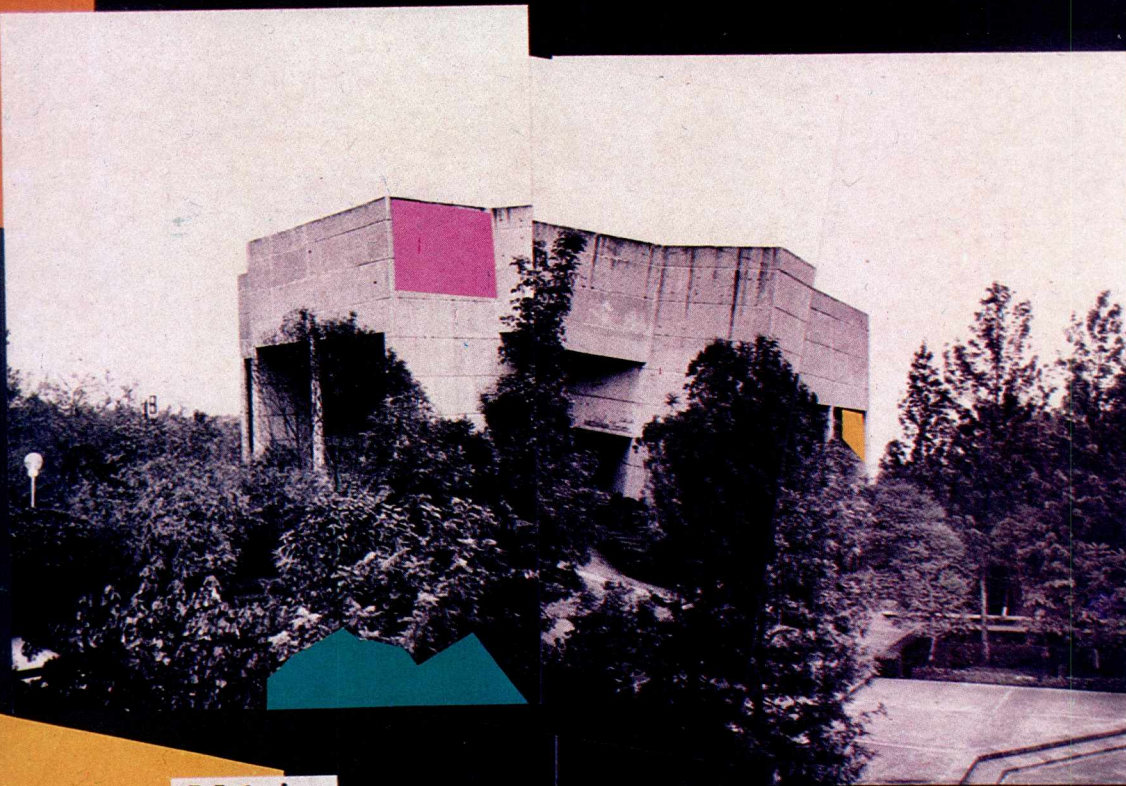
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NEZAHUALCOYOTL  
CARLOS CHAVEZ

*Teatro*

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SOR JUANA INES DE LA CRUZ

*Cine*

JULIO BRACHO  
JOSE REVUELTAS

*Danza*

MIGUEL COVARRUBIAS

*Librería y Cafetería*