

# voices

of MEXICO

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

Facing the  
Present Crisis

Crying Need  
for Regional  
Movements

'Cultural  
Diversity is  
Under Attack'

Unfettered  
Democracy



One Year Later: Mexico  
Commemorates its Dead  
and Celebrates Life

\$10.00  
\$3.00

December 1986-February 1987 Number 2



CASA  
DE  
EVIADOR

36

SAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE, Gto.

# Contents



iovo

ISSN 0186-9418

## the nation

- 3 Saving Humanity From Nuclear Holocaust
- 5 New Industry, Falling Prices
- 7 People Change
- 9 Challenged by Modern Times
- 10 U.S. Cars "Made in Mexico"
- 13 Better Relations?
- 15 New Government, Old Problems for Oaxaca
- 17 Woman Candidate for Governor

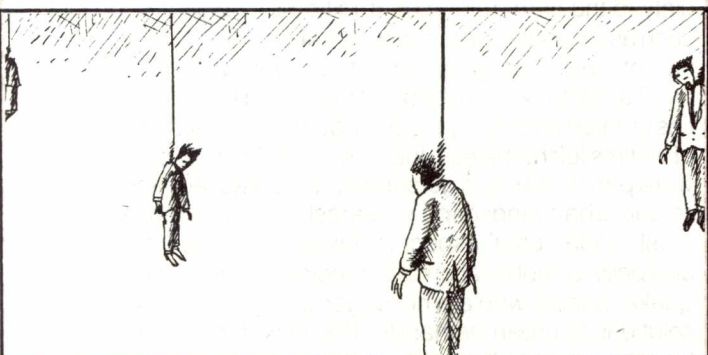
## point of view

- 19 "Cultural Diversity is Under Attack"  
(Interview with Congressman Juan José Bremer)



## mexican profiles

- 22 Facing the Present Crisis
- 25 Crying Need for Regional Movements
- 28 Unfettered Democracy



## latin american issues

- 31 Premonitions of Instability
- 33 Reaping the Future
- 36 Perils of an Occupied Country

## faces

- 38 Chronicler of Mexican Picaresque
- 40 Aztec Roots Live On at Milpa Alta

## special section

- 41 One Year Later: The Earthquake Revisited

## documents

- 48 A Collection in Support of the Nicaraguan People
- 50 The Puerto Vallarta Declaration



## life and culture

- 52 Surrealism and Mexico
- 53 Painters of Seven Generations
- 56 Community of Central American Writers and Artists

## ecology

- 57 Towards a National Park in Texcoco's Lake
- 58 What About the Monarch Butterfly?

## science

- 59 Tepexcohuite: The Magic Tree

## odds and ends

- 61 Books: Canetti's Passion for Immortality  
The True and Marvelous Story of María Sabina, Mushroom Priestess  
Nicaragua's Ethnic Paths  
Books Worth Reading
- 64 Exhibits: The Prehispanic Ballgame Tradition
- 65 Food: Baroque Mexican Cuisine
- 66 Theater: Mirror, Mirror On the Wall
- 67 Cinema: Gaby Brimmer, A Gigantic Film Production in Mexico
- 69 Music: Work in Progress: A New Mexican Opera

Cover photo by Sergio Dorantes

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

DECEMBER 1986 - FEBRUARY 1987 NUMBER 2

## This Issue

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All editorial correspondence should be sent to VOICES OF MEXICO, Filosofía y Letras No. 88, Col. Copilco-Universidad, 04360 México D.F. Tels (905) 658-5853 and (905) 658-7279. Allow 2 weeks for delivery.

VOICES OF MEXICO is published quarterly. Subscriptions are \$10.00 per year and \$14.00 for those other than in North America. Single issues are \$3.00 each.

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We are mainly concerned with three subjects in this issue. The first is our economic and political relationship to the rest of the world. As we were closing this number, Mexico finally reached an agreement with its international creditors. This means that the ongoing internal debate concerning payment of the foreign debt has temporarily quieted down, especially when compared to the storm of statements and points of view unleashed previous to the change-over in the Ministry of Finance last June, which we covered in our previous issue. Now the discussion seems to be centering on other points, such as whether the specific way in which the Mexican government renegotiated the huge debt was the most suitable. VOICES contributes to this debate with an article by well-known economist Ifigenia Martínez called "Facing the Present Crisis."

At the same time, the year came to a close with changes in several governorships and municipal elections in different parts of the country. Some of these elections — such as the case in Chihuahua, Durango and Oaxaca — stirred up national public opinion and even deserved certain international notoriety. We believe that once the most acute and decisive period in this process is past, it is our duty to provide critical and dispassionate analysis of recent elections in Mexico, including aspects such as possible future trends in our political system. Besides the informative articles we present on voting in Oaxaca and Tlaxcala, we are including two essays that take a more in-depth look at what is really happening in Mexican elections: "A Crying Need for Regional Movements" by Manuel Villa, and "Unfettered Democracy" by Silvia Gómez Tagle.

Finally, we have taken an overview of the earthquake Mexico City suffered on September 19, 1985, one of the worst catastrophes in our modern history. The earthquake shook a lot more than the city's buildings. Its effects moved Mexican society to the core, raking up traditionally neglected problems such as excessive urban concentration, Mexico City-dwellers' lack of voice in city government, unequal access to services, etc. To this surfacing of old wrongs must be added the difficulties created directly by the earthquake, such as the thousands of victims left homeless, the loss of whole neighborhoods that were part of the city's personality, the disappearance of some of our urban landscape's dearest signs of identity. But the most fundamental aspect in this sense is the intense social and political mobilization of the sectors hardest hit by the earthquake, people who are no longer willing to wait for traditional solutions to urban demands. This new, highly active and articulate actor on the political scene points to the presence of a vigorous people moving behind the facade, and announces deep changes to come in Mexican society. These are processes we need to follow closely, and this is why we offer our readers a special section on the earthquake and its aftermath.

Mariclaire Acosta

# Saving Humanity From Nuclear Holocaust

*The Group of Six struggles to guarantee that there will never be another Hiroshima.*

Ixtapa, Mexico. August 7, 1986. "We strongly urge people, parliaments and governments around the world to actively support our call. Everyone has a right to peace and the obligation to make the effort to achieve it. Neither together nor alone can the people of the world erase the human memory of the horror of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but together we can and must erase this threatening horror from our future."

Those are the closing words of the "Mexico Declaration" issued by the Group of Six, whose members are Argentina, Tanzania, India, Sweden, Greece and Mexico. Their position reaffirms their commitment to protect the right to peace in order to assure the survival of the human race.

Prior to the two-day peace summit (August 5-7), meetings were held with prominent public figures and nuclear experts. They presented papers that were then studied by Presidents Miguel de la Madrid (Mexico), Raúl Alfonsín (Argentina), Andreas Papandreu (Greece), Ingvar Carlsson (Sweden), Rajiv Gandhi (India) and Julius Nyerere (Tanzania).

A specific proposal for verifying the suspension of underground nuclear testing was the most concrete result of the meeting. In fact, since August 4, 1984 when the Group issued its first call to the leaders of the world's great powers, it has produced at least four other statements and held a major conference (in New Delhi). The fact that it was able to develop a concrete proposal this time is an important sign of progress in the Group of Six' activities, since before they were limited to sending written messages to Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachov.

## AND WHAT ABOUT THE ARMS RACE?

Some 800 billion dollars are spent each year on defense. The implications of this fact are tremendous. In the first place, arms spending in the United States is one of the main causes of the huge federal deficit, now the largest of any country in the world, and it has been tied to budget cut-backs for social programs that aided the least protected sectors of U.S. society. In addition those billions of dollars could be used to liquidate the debts of developing countries with their creditors once and for all. Freeing those funds would allow our countries to end the transfer out of economic resources in the form of high interest payments on the foreign debt or as foreign exchange, channeled to the U.S. by multi-national corporations operating in our countries because of the cheap labor.

Paradoxically the resources invested in this industry of death could be used alternatively to promote economic development, for health care, food and culture, as well as to erase the stigma of domination from the relationship between strong and weak countries.

The nuclear arms race has already gone far beyond the rational: together the Soviet Union and the United States have some 60,000 nuclear weapons in their arsenals, including 20,000 strategic weapons. This is enough firepower to destroy all of humanity and the planet we inhabit fifty times over. This is the present state of affairs, without taking into account the "Star Wars"



Photo by Rogelio Cuellar

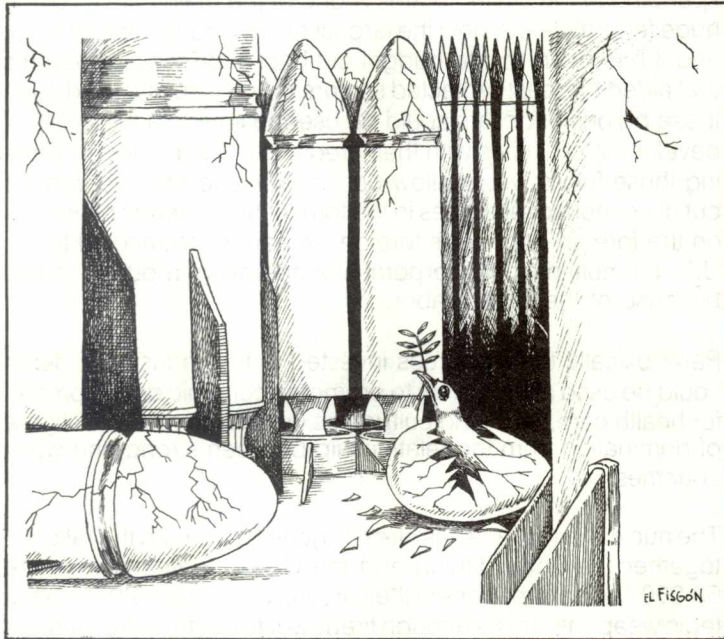
The meeting at Ixtapa: seated from left to right, presidents Nyerere, Ghandi, Alfonsin, De la Madrid Papandreu and Carlsson.

## the nation

proposal to develop a laser based system to intercept projectiles in flight.

The measure proposed by the Group of Six is the first time since the nuclear arms race began in 1945 that a group of Third World countries has taken the initiative to remind the world powers that they are not the only countries on this earth and thus do not have sole rights to determine the destiny of all humanity.

In addition to proposing mechanisms that could be a first step toward ending nuclear testing and help increase mutual trust between the Soviet Union and the United States, the peace and disarmament summit in Ixtapa reiterated its position prohibiting the militarization of outer space. The Group of Six holds that such programs, rather than increasing the security of the two power



blocks, will actually increase the risks of destroying the planet, either through error or deliberately.

The importance of the meeting lies not only in the very fact that it was held, but also in its potential to spark a current of world opinion, a kind of international awareness that will move countries to become a positive force in the effort to protect the international rights of weaker nations.

According to Jamal Shemirani, director of the U.N. Information Center, "In addition to the support given the Group of Six by the 40th U.N. General Assembly, in the next session their positive and brave posture regarding the arms race will be taken into account. But at any rate, this topic should not only be of concern to these two organizations; rather it should be taken up by all socially-oriented organizations around the world."

### A PROPOSAL, IF YOU PLEASE

The specific proposal for verifying the suspension of underground nuclear testing is an important example of technological advances being made by Mexico, Argentina, Greece, Tanzania, India and Sweden. Their seventeen point proposal was sent along with the "Mexico Declaration" to President Ronald Reagan and General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachov. Among its most important elements is its emphasis on bilateral cooperation in guaranteeing the moratorium. This includes enforcing the moratorium at testing sites, inspecting large chemical explosions without confusing them with nuclear detonations and permitting independent inspections and technological developments by the Group of Six.

The document calls for an initial meeting of U.S. and Soviet experts with the people who formulated the proposal. Together they would examine the details of setting up a network of some 20 or 30 seismic stations for the international monitoring of both countries' national territories, as well as test sites and the possibilities for on site verification.

The six leaders, as well as the other noted individuals who participated in the pre-meeting on disarmament, believe that political will is the only ingredient still missing to bring the proposal to life. They refuted the idea that stopping the nuclear arms race presents an endless number of technical problems and characterized that as an inhumane and petty argument created by those who are not really interested in peaceful coexistence. According to participants, the best proof of this is the Soviet's temporary test ban and their decision to extend it for another year after the Group of Six' New Delhi statement. They viewed the Soviet move as an effort to make a show of good will towards reaching an understanding and achieving an arms accord between the two powers.

### THE URGENT NEED FOR PEACE

There are numerous treaties on nuclear arms, including the Antarctic Treaty, the Outer Space Test Ban, The Tlatelolco Treaty, the partial test ban signed in 1963, the 1974 Threshold Test Ban and many others signed by both the United States and the Soviet Union. Yet after 40 years of the arms race, none of these accords has been able to bring it to a halt. To make matters even worse, world powers have often ignored international law to the detriment of weak countries and in the process have heightened international tensions, especially regarding bilateral East-West relations.

The accumulation of nuclear weapons that can destroy the world many times over has not produced the desired security of nations. Only the accumulation of peace and peaceful coexistence can really assure the security of the strongest countries and of the world in general. The potential for economic, political and social development is integrally related to the insanity of the arms race that robs people of their possibilities for creating a better life for their children.

The sentence was handed down by the prominent figures who participated in the disarmament meeting: "Amidst humanity's final chaos and the eternal nights, the only vestige of what had been life on earth will be the cockroaches." ★

Ramsés Ramírez



# New Industry, Falling Prices

*La Caridad Mine is an ambitious venture in uncertain times.*

Fantasy sometimes comes true, and this seems to be the case for a mine sheltered by a mountain range at 5,400 feet above sea level. La Caridad mining and metallurgy complex is located in the Mexican state of Sonora, which borders with Arizona, some 165 miles northeast of Hermosillo, the state capital. It is currently the second most important mine of its type in the world and possesses the most advanced copper-mining and processing technology currently available.

Together with the mineral-rich areas of El Alacrán, La Púrica, Bella Esperanza and La Florida, La Caridad mine was discovered thanks to a joint program developed with the United Nations which allowed a significant breakthrough in the country's mining prospects. Mexicana de Cobre (Mexican Copper) began building the project in 1974 as a completely integrated industry that started out as a mining venture and has been developing other aspects of the process according to a previously designed program.

The existence of at least 1,350 million tons of mineral reserve containing an average 0.6% of copper and 0.02% of molybdenum was confirmed in 1979, which was when work actually began at the mine and at the grinding and concentrator plants. The lime and molybdenum plants became operational in 1980 and 1982, and the smelting plant began

test runs in January of 1986. The program eventually includes production of electrolytic copper, molybdenum derivatives, sulphuric acid and phosphate fertilizers.

## AT THE VANGUARD

Xavier García de Quevedo, administrative director of Mexicana de Cobre, explained the project's dimensions as a means of illustrating La Caridad's importance in our mining industry. He recalled that, "the project was conceived in 1968, and exploratory work and economic feasibility studies began that same year. At the time the prospects for copper on the world market were attractive. When the first phase of the project was completed, basically the mine itself and processing plants, the price of copper still stood at \$1.20 per pound, which made the project entirely feasible."

Mexicana de Cobre was set up in 1968 with 10 million pesos (when the exchange rate stood at 12.50 to the dollar), and by May, 1986, despite difficult market conditions, the firm's capital had increased to 101.457 billion pesos (at an exchange rate of 550 pesos to the dollar), most of it dedicated to new investment. Mr. García said that when the second phase of the project, the smelting plant got underway, the price of copper still made the investment viable. Trouble started in 1982 when the price of the ore on the world market collapsed.

By this time, said Mr. García de Quevedo, it was impossible to turn back, and the decision was made to carry on with

the project. The country benefited as it ceased to import large amounts of copper metal and moved to the head of copper mining the world over.

Despite disappointing prices, two open-sky copper mines are currently operational in Mexico, La Caridad and Cananea, both located in the same region at a distance of some 62 miles one from the other. 1984 was an especially important year because over 50% of the ore mined was sold abroad, confirming the sector as one of the country's main exporters.

"The fact that prices are depressed doesn't mean a lack of demand," says Mr. García. "We've been exporting copper concentrates from the very beginning; over 90% of our production goes to Japan, Korea, China, Germany, Italy and the United States. And now that we have the smelter our outlook is even

brighter, particularly because of the purity of our copper, one of the deposit's characteristics." La Caridad has certain important geological features that reduce costs and make it profitable, among them the high copper content of the ore that is mined.

The only possible means of competing on the world market is to reduce extraction and processing costs as much as possible, but at the same time, the availability of new technology completely closes the gap between a developed country and our own. Mexicana de Cobre's Xavier García explained that in the United States many mines have lower copper-content levels and don't have the latest technology, something which has led to the shutdown of 14 of the 25 most important plants. Many smelting plants are also in the process of closing down because they are unable to meet pollution control standards.

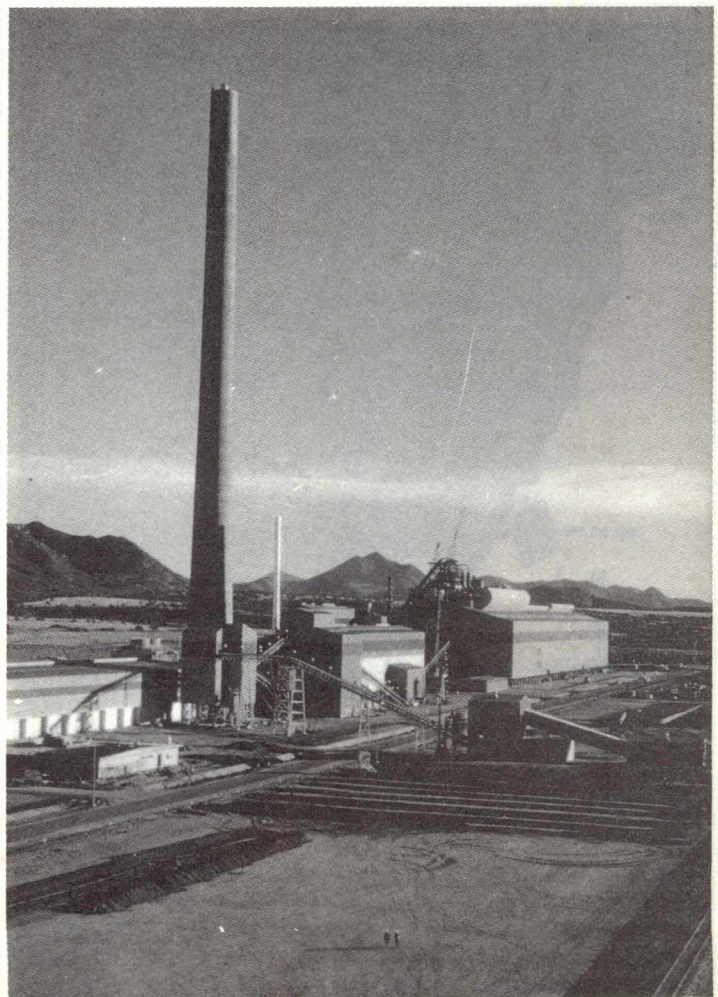


Photo by Jorge Betancourt

La Caridad, the third largest mining-metallurgical plant of its type in the world.

## the nation

As a by-product of these difficulties, for the first time in its history the United States will become a provider of raw materials to a developing country: it will send ore to Mexico for the smelting process.

### PROBLEMS DON'T SCARE US

Overall, the mining sector was hit by constantly lower prices for minerals on the world market during 1985, as was indicated in a report on the Mexican government's National Development Plan for that year. The report added that the mining and metallurgy sector showed a 17.5% growth rate during 1985. The sector's trade surplus was \$545 million, a 28.8% fall compared to 1983 and 33.4% slide when compared with figures for 1984. Yet mining activity continues.

We were also told that thanks to the project underway, smelting, which was previously carried out abroad, will now be

done in Mexico. Copper metal with a high component of aggregate value will be exported from now on, and the new smelting process will allow for the recovery of most of the gold and silver also contained in the ore. Most important of all, this will generate new foreign exchange income and allow for the substitution of costly imports.

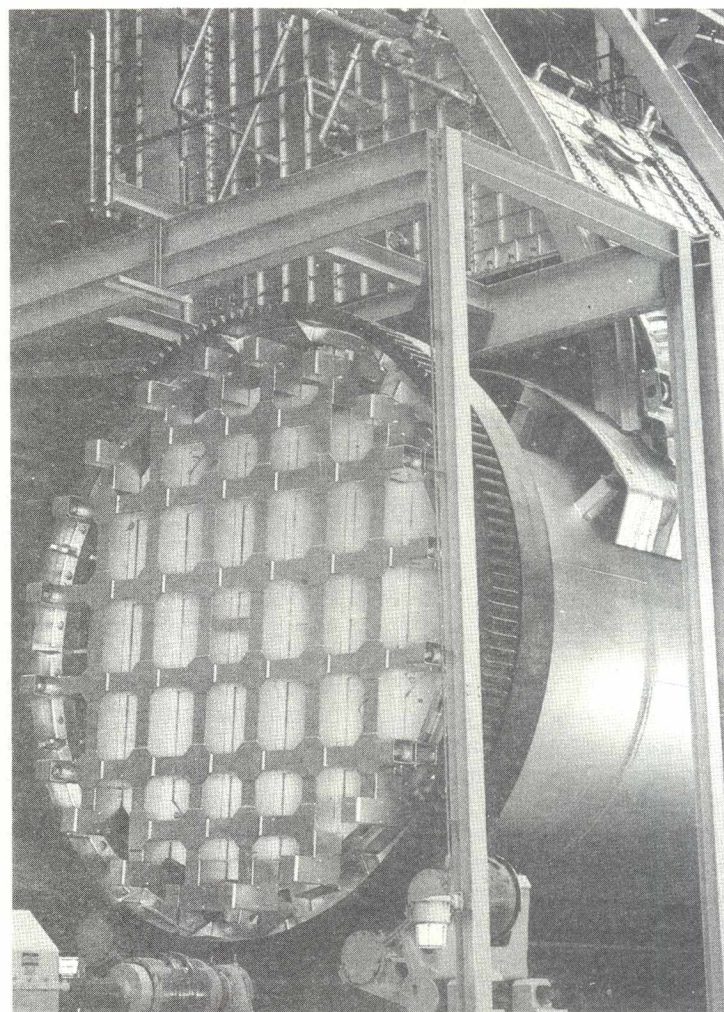
Yet the future for copper is not a particularly bright one. Synthetic materials with many of copper's characteristic are beginning to appear, and this metal is probably going to be displaced from many of its current uses. Yet none of this seems to frighten the businessmen behind the La Caridad industrial complex.

In its Oct. 1985 issue the magazine *Minero* (Miner) published an article called: "Copper, Industrial Restructuring and New Technology," which describes how the greatest danger for copper comes from

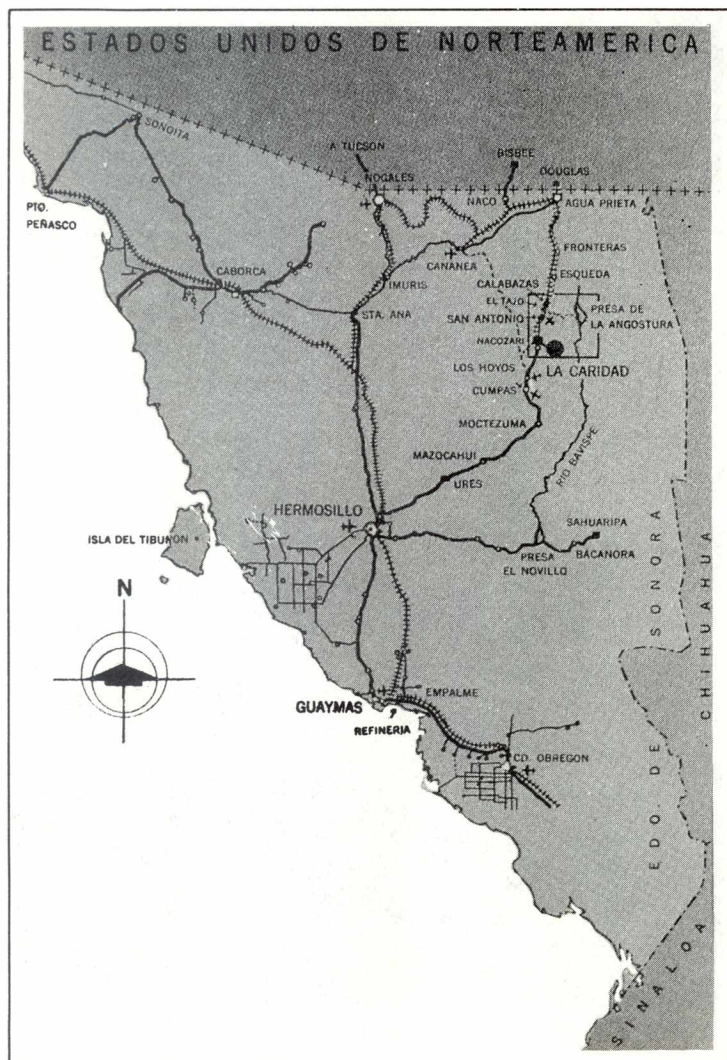
the optic fibers used in telecommunications. "These are siliceous threads used to transmit the rays of light issued by laser rays. These threads are capable of transmitting up to 10 times as much information as copper wire can, and of doing so much more neatly. The cost of these new materials tends to be lower than copper's, and will probably continue to shrink in the future," states the author, ad-

ceased to be profitable, all of which means there is stability in the copper market." He adds that although optic fibers may well replace copper there are other technologies currently under development that use this metal, such as different means of harnessing solar energy.

Yet as a recovery in the price of copper is still expected, lower prices have not affected



Advanced technology in Mexico: inside the smelter complex.



ding that further market contractions are to be expected for primary and refined copper, as well as for wire and cable, estimating that as much as 35% of the market could be affected over the next ten years.

But Mr. García believes Mexico's copper industry probably won't come up against too many problems because, "on the one hand, world demand for copper is on the rise, and on the other, many mines have closed down because they

production at La Caridad. Many phases are still incomplete, including the sulphuric acid plant which will avoid causing ecological damage by using a chimney that expels toxic gas into the air at a height of 850 feet.

La Caridad is a good example of industrial integration and of the workings of joint economic ventures (private business and the state) in our country's traditional mining activities.★  
Enrique Vargas Anaya



# People Change

*Other things have changed in the Central Valley of Mexico besides the quality of the air. City dwellers are no longer the same, either.*

Not even a trace is left of Tenochtitlan, the imperial city that impressed the Spanish conquerors with its pristine lakes, clear air, imposing pyramids and perfect social organization. Today, more than 400 years later, modern Mexico City is one of the most chaotic, polluted and crowded population centers in human history.

The city's growth has been incredibly rapid. In 1950 there were some 3.5 million inhabitants living in about 240 square kilometers; today there are some 18 million people—roughly 23 percent of the country's total population—who live in the city's 1000 square kilometer area. As a result, population density is higher than in most other cities, even those like Tokyo, traditionally considered to be among the most densely populated in the world.

## INDUSTRIALIZATION AND URBAN GROWTH

The Valley of Mexico metropolitan area began its anarchic growth during the 1920s. The country began a period of industrialization that grew steadily and peaked during the Miguel Alemán Velasco administration (1946-1952). This growth tended to concentrate the nation's work force and its industrial plant in a few urban centers (Mexico City and its metropolitan area, Guadalajara and Monterrey being the most important). In the process, the country's predominantly rural economy was broken down, and thousands and thousands of peasants migrated to the cities in search of industrial jobs.

Mexico City's dizzying growth transformed all of its original spaces. Downtown, for example, was replaced as the center of student and cultural life when University City was built in the southern part of the metropolitan area. The old downtown bookstores on Donceles, Argentina and San Ildefonso Streets moved to the more suburban Coyoacán and San Angel neighborhoods, as cultural life in general moved south. And thus the city became divided: culture in the south, the mansions of wealthy businessmen and industrialists in the western suburbs of *Las Lomas*, blue collar workers and factories in the north and slums encircling the entire city.

The classic urban center is being replaced by new population centers: Naucalpan, Tlalnepantla, Ecatepec, Nezahualcóyotl, etc. in the state of Mexico. And the Valley of Mexico's traditional landscape has been changed completely. The old neighborhoods that produced a fuller and stronger urban culture, the arid lands left behind as the ancient Texcoco Lake (home of the Aztec capital Tenochtitlan) dried up and the surrounding agricultural lands have all given way to commercial speculation, real estate transactions and the merciless laws of supply and demand.

## PEASANT CULTURE VS. URBAN CULTURE

"The peasants who migrate to the city are people with deeply rooted rural cultures," explains Héctor Manuel Romero, chronicler for the Federal District's Cuauhtémoc Delegation (an administrative sub-division of the capital city.) "They build a protective wall around themselves against the lack of communication and the hurried pace of life, and they close themselves off in a kind of little island. There are thousands of these little islands that coexist in the same city, with no communication between them. It's really a problem of mass psychology: how to incorporate peasants into a city where people speak a different psychological language. I still don't see any solution for the problem."

According to Carlos Monsiváis, a leading Mexican writer and journalist, there are four main processes of cultural change taking place in the Federal District.

The first is the increase in cultural activities. Until the 1960s, the city's cultural life was concentrated in just a few places: the Palace of Fine Arts, a few galleries and film centers and several specialized bookstores downtown. Beginning in the 70s, cultural gathering places were displaced toward the university center (a modern cultural complex built by the National Autonomous University of Mexico), theaters and bookstores in the southern part of the



Drawing by Alberto Beltrán

## the nation

city. Beginning at about the same time, cultural activities began to diversify to include the excellent concerts, plays and exhibits characteristic of the world's great cities. To a large extent this process is a result of the growth of the city's middle class, whose cultural level has risen considerably since the consolidation of the Mexican Revolution.

The second process is related to the new mood on the part of students who take the lessons of 1968 (a year marked by huge student demonstrations and culminating in a large massacre on October 2) as the basis for changes in their attitude toward life and society.

The third process has to do with the "nationalization" of rock music, a legitimate language of youth, rooted in the 60s and continually developing with its own dynamics and traditions. The words to songs by Mexican rock groups like the "Three Souls" express an urban perspective on the massification of life; on marginalization within massification, to put it one way.

A fourth point is peoples' new attitude toward reading. Books have lost their virtually sacred character and reading is becoming a more natural activity. Unfortunately, the latter process has been interrupted by the economic crisis and the tremendous increase in the cost of paper.

### IN SPITE OF EVERYTHING, THERE IS STILL SOLIDARITY

About half of Mexico's population lives in large urban centers, where the consequences of a social organization that offers no real possibilities for a decent life and more humane interactions

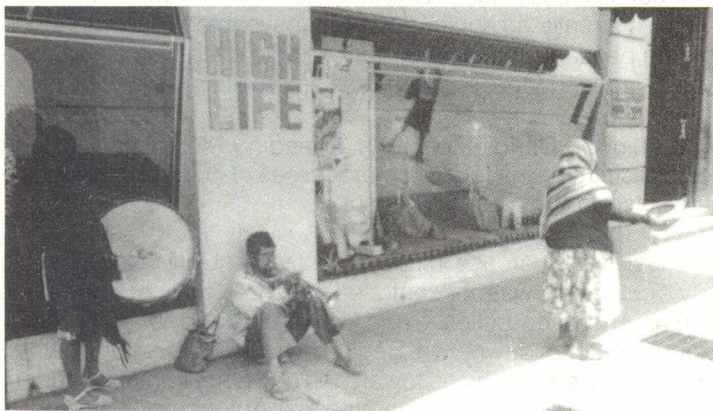


Photo by Sergio Dorantes

New arrivals earn a living in Mexico City.

are most obvious. Nonetheless, according to Carlos Monsiváis, there is still solidarity in the city, despite the enormous psychological damage implicit to life in such a chaotic and closely-packed environment. "It would seem," he explains, "that life is just like it is in any other big city. But I don't think that's really true; we still haven't reached the degree of indifference, reserve and rejection that marks life in major, Western urban centers. In Mexico City peasant culture and old-time workers' culture still have a certain importance, and we have yet to get to the point of total isolation and rejection of our neighbors; I think we're not there yet. Everyone in the Federal District shares the hardships and lives in a climate of perpetual tension and anxiety, yet people still find time to maintain some minimal forms of communal life, to continue as best they can the classic traditions of family, friendship and *compadrazgo*.\* On the one hand, it is a city of 18 million people, representing a completely new phenomenon in the world, yet at the same time people hold on tightly to traditional social forms."

### THE EARTHQUAKE AND CITY LIFE

The September 19, 1985 earthquake is perhaps the most important factor in recent times to radically change peoples' behavior in Mexico City. People went out from their houses and helped their neighbors. And we rediscovered each other, all of us who make up part of this city. We had lost sight of the city as a whole; with September 19th, we regained that awareness.

The city is not the same as before; it looks different now. The quakes destroyed a large number of buildings in the downtown area, and the ruins are now another part of the urban landscape. The deaths of so many thousands traumatized us, and we will never be the same again either.

"It is impossible to say what things will be like in the year 2000," says Héctor Manuel Romero. "They calculate that by then there will be some 35 million people living in this already saturated city."

What is clear is that Mexico's major cities will continue to be the centers of political power and wealth in the country; and they will also be its centers of increasing misery and social disintegration. ★

Mercedes López

\* relationships established between god-parents; traditionally an important component of Mexican community life.



Drawing by Alberto Beltrán

# Challenged by Modern Times

*In his State of the Union message, the president blames falling oil prices for Mexico's woes.*

On September 1st President Miguel de la Madrid presented his fourth State of the Union address to the nation before a joint session of Congress. His message dealt mainly with the economic and political situation, including current government goals and the validation of the measures enacted to counteract the economic crisis.

The president stated that income lost because of the fall in the price of oil prevented economic growth and re-launched inflation. He added that current government borrowing policy is to contract the least amount possible of foreign financing, meaning only that which is strictly necessary to complement internal savings and to cover the economy's foreign exchange demands, on the premise of rationalizing the use of resources and of moderate growth.

Thus far the main adjustment in public finances has been made in several areas of fiscal spending through measures such as re-allocation of investment resources, restraints on current expenditures in order to increase savings and adjustments in both sectorial and regional priorities. Federal spending during 1985 was 5% lower than what had been estimated. Transferred resources fell 2.5% below the authorized budget and this item's share of the GNP fell by close to four percentage points between 1982 and 1985.

Available information tends to confirm that there has been a disciplined exercise of the fiscal budget. Excluding internal and foreign debt service, public spending shows an accumulated decline of 40% in real terms since 1981. Despite the fact that over one billion pesos were lost during the first semester of 1986 because of the fall in the price of oil, the overall fiscal deficit shrank by 8%; real-term government spending fell by 22.3%, and these are clear indicators of the fiscal discipline being followed. The new emphasis in government spending is on supporting stable economic growth, not through expanding the budget but rather through the elimination of non-

priority programs, thus freeing resources for development projects, financing for state-owned firms, etc.

There have been efforts to avoid a massive loss of foreign exchange reserves, which currently stand at \$4.525 billion, down \$1.281 billion since the end of 1985. There were considerable difficulties in this respect because of the loss of foreign exchange income from oil sales.

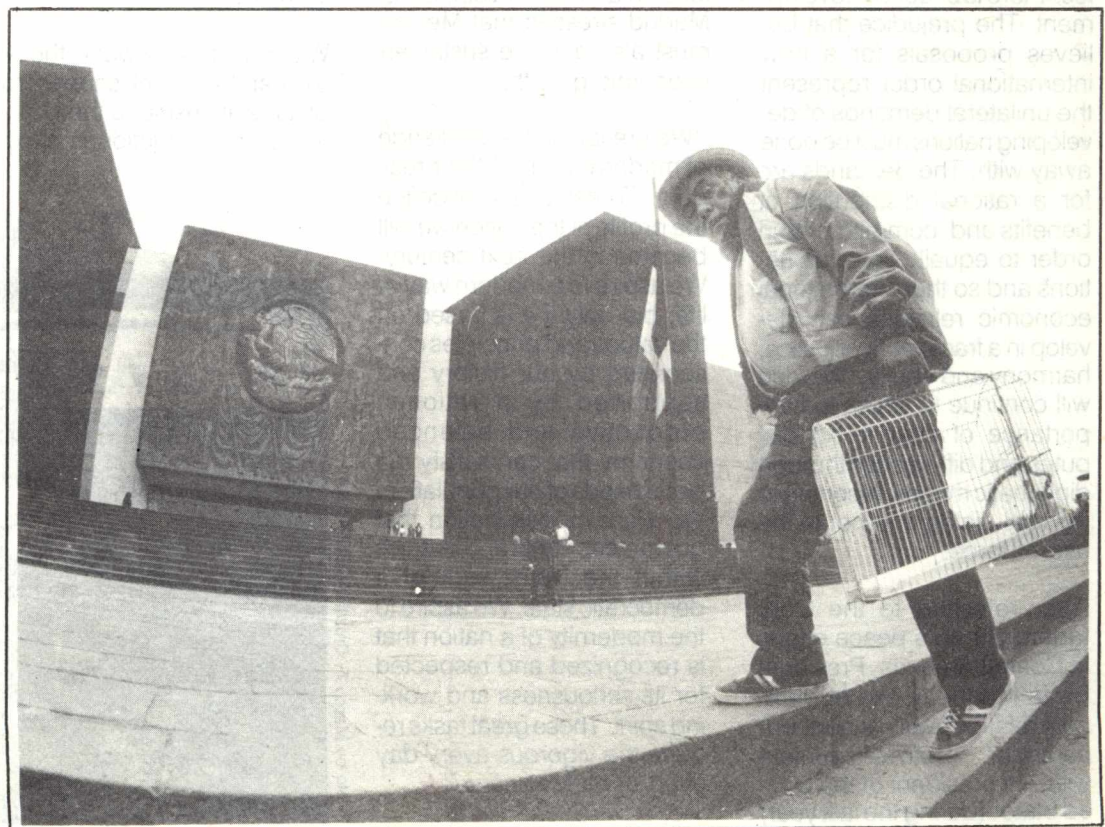
President De la Madrid denied that current economic policy is to blame for the country's economic woes. Both inflation and recession have been spurred on by falling oil prices, not because of the government's economic policies, which are considered valid.

"Falling oil prices, the steady depression in the world prices of most raw materials and the fact that we had practically no fresh foreign financing during most of 1985 and 1986 have meant not only new, additional problems to the ones we were already facing, but practically a new crisis."

Mexican state policy of furthering democracy and social and

cultural independence was reaffirmed, as was the decision to continue with the in-depth changes necessary to overcome current obstacles. The people's support and involvement have made it possible to deal with difficult situations with respect for democratic rights and avoiding clashes over existing conflict. "Our institutions have shown their firmness and flexibility over these four years, and they have supported the process of economic reorganization and structural change."

Gubernatorial, congressional and municipal elections were held in several states during the period referred to in the presidential address September 1, 1985 through August 31, 1986- with conflictive situations in Chihuahua, Durango and Oaxaca. On the subject the president stated: "These elections took place with respect for the law. The people were able to choose in an atmosphere of complete freedom. The press was completely free to keep the public informed... These elections strengthened our political and ideological pluralistic system and reaffirmed our democratic calling."



The Congressional building, where the president delivers his annual address

Photo by Marco A. Cruz/IMAGEN LATINA

## the nation

So-called "moral renovation" has been greatly emphasized by the De la Madrid administration, and in his address the president indicated that there is a steady effort to improve the quality of government services and to guarantee honesty in public servants. The noticeable reduction in delinquent acts on the part of public employees is mainly due to the preventive measures that have been enacted.

Two nagging world problems - the threat of war and the breakdown in the global economic structure - guided Mexico's foreign policy efforts towards international stability and security. Thus, the Mexican government hosted a meeting between the chief executives of Argentina, Greece, India, Sweden and Tanzania, gathering what is called the Group of Six for Peace and Disarmament. The meeting was held in early August in the resort town of Ixtapa.

The six statesmen called on the world's nuclear powers to cease their irrational arms race and to agree on an overall irreversible nuclear disarmament process as soon as possible. Mexico stressed that there cannot be real peace unless there is effective development. The prejudice that believes proposals for a new international order represent the unilateral demands of developing nations must be done away with. The demands are for a rational distribution of benefits and commitments in order to equally favor all nations and so that international economic relations can develop in a framework of justice, harmony and equity. "Mexico will continue to stress the importance of channeling disputes and differences through diplomatic means, resorting to political dialog and not to the use of force."

After referring to the Contadora Group's peace efforts in Central America, President De la Madrid spoke of Mexico's relations with its northern neighbor. "Both encounters with the president of the United States (during the last year) were aimed at improving ex-

change and communication and at activating and strengthening bilateral cooperation. Our main points of agenda were immigration issues, border-area cooperation, drug trafficking and a variety of trade and financial topics, as well as the issue of respect for the individual, labor and social rights of Mexican immigrant workers."

In his closing words the president stated that in the midst of adversity the Mexican people have reinvigorated their will to struggle and have shown their capacity for facing challenges: "Nationalism and the will to continue to be a united and sovereign people are our main sources of strength." Looking forward, De la Madrid proposed to broaden the range of social participation in national affairs and to further extend Mexico's democratic renovation. Mexico shall continue on the path of municipal reform, of strengthening the balance between the different state powers and exercising the presidency in closer contact with the different social sectors. Our country's international relations must be framed by the nation's interests and reality, and we must take on our full responsibility in world affairs. In a different vein, De la Madrid stressed that Mexico must also achieve sustained economic growth.

"We are facing the challenge of modernity," said the president. "These years will define the profile of the nation we will become in the next century. We aspire to a modern way of life, but only if it is based on the values and principles consecrated by our history and supported by a rational, productive and balanced economy that can satisfy the basic needs of our population. We want modernization that guarantees rights and liberties within the framework of a democratic state. We aspire to the modernity of a nation that is recognized and respected for its seriousness and working spirit. These great tasks require the vigorous every day effort of all Mexicans." ★

Edna Lydia Santin

## U.S. Cars (Made in Mexico)

*The Mexican automobile industry is in transition. The question is whether this change benefits the country or multinationals.*

Mexico's automobile industry faces an uncertain future. New technology, economic crisis, a shift in the industrial development model from the substitution of imports towards greater emphasis on exports, constitute a challenge for the government, business and workers alike. The economic importance of the industry is second only to oil. Thus, events in this sector can signal the way for much of the country's economic activity.

Today, manufacture is increasingly determined by the course of the world market. Multinationals, mainly General Motors, Ford and Chrysler, decide the policy that is to be followed by their subsidiaries or "satellite" companies in underdeveloped countries such as Mexico.

It must be kept in mind that the U.S.' trade deficit has immediate short-term implications for the different sectors of its economy. Many manufacturing plants have shut down, leaving thousands of North American workers unemployed, and this is particularly true of the automobile industry. Over 60% of Mexico's exports are aimed at the United States, and this interdependency means that decisions made in the U.S. auto industry will affect the plants in Mexico.

Within this framework, the Mexican auto industry tends to be a great draw-back shop for foreign firms. This is particularly true of its relationship to the U.S., since 85% of our border area automotive production is exported to that country.



Photo by Marco A. Cruz/IMAGENLATINA

GM has laid off 40% of its work force in Mexico since 1981.

Mexico's auto industry began to develop in the 30s, stimulated by the state in order to broaden the country's productive plant and as part of an overall industrialization policy based on the substitution of imports. This policy generated new jobs and sought to stimulate the growth of the auto industry both through the local market and by promoting exports.

Yet over the years it has become increasingly evident that the auto industry's development in our country has taken place through broad-sweeping penetration of multinationals rather than through greater use of nationally manufactured components. Over the last fifty years automotive policy in Mexico has changed from a protectionist one that sought to stimulate Mexican industrial development, to an export-oriented model. This change-over has taken place in an attempt to reduce the deficit in the balance of payments and to create greater employment, according to experts at several prestigious Mexican research institutes.

The restructuring of the industry was officially launched in June, 1977 when the rules and basis of the new industrial policy were published in the *Official Gazette of the Federation*. Among the first steps were the movement of GM and Chrysler's plants to Ramos Arizpe, in the northern state of Coahuila, and the Ford plant's move to Chihuahua. According to Jorge Carrillo from the North Border School, close to 80% of production in these plants, both motors and assembled cars, is earmarked for export.

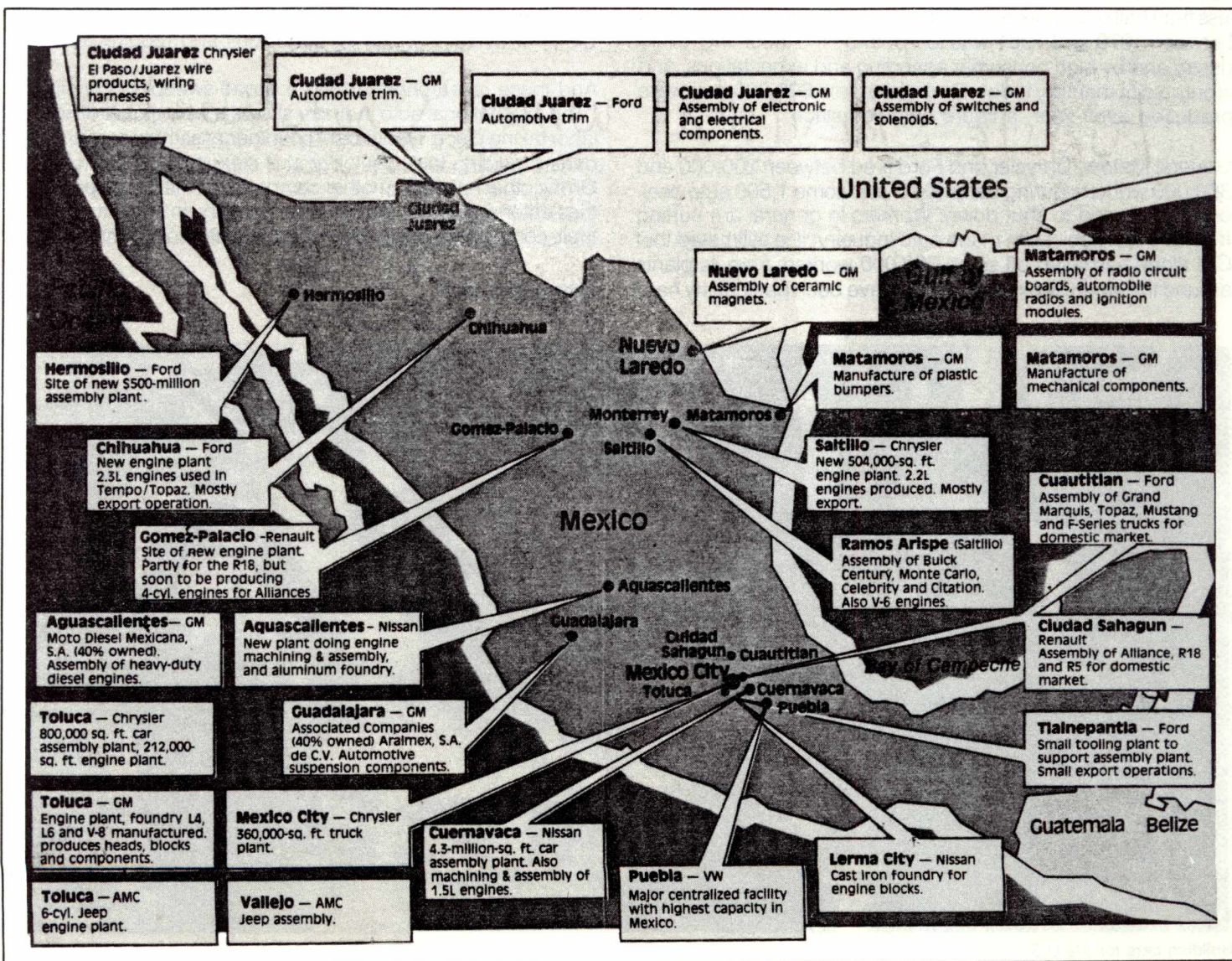
Likewise, the manufacture of autoparts is also increasingly aimed at the export market. In 1975 this spin-off industry provided more

jobs than the auto industry proper, 56,874 versus 42,860. Aggregate value in the manufacture of auto parts represented 41.5% of the total for the industry nationwide.

A government decree issued in 1972 regulated draw-back firms and was the basis for the export-oriented assembly of auto parts. Most of these plants are 100% foreign-owned and are allowed to import machinery, equipment and components on the condition that what is assembled be re-exported to the United States.

Jordi Micheli does research at CIDE, an institute for economic studies. He believes that in 1981 Mexico's auto industry began to develop a dual nature: manufacturing plants set up in the northern part of the country "have adequate technology and ideal unions," while the traditional plants located in central Mexico are either re-structuring or in the process of disappearing. He says GM, Ford and Chrysler's plants in the north have relatively few employees and are practically oblivious to regional and national economic activity. Mr. Micheli adds that these plants pay wages that are close to 2.750 times lower than those payed for comparable work in the United States.

Jorge Carrillo stated that in 1985 only 381,000 cars rolled off the assembly line, whereas the industry produced 596,518 units in 1981. The Mexican Automotive Industry Association (AMIA) and the Mexican Association of Autodealers (AMDA) report that the nation's production of automobiles fell by 30% during the first semester of 1986. Car sales for the period totalled only 132,088 units.



Taken from WARD's Auto World

## the nation

Yet production in the industry's export sector increased 15.8% in comparison with the first two quarters of 1985. While export-oriented plants face the happy prospect of expansion stretching on into the next century, the traditional auto industry dependent on the local market faces a critical situation. Annual car sales between 1985 and 1990 have been estimated at 223,000. This is 58,000 fewer vehicles than those sold during the 1978-1982 period, when the annual sales rate stood at 281,000 units.

Both AMIA and AMDA agree that thus far, exporting has been the best means of standing up to the crisis. But AMDA officials add that "export programs aren't strong enough to keep plants operating at its highest level."

Additionally, the value of the industry's imports during 1985 rose a whopping 81.2% over 1984, while at the same time production fell dramatically. This means higher-priced cars on the local market, and when we take into account that the real value of wages in Mexico has been cut in half, and that there is practically no credit for buying cars or trucks, it is obvious why new car sales have been falling.

AMDA officials estimate that for every ten fewer cars on the market, at least seven jobs are lost, and that 2.2 million pesos (some \$2,860) are lost for each unit that goes unsold. 3.9 million pesos (over \$5,000) in aggregate value are lost for each automobile that is no longer produced.»

According to figures from the Mexican government's office for programming and the budget, the SPP, the country's auto industry used to account for 2% of world production; now it is less than half of one percent. The high point the industry reached between 1979 and 1981 was fed both by the booming oil industry and by high consumer spending and expectations, and is only a dim memory today. During that time 600,000 cars were produced each year, a figure not seen since.

General Motors, Chrysler and Ford fired between 200,000 and 300,000 workers during early 1980, and some 1,500 auto dealers were forced to shut down. Workers in general are hurting from this reorganization of the auto industry; it is estimated that GM alone has laid off some 300,000 workers from its plants around the world. Mexican workers have been particularly hard

hit, says Researcher Luciano Concheiro from the Autonomous Metropolitan University. Whereas GM employed 160,000 workers in 1981, 40% of them have since been fired.

On the other hand, French-owned Renault recently closed down operations in Mexico, and has fired 21,000 workers since 1985. The company had been operating in the red since 1981, and lost over \$1 billion between 1984 and 1985. Given the situation, Renault simply packed its bags and pulled out of Mexico.

Joaquín Zapata Romo is a labor leader in one of GM's plants. "Robots," he says, "automatically mean greater unemployment." Thus, union strategy in the industry is to unite into a kind of coalition that will better allow workers to face the crisis. In order to survive the increasing use of robots on the assembly line unions must improve quality and increase productivity, and they must look ahead in order to foresee and prepare for new technological developments.

Yet today, says Zapata Romo, "the crisis obscures our future." Just the plant he works at has 2,000 vehicles backed-up in the warehouse, including C-15 pick-up trucks, C-35 three-ton trucks and P-30 "Chato" snub-nose minibuses. And this GM firm imports 40% of its industrial input from the United States.

Productivity in the industrialized countries is increasingly linked to the introduction of robots in the assembly-line. Japan now has 70,000 robots, the U.S. has some 30,000 and Europe close to 30,000. Another trend Mexican experts see in the industry is that Japanese production, along with important subsidiary manufacturers such as Mexico and Brazil, are forcing the U.S. and Europe to produce a "universal" automobile that is adaptable to a diversity of market conditions and requirements.

And these researchers added a broad-sweeping conclusion: "The international auto industry shows a new global division of labor taking place. Dependent countries assemble cars and auto parts providing low-cost labor and inexpensive raw materials. On the other hand, the mother companies in the developed countries enter areas such as the arms industry, in order to maintain their competitive edge on the world automobile market."★

Adriana de la Mora

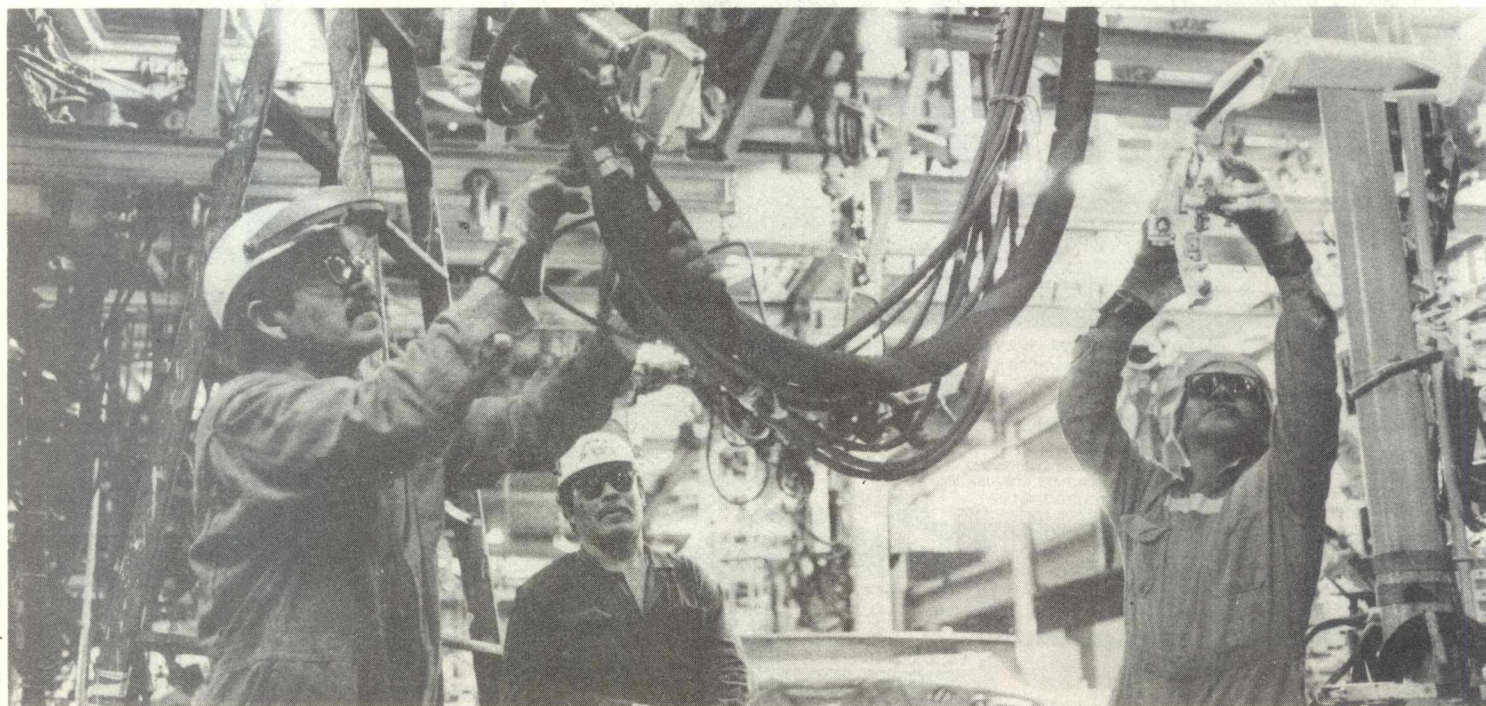


Photo by Marco A. Cruz/IMAGENLATINA

Building cars for the U.S.

# Better Relations?

*Both presidents said so after their meeting. But serious doubts linger and are bolstered by events after the fact.*

México's short-term policy was shored-up by the series of economic and trade agreements reached by presidents De la Madrid and Reagan during their meeting last August 13. The Reagan Administration agreed to support México's ongoing negotiations with the banking community and displayed a positive attitude by renewing U.S. purchase of Mexican tuna, programming new acquisitions of Mexican oil for its strategic reserves, and stepping up the pace of negotiations for a broad-based

trade agreement. Yet despite the optimistic results, relations between the two countries are still conflict-ridden.

## BY NO MEANS THE FIRST LINE

Interviews between the presidents of the United States and Mexico have been a frequent event throughout the century. They began in October 1909 when Porfirio Diaz—who once said: "Poor Mexico, so far from God and so close to the United States"—met with William Taft. There followed a 34-year gap in the meetings due to the turmoil and friction caused by revolution south of the Rio Grande. In 1943 presidents Manuel Avila Camacho

(1940-1946) and Franklin Roosevelt met in the northern Mexican city of Monterrey. Since then, the presidents of both countries have met 35 times.

Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (1964-1970) was the Mexican president who met the most times with his U.S. counterpart: eight interviews in all, 5 with President Johnson and 3 with Nixon. President López Portillo met once with Gerald Ford and 3 times each with Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan. While seventeen presidential encounters have been held in our country and 18 in the United States, over the years 9 Mexican presidents have met with 10 chief executives from the north.

This high frequency of encounters is explained by the close ties between neighbors, starting with a 3,000 kms. common border. Mexico sends 67% of its exports to the U.S., including 60% of the crude oil it sells abroad, and 70% of our imports come from the United States. It has been estimated that by 1985 close to 10 million Mexicans had migrated north in search of work, giving rise to labor problems on either

side of the border. Additionally, over half of Mexico's \$100 billion foreign debt is owed to U.S. banks, who also happen to be the main recipients of the capital flight afflicting our country. Further, 70% of all direct foreign investment in Mexico comes from the U.S., as does 60% of the technology we use. While 2 million Mexicans visit the United States each year, 6 million North Americans come south.

The importance of this latest interview between De la Madrid and Reagan could be measured according to indicators such as new treatment of immigrants, the possibility of fresh incoming credit agreements. Yet beyond whatever practical results these good intentions may yield, the really new framework is in the political good-will shown by both governments to build cooperative ties on the basis of facts and action and no longer clouded by mutual suspicion. Relations between Mexico and the U.S. have been historically asymmetrical. Common problems tend to take on intense dynamics which often complicate the foreign policy designs of one or another country, and that either generate undesirable side-effects or introduce ideological judgments that pertain more to the past than to the present.

This interview was "much more cordial" than previous ones partly because tension generated during President De la Madrid's visit to Washington in May, 1984, had been somewhat alleviated. But another factor that explains the warmer atmosphere is that the August encounter took place following important policy decisions by the Mexican government to introduce structural change in the country's economy, both in matters of trade and of finance.

De la Madrid and Reagan's encounter in 1984 was a meeting of discrepancies, mainly over México's Central America policy, and it took place in the midst of accusations launched by *Washington Post* columnist Jack Anderson to the effect that President De la



Photo by Presidencia de la República

President De la Madrid fencing at the National Press Club in Washington D.C.

## the nation

Madrid had "deposited at least \$162 million in foreign banks." Mr. Anderson said the sources for his information were in the CIA, and that the overall framework for his story was "corruption among Mexican presidents." All of this led the Mexican government to issue a public statement denying the veracity of the information, and along the way a complaint was lodged against the *Washington Post*.

### THE RESULTS OF THE INTERVIEW

Specific result of the presidential interview include an agree-

ment to lift the U.S. embargo against Mexican tuna that had been in effect for 6 years. Aspects of trade and finances, drug traffic and immigration were also on the presidential agenda.

On his return President De la Madrid stated that these conversations were very important, and that following this latest interview Mexico will go to extraordinary lengths to improve its relations with the United States. He also acknowledged the Reagan administration's "highly valuable" role in Mexico's negotiations with international finance institu-

tions, mainly the International Monetary Fund, and said that White House support helped find new, more flexible and realistic formulas for dealing with Mexico's foreign debt.

On the point of Mexican undocumented workers in the United States, De la Madrid stated that the issue arises from structural economic factors on either side of the border, and that hopefully the flow of migrant workers will be reduced as Mexico's economy improves its performance.

Drug trafficking was a high-priority issue in the presidents'

conversations. De la Madrid emphasized his country's position that international cooperation is essential to effectively combating drug traffic. "We believe it is vital to attack all of the links in this criminal chain simultaneously and with greater determination," said De la Madrid, and he praised President Reagan's campaign against drug abuse and distribution in the U.S. He added that the fact that both presidents gave priority attention to their points of agenda was an indication of the deep and firm friendship between Mexico and the United States, one which is mutually beneficial.

For his part, President Reagan expressed approval of the economic path Mexico is following, and stated his willingness to help the country resolve its financial woes. He added that the United States hopes to see growth and development in Mexico such as the country knew during the decades before the 1982 crisis, and stated his belief that it has the resources that make prosperity possible.

No doubt many factors contributed to the positive atmosphere of the fifth encounter between De la Madrid and Reagan, and it differed from previous ones both in its results and because of a important to the outcome: Mexico's becoming a member of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs, GATT, is a step whose agreements into "broad trade agreements" within the GATT's framework. But a weaker dollar and a not-so-strong Reagan who faces many unresolved foreign policy issues, also contributed to the new context.

This latest presidential meeting took place in the midst of one of the most difficult bilateral contexts in decades because of Mexico's economic crisis, but also because many of the explicit and implicit rules that have framed the bilateral relation are no longer operative. Mexico's foreign policy is a case at hand. For decades the design and execution of policy toward the U.S. was exclusively in the charge of the

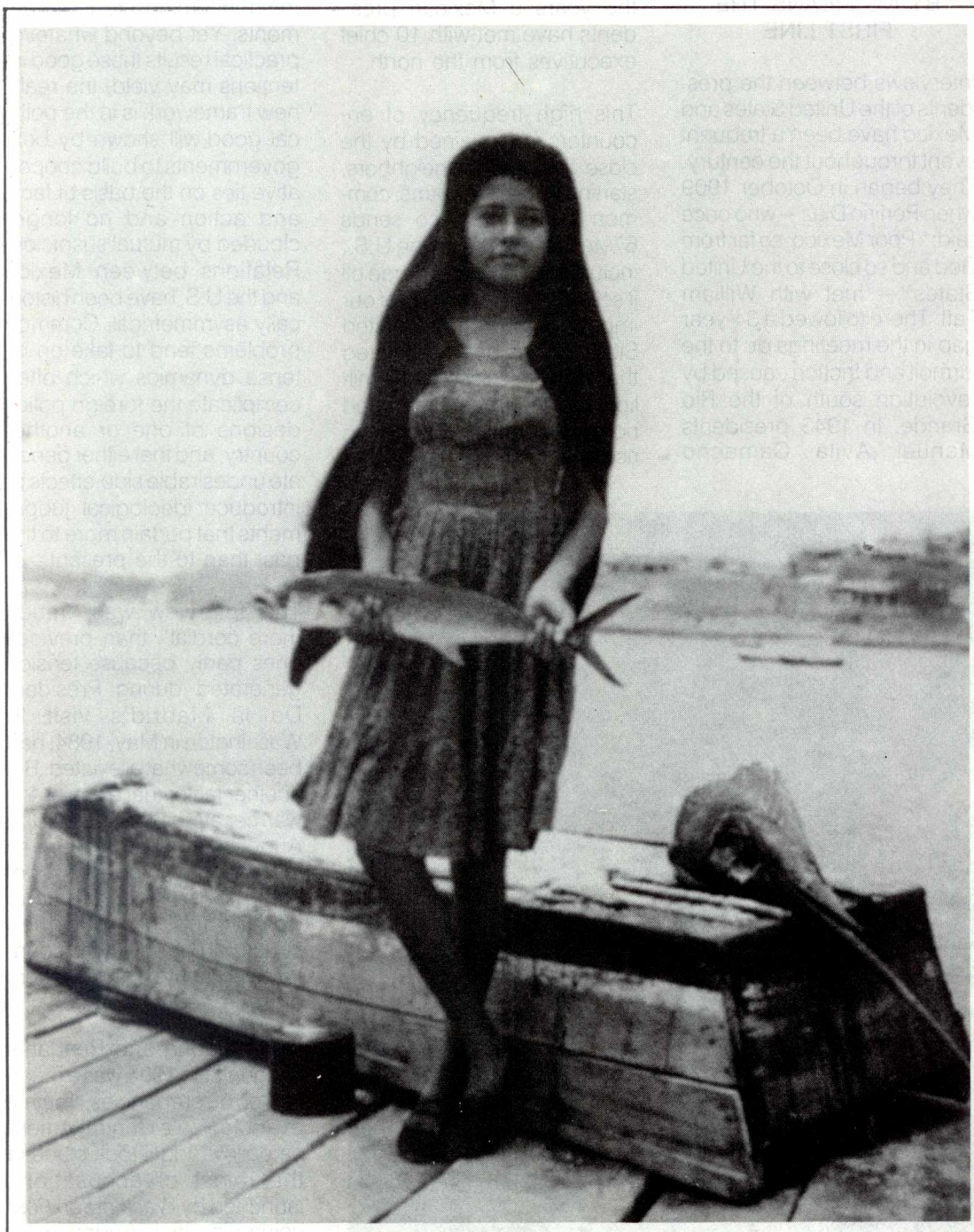


Photo by Manuel Alvarez Bravo

Following new agreements, Mexican fish will flow north again.



president and the ministry of Foreign Affairs, a situation which allowed for a great deal of coherence. But increasing economic integration between Mexico and the United States, and the country's acute financial crisis have led both the Treasury and Commerce ministries into the realm of U.S. Mexico policy and relations, in the political arena as well as in economics. Although for different reasons, a similar process is underway with the Attorney General's office and with others, and the logic of events has also led congress into assuming a greater role in foreign policy. Furthermore, the complexity of the border situation has led both governments to a sort of de facto foreign policy.

ago our system was broadly regarded as a model for other Third World countries, today it is portrayed as incapable of guaranteeing economic growth and as politically vulnerable. Whether or not these perceptions are based on fact, the truth is that Mexico's internal politics and policies have become part of the bilateral agenda.

And last but not least, the basic premise underlying U.S. foreign policy—the main point of which is the East-West conflict—crops up in the U.S.' unilateral economic and political decisions at a world level, something which also affects Mexico.

Altogether, these changes are taking place at a time of in-

### Meetings Between Presidents de la Madrid and Reagan:

October 8, 1982

Coronado, California (De la Madrid as president-elect had not yet taken office.)

August 14, 1983

La Paz, Baja California, Washington, D.C.

May 14-16, 1984

Mexicali, Baja California

January 4, 1986

Washington, D.C.

August 13, 1986

The picture of U.S. policy toward Mexico, on the other hand, is also increasingly complex. Perceptions about Mexico's political system are changing in government circles as well as among academics, businessmen and in the media. Whereas 20 years

creasing economic, social and political integration between the two countries. Bilateral relations will no doubt face enormous challenges given the disparity in conditions between Mexico and the United States.



Edna Lydia Santin

# New Government, Old Problems for Oaxaca

*While a governor with good credentials takes office, the opposition alleges fraud and takes to the streets in Juchitán.*

Oaxaca, one of the country's poorest states, has great expectations for the new Governor-elect, Senator Heladio Ramírez López. In the August elections, people chose not only a new governor, but also 18 state representatives and 570 mayors. Together they must provide leadership for a region that in many ways represents a synthesis of Mexico's deepest agricultural contradictions. They inherit the old problems related to agrarian property structures, economic backwardness, the marginalization of its Indian population and misery. The challenge they face is quite overwhelming.

Oaxaca's 2.59 million inhabitants live on a subsistence economy. And while it is the country's next to last state along the southern Pacific coast, it may well be the first state when it comes to problems and needs.

Some 70% of the state is mountainous, with few roads. Every year during the rainy season, the tiny mountain villages, home to more than 300,000 Indian peasants, are cut off from the rest of the state. But their isolation has other dimensions, as well. People have very few opportunities for development, little chance to learn Spanish (which would allow them to communicate and defend themselves better) and little access to culture, in general. Just in the Huautla de Jiménez mountain range and the Cañada region, 40% of the communities have no postal service, none has a telegraph post and 70% do not have adequate transportation or roads.

Oaxaca has the highest illiteracy rate and the highest rate of peasant out-migration in the nation. Thousands of people born in Oaxaca now live in Mexico City's slums. Others work as farmhands, paid on a piece rate during the harvest season in the country's northern-most states. And others cross the border, headed for California, the richest state in the world's richest country.

More than half of Oaxaca's agricultural potential is unexploited. A quarter of its residents are ill-paid craftsmen, and about 90% have no access to social security. Potable water is scarce even in urban communities, to say nothing of the rural areas. Wholesale commerce is controlled by just 0.5% of the state's businessmen, and problems with intermediaries force up prices for basic consumer products.

The crux of Oaxaca's problems lies in the fact that its economy is much too small to be able to take advantage of its tremendous natural and human resources. According to the State Development Plan, Oaxaca cannot generate the conditions needed to assure self-sustained growth. Currently, the federal government covers 92% of the state's expenses.



Migrant workers crossing the 3,000 km long border at some point.

## the nation

Sixteen Indian ethnic groups continue to live in the state, struggling as it were for their very survival. A peasant without land, with no place to plant, can perhaps make hats; for a full day's work, he will earn about as much as someone in the U.S. spends to make a phone call. But despite their crushing poverty, the Zapotec, Chontal, Zoque, Mixtec and other ethnic groups have a long tradition of struggle and independent organization.

Unlike most other states, Oaxaca has conserved its communal land holdings and today about one-fourth of all such property in the entire country is found there. Land disputes between peasants may take more than 10 years to resolve in the courts, a situation that gives rise to many of the state's agrarian conflicts.

Recently, the National Peasant Confederation (CNC, the nation's largest peasant organization, linked to the PRI) acknowledged that despite the fact that "communal property and *ejidos* account for 96.3% of agricultural holdings, they only contribute 17% of production." The best lands, on the other hand, are controlled by cattle ranchers who live in Mexico City or in other states. According to researchers from the Benito Juárez Autonomous University of Oaxaca, large local landowners have imposed a reign of terror in the state in order to take over the most productive lands.

Just in the last several months, more than 200 Indians (equivalent to about two small communities) have died in clashes over boundaries to communal land holdings, according to information from the National Association of Economists. *Caciquismo*, a kind of power structure headed by local strongmen or *caciques*, still wreaks havoc in the area. In San Juan Copala, *caciques* have harassed many peasant families, forcing them to leave town and taking over their lands. The situation has been repeated in Río Metate, Paso del Aguila, Río Tejón, San Miguel Copala, Yozoyci and Río Venado.

Between 1982 and mid-1986, 592 peasants were murdered in the country; some 70% of them lived in Oaxaca or neighboring Chiapas (*La Jornada*, May 19, 1986). And Heladio Ramírez, the Governor-elect has publicly acknowledged that in many parts



Photo by Rogelio Cuéllar

Juchitec women are renowned for their fighting spirit.

of the state it has been impossible to break the iron grip of the *caciques* power.

The state's economic and social instability also translates into political instability. None of the last three governors have completed their terms. Manuel Zárate Aquino resigned; Víctor Bravo Ahuja stepped down to become Minister of Public Education; and Pedro Vásquez Colmenares left office to head the National Security Office. Internal divisions have developed within the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party, in power) related to power disputes at the municipal level, and left opposition parties strengthened their political presence in 20 municipalities, especially in the Tehuantepec Isthmus area.

Traditionally in Oaxaca's Indian communities, public assemblies have chosen a representative whose name was then placed on the ballot as the PRI candidate. Nonetheless, in the past few years, and in the face of growing discontent, the official party has begun to name candidates not chosen in public assemblies in order to assure its continued domination. But the Indian rebellion was not long in the making, and it has used opposition political organizations as its major vehicle for expression. Before the elections, PRI analysts believed that organizations like COCEI (Isthmus Coalition of Workers, Peasants and Students, considered to be a left opposition party, winner of the Juchitán mayoral race in 1980) could win a significant number of votes in at least 25 municipalities.

Two months before the August 3rd elections, the country's first united platform by left political parties was formed to run joint candidates in some 50 local and state-wide elections; the new coalition ran under COCEI's name. The contrast between COCEI's electoral strategy and that of right-wing opposition groups in Chihuahua could not have been more striking. While COCEI campaigned among Indian communities in the mountains and along the isthmus and carefully watched over the entire electoral process, the PAN (National Action Party, right-wing opposition) sought out its political support from conservative sectors in the United States.

The elections proceeded as usual except in Juchitán and the isthmus region, COCEI stronghold areas; there the State Police patrolled intensively, and army units showed up in several municipalities. The PRI declared victory in the disputed mayoral races, and the opposition claimed there had been serious fraud. The region was tense, although there was no violence. The highways were blocked off, protest demonstrations were held in the State Capital, and a hunger strike was called in which strikers eventually decided to go to the National Congress in Mexico City. Nonetheless, the political maturity demonstrated by the strikers and by COCEI leaders, together with the willingness to dialogue on the part of state officials, representatives of the Interior Ministry and the Governor-elect himself, allowed for a peaceful resolution. A detailed study of the elections was promised, the hunger strike was ended and the barricades lifted from the highways. If the study shows irregularities in the proceedings, the elections will be nullified and repeated.

So this is the state that awaits the new government. It is really a cross-roads situation, with a choice to be made: either continue in misery, violence and the iron grip of old regional powers, ignoring the legitimate aspirations of increasingly impoverished Indian populations; or take steps toward economic and political democracy. Perhaps the new leaders cannot be asked to erase the problems accumulated over centuries during their six-year terms in office, but they can be asked to use all of their energies to assure that the future of Oaxaca's people be less forsaken. That is the challenge.★

Jorge Luis Sierra Guzmán

# Woman Candidate for Governor

*Beatriz Paredes is one of the most interesting figures to emerge from the ranks of the ruling party.*

On November 16 the citizens of the state of Tlaxcala will go to the polls to elect a new governor for the next six years. Beatriz Elena Paredes Rangel, a young woman with a strong academic background and a long history of political and organizational activity, will almost certainly be the winner.

Tlaxcala is the smallest of Mexico's states, but also one of its most dynamic. Located only 25 kilometers from Mexico City, this tiny spot on the country's map conserves many of our finest traditions.

The geographic conditions are particularly hostile, in part due to the rugged terrain. But the state also suffers from a very serious erosion problem exacerbated by monoculture and rudimentary techniques for working the land. Of Tlaxcala's 650,000 inhabitants, some 40% of the economically active population works in agriculture. Nonetheless, because of low productivity, agriculture accounts for only 10% of the wealth produced in the state. The problem is due in part to the continued subdivision of land parcels into smaller and smaller plots. Most people have less than 12.5 acres to farm, making it extremely difficult to apply modern agricultural technology.

This situation generates a constant deterioration in living conditions for Tlaxcala's rural inhabitants, which in turn creates strong pressure for out-

migration to more developed population centers nearby (for example, Mexico City, Puebla and the state of Mexico). In fact, there are reportedly some 150,000 Tlaxcalans living in Netzahualcōyotl, a township that forms part of the greater Mexico City metropolitan area. Most of them are underemployed.

Over the past several years greater emphasis has been placed on the state's development. And while there are now seven industrial corridors that house important manufacturing plants, this sector is still not able to provide jobs for all of those who have been displaced from rural areas. Thus, Tlaxcala is a state beset by a series of urgent social problems.

"To tell you the truth," said one Tlaxcalan to the country's President when he was campaigning in the state, "the residents of Tlaxcala are not satisfied with our living conditions. We want sewage systems, potable water, schools, buses, fertilizers; we want playing fields and parks so that we can create the goodwill that is necessary for peace and well-being."

Many improvements were made during the administration of out-going Governor Tulio Hernández, but many serious problems still remain. It is virtually assured that Beatriz Paredes will be the next in line to tackle those problems.

Ms. Paredes, a seasoned activist of the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party), is a 33 year old sociologist. She was elected to the state legislature when she was 21 and has already held a series of important political positions. These include: State President, National Revolutionary Youth Movement; General Secretary, League of Agrarian Communities and Peasant Unions; Representative to the 51st National Congress; and Under-Secretary for Agrarian Planning, Ministry of Agrarian Reform.

Unlike most other PRI gubernatorial candidates, Beatriz Paredes has the genuine support of her state's citizens. One of the most important women in the country's political life, her nomination generated great pleasure in Tlaxcala and sparked interest around the entire nation. As VOICES goes to print, no other party had yet to name a candidate to run against her.

According to Adolfo Lugo Verduzco, a major figure in national PRI politics and himself a candidate for governor in Hidalgo, Beatriz Paredes "is an honorable representative for the people of Tlaxcala. Because of her origins, her training and her deep roots in her native state, and because of the support of many men and women from this progressive state, she will certainly form a government mindful to the needs of the majorities."

The candidate has crisscrossed the state to study its problems and gone door-to-door to talk to everyone she can, to listen to their ideas and their proposals. While this kind of campaigning is common in Mexico's presidential elections, it is quite unusual in gubernatorial races. Her efforts to seek out the opinions



Beatriz Paredes, dynamic young woman candidate for governor of Tlaxcala.

Photo by Marco A. Cruz/IMAGENLATINA

## the nation

of so many residents, in so many communities is surprising and impressive.

The Tlaxcala electoral campaign has turned out just as Paredes announced it would when she was nominated: a civic celebration, a call for unity and for the participation and efforts of "all the descendants of the land of Xicoténcatl."

If she wins on November 16,

Mexican people believe that we can."

Regarding the specific situation in Tlaxcala, the candidate believes that if Tlaxcalans unite, we can find an equilibrium between the rural and urban regions "without creating poles or depending on miraculous resources such as oil."

In meetings with workers,

guez, in the Independence War and Carmen Serdán in the Mexican Revolution.

Nonetheless, even though Mexico's Political Constitution establishes full equality for men and women, it is only recently that Mexican women have really been able to occupy high-level administrative and political positions in increasing numbers.

home state greatly restrict her options for confronting the multiple problems described by the thousands of people she's consulted during the campaign. But despite the adversity of the moment, many Tlaxcalans from all walks of life believe that with Beatriz Paredes at the state's helm, they may soon enter into a new period of development. The likely governor-to-be is optimistic that she will be able to

Photo by Sergio Dorantes



Tlaxcala is one of Mexico's poorest states.

Beatriz Paredes wants to "promote a vigorous and concisive democratic movement that expresses the democratic aspirations of teachers, rural workers and business people to assure integrated development in our communities." She believes that it is necessary to consolidate a people's government based on democracy and social justice and built on a solid relationship between those who govern and those who are governed, in which analysis and responsibilities are shared.

Regarding Mexico's current problems, Paredes states, "the country is in the midst of a very serious economic crisis; but we face the crisis with some very important resources: solid institutions and a very mature population with an incredibly strong tradition of resistance, participation and preservation. There's one condition that will allow us to overcome the situation: if the

peasants, students, with women and all sectors of the population, all of the state's problems are being analyzed in attempt to get a full picture of the situation. The government's future state-wide plan will be based on this effort.

Beatriz Paredes will be only the second woman in Mexico's entire history to occupy a governor's office. Griselda Alvarez Ponce de León was the only other woman; she was governor of Colima from 1980 to 1986.

It is important to emphasize this point because there is a long tradition of women's involvement in Mexican political struggle. Their participation has not been limited to fighting only for their specific demands as women, but also for more general social demands and to defend our national interests. To give just two examples of important leaders: *doña* Josefa Ortiz de Domín-

guez will soon get her turn. She will face a tremendous challenge, as the country's difficult situation and the particular conditions in her

state will be a tremendous challenge, as the country's difficult situation and the particular conditions in her

Ariel Rivera



Photo by INAH

Mural at Cacaxtla, the most important archeological site in Tlaxcala.

# “Cultural Diversity is Under Attack”

An interview with  
Congressman Juan  
José Bremer

*Juan José Bremer is the new chairman of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Mexican House of Representatives. A former director of the Institute of Fine Arts who earned high marks for handling sensitive issues in the country's artistic community, Mr. Bremer was also vice-minister for Cultural Affairs before his election to the House. Since then, one of the main issues he has taken up is the explanation of cultural differences between Mexico and the United States, differences that often get in the way of mutual understandings. Amidst important debates concerning bilateral relations in the present legislative session, Congressman Bremer spoke with VOICES OF MEXICO's Director, Mariclaire Acosta, and its Editor, Arturo Arias. Excerpts:*

You participated in the Mexico-United States interparliamentary meeting. How would you define relations between the two countries?

Relations between our two countries have a history that we cannot disregard, and are highly dynamic and complex. After all, we share the only existing border between the developed world and underdeveloped countries. Nonetheless, and despite the difficulties this implies, new factors are constantly appearing that are necessary to our daily coexistence as well as to the exchange of goods and cultural aspects. There are 2 million crossings over our mutual border each year, and this is something we need to keep in mind. We face the challenge of analyzing this process and of getting to know it. At the turn of the century and during its early decades there were still voids in the relations between our two countries, but now these spaces no longer exist. This is something else that requires attention.

From what you've said, Mr. Congressman, what should be the basis governing relations between the two states?

Total respect for the specific nature of each

country should be the core premise underlying Mexico-U.S. relations. We must be capable of accepting the fact that we're diverse societies with different histories and cultural patterns. Recognition of the diversity of each society means respecting each one's development model and renouncing imposition, or the pretense of imposing your own model.

It has been said that socio-cultural premises differ between our two countries. For example, North American society seems to have little sense of history, unlike ours. In our society the group prevails over the individual, which in the U.S. is to the contrary. Social relations in the United States are more competitive, ours are more solidary. All of this would seem to mean that when we speak of a people's right to free self-determination, they understand one thing and we another. Do you tend to agree with this?

Yes, I do, and this touches on the special subject of misunderstandings in our relations. I'm not referring to deliberate distortions, which would be another chapter of the relationship. I'm speaking of different cultural codes, of a semantic problem between us. Neither society can be simplified, both are diverse and complex. Both are multicultural nations, though not multinational states. But they're both definitely multicultural. Thus, both nations contain different expressions and debates, different worlds, even. If both our nations refuse to be simplified or schematized, it would be foolish to try to schematize and simplify our relations.

I feel there's a challenge in all of this, a challenge to our capacity for knowledge and analysis. Only by standing up to this challenge can we more clearly define our attitudes on many aspects of our relations. Mexico's overall policy is very clear: respect for self-determination, the defense of our legitimate national interests and the assurance of our own guide to development. But there are numerous other issues that must be analyzed in their specificity: the flow of migratory workers, border-area coexistence and new

problems arising from cultural inter-relation, just to mention a few that require further study.

**There's something we find particularly interesting. We've been at several bi-national meetings recently where we've found the basic premise to be that we have to understand each other better in order to improve our relations. Yet it always happens that we end up discussing Mexico's problems and never talk about the problems of the United States. It would seem that North Americans have to understand Mexicans, but that we can't touch on the problems of the U.S. Do you think this is the case?**

Economic asymmetry must be faced clearly. It's an asymmetry of power present in everything, including cultural aspects. International news agencies propagate more the so-called First World's view of what happens on our planet than the view of other developing worlds concerning contemporary life. No doubt powerful economic instruments have a role in the large means of communication, and you can easily recognize the importance of imposing a certain world view on the planet as a whole. This is a tremendously big challenge and a starting point we have to work with.

Another important topic in our relations has to do with how we understand nationalism. Highly developed nations tend to disqualify the nationalism of developing countries as an infantile, primary, schematic and demagogic expression which is historically outdated. I believe this is one of the great issues of our time, but there's a lot of confusion surrounding it. In the first place, there's absolutely no contradiction between nationalism and internationalism if neither concept is understood objectively and neither has been manipulated to serve power interests. On the other hand, we should make an historical distinction between two different types of nationalism. The first type has been expressed in powerful societies and is marked

by ideas of ethnic or cultural supremacy. It's aggressive, belligerent and exclusive, and has always been the source of international conflict through acts of conquest or violations of international law. It has also been the seed of the century's world wars and opposes all international community spirit.

But another type of nationalism has been emerging during the XX Century, one which is a path for the confirmation of societies whose history is different from that of the great western power centers. These societies have characteristics of their own that define their specific identities, and they justly defend the cultural crossbreeding that has produced them. This is a type of nationalism that defends national sovereignty and doesn't seek to impose its own cultural patterns and forms of political organization on others in the belief that they're superior. Quite the contrary. This type of nationalism is the basis for a real understanding of what the international community is or should be: a real community devoid of distortions and demagogic elements, one whose roots are healthy.

I believe that one of the main characteristics of our planet is its diversity. There is biological and cultural diversity, and its defense in the world is an essential part of contemporary humanism. There's no denying that today cultural diversity is being attacked by the uniforming phenomenae generated by market-oriented industrialized societies who need to create standardized behaviour patterns that can be applied to different population groups. This trend is eroding the diversity of groups, of nations, of regional cultures and even of individuals.

Some think that trying to defend cultural identity is romantic, nostalgic or demagogic. But I think there's an error of interpretation in this line of thought. In the first place, it's not a defense. It's an affirmation of an identity that is part of a nation. In the second place, a nation's identity, just like that of an individual, is in a constant

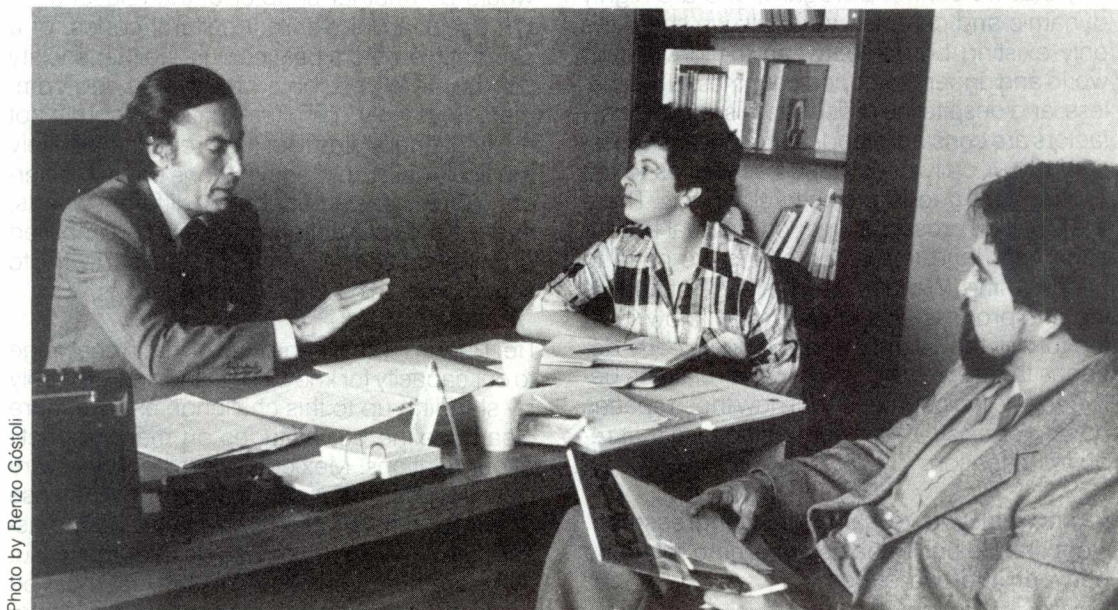


Photo by Renzo Góstioli

Congressman Bremer talking with VOICES' Mariclaire Acosta and Arturo Arias.

process of evolution. Identity is not something that remains unchanged throughout history, since history itself is never still. Identity is always a fluent and dynamic process that surges and develops on the basis of historic memory. A nation without a memory loses its spinal cord. In the same way, identity implies a consciousness of the present, a factor that obviously links up with historic memory. Finally, the constant stimulus of creativity substantiates identity as a process.

**And, naturally, Mexico-U.S. relations are situated within this framework.**

Yes, they are, they're in this framework despite the fact that economic relations are the most publicized topic these days. Yet even if the economy is the great subject of the decade, this still doesn't mean it's not part of this broader field we've been talking about. Nations grow and develop as a result of their interrelation with each other. It has been said that the West's great cultural developments were produced by a mingling with other cultures. Christianity is a good example of this, for as we well know, it is not originally a product of the west. Neither is the gothic, which is a consequence of the first renaissance, the one before the Tuscan renaissance. It was brought to Europe by the Crusades, the great connector of the Atlantic world with the essence of the Eastern Mediterranean.

Thus, there's no contradiction between a universalist world view and the healthy assertion of a society's own values. This is why I am so insistent on the subject of recognizing diversity. In this attitude there is none of the immature reaction that comes from an inferiority complex. Rather, it's the conviction that the human spirit can be expressed and fulfilled from different perspectives which are an enormously enriching aspect of universal culture.

**Are these values you're talking about found in the Mexican people?**

Well, large sectors of our population also have a colonized mentality. What do I mean by this? It's the uncritical devotion to anything coming from the outside as well as the uncritical underrating of what comes from our own country. This is what characterizes the colonized mentality, and it's also why we must demand an objective analysis of our own values as well as of those of other countries. But in order to do this we must first shake off colonization.

In this context we can see how relations between Mexico and the United States are reflected in various ways throughout the different layers of our population. Thus, I would like to mention some ingredients that should be present in our relations with the U.S. in the future. First, a full-fledged rescue of the concept of patriotism as a sense of clear and consistent defense of our national interests and values. Only from these can we establish power relations with the wealthiest nation on Earth. Second, we must make a great effort to be objective, because

we tend to sway between handing ourselves over completely and outright immature rejection. We must establish a firm, intelligent adult relationship beyond these harmful extremes, one capable of detecting which are the national-interest issues appearing in the new interrelationships.

**Don't you think a profound examination of our identity and a broad debate among Mexicans are necessary so that all this objectivity and patriotism result from a process that for the most part we carry out ourselves?**

It is fundamental to evaluate our own interest in greater self-knowledge and to further study Mexico-United States relations. These are both challenges for our country's institutions of higher education. An exchange of points of view among specialists, intellectuals and those interested in going into our mutual relations in greater depth must be stimulated. Likewise, foreign affairs research institutes should feed into our foreign policy decision-making centers, because it often happens that these efforts are lost because they're not linked to political decision-making. I believe this is essential.

**Is it possible to apply economic formulas designed for other societies to our country?**

We haven't touched on cultural subjects as a means of avoiding economics. I've been speaking of our social and cultural diversity in order to highlight how these factors have a decisive impact on our development model. Consequently, this is precisely why it's not possible for others to give us economic recipes that may be effective in the U.S. but cannot function in our society for obvious reasons. A quick mention of these reasons would include international aspects, for example, meaning Mexico's position in the world. Another would be our level of development, which is different from that of the United States. Finally, and this is what I have most gone into, our country's specific cultural and social roots.★



Drawing by Alberto Beltrán

# Facing the Present Crisis

Mexico's economic crisis cannot be solved—or even understood—outside of the global context which led to it.

*While Mexico renegotiates its foreign debt oscillating between euphoria and uncertainty, the national debate surrounding these crucial decisions intensifies. Given VOICES OF MEXICO's desire to portray the heterogeneous and pluralist voices that conform Mexico, we present an analysis by Economist Ifigenia Martínez, a member of the Foreign Policy Advisory Commission of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A former director of the School of Economics of Mexico's National University (UNAM), Ms. Martínez has been outspoken in her fears that the country is in the process of losing its sovereignty as a result of the de-nationalization and de-capitalization of its economy. Her views:*

The relationship between Mexico and the United States regarding issues of trade, finance and labor is so complex now that problems can no longer be taken up on a case by case basis, isolated from a more unified view that takes into account medium and long term implications, relating those problems to the past and carrying them into the future.

The impoverishment of the Third World is already having a depressive effect on world-wide demand, and there are ominous tidings in the First World due to a decrease in industrial production in the United States, West Germany and even Japan. These are symptoms of the need for change in international economic policies, of the need to revitalize the measures of international economic cooperation proposed by political forces that represent anti-conservative positions. This was the broad context for the recent meeting of the Presidents of our two nations.

It is perhaps important to remember that part of President Reagan's popularity is due to improved economic conditions in the U.S., to the strong rise in consumption and to the relative

decrease in unemployment. It would seem to be an economic "miracle:" financing a rapid increase in the arms race without inflation and without raising taxes, while creating enormous budget and trade deficits. What's more, the "miracle" violates all of the orthodox rules set by the IMF for poor countries. To a large extent, the "miracle" could happen because of the prevailing international economic system, which transfers imbalances at the center of the system to the periphery and accepts the dollar as the dominant currency for international reserves. The Reagan era of prosperity for the United States has been accompanied by a development crisis in other parts of the world, prolonging hunger and misery in many decolonized countries of Africa and further impoverishing debtor nations, especially in Latin America and in particular, Mexico.

It is also important to remember that there is strong opposition to Reaganomics in more liberal sectors in the United States because the overvalued dollar has hurt the competitiveness of certain sectors, particularly agriculture and manufacturing, and most recently the oil-producing states. And this does not take into account the social costs of the "miracle," of consumerism increasingly expressed in drug addiction and other manifestations of the broken moral fiber of an overly-commercialized society.

The problems between Mexico and the United States unfold in this context. In financial matters, without a doubt the main problem is the foreign debt. While it is true that only about one-third of Mexico's 96 billion dollar debt (in 1986) is with private U.S. banks, most creditors generally follow the policies set by the U.S. government. Thus, bilateral discussion of these issues is crucial. By signing a new agreement with the IMF, Mexico avoided the possibility of having to declare an "involuntary moratorium." And because the agreement does not represent a deep or equitable solution, Mexico's decision also created an opportunity to raise fundamental aspects of the problem with clarity and realism. For the moment, transitory measures were approved that preserve the rules of a game in which the odds are stacked against us. For Mexicans it is clear that a real solution lies in the search for mutually acceptable measures that reduce the debt burden, both the principal and the interest, to bring it into line with our real



capacity to pay and with our right to development. Given that Mexico's prudence has helped save the blossoming international "banking industry" from chaos, the country is on firm ground when it proposes solutions based on our national interests.

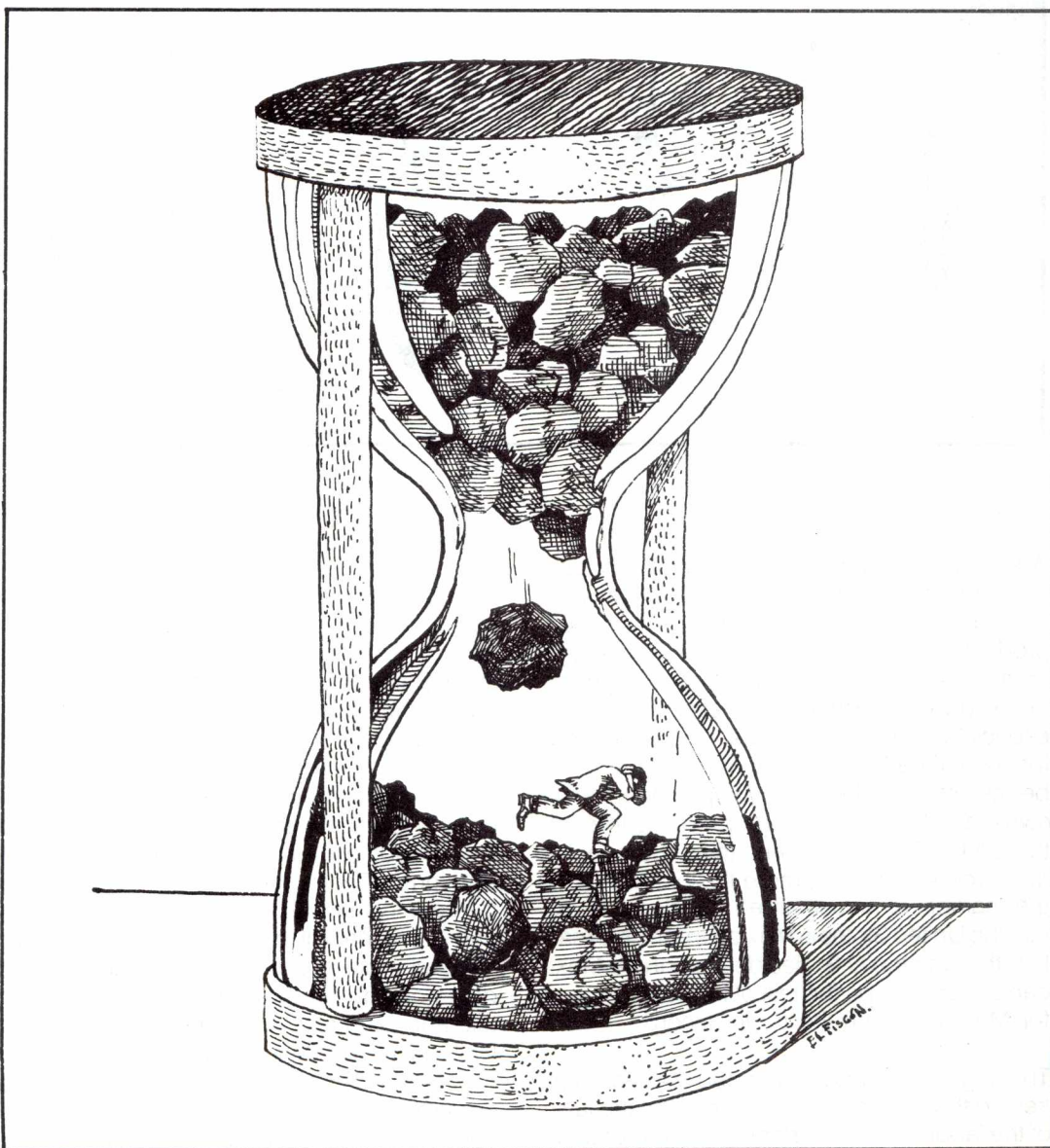
World history has shown that when a foreign debt burden grows to the point that it threatens to paralyze economic activity in the debtor country, it is mutually beneficial for the creditor to reduce the burden. That is what was done after the First World War with Germany's reparations debt and with France's debt for military equipment. And it was also done with the Soviet Union and Western allies under the World War II Lend-Lease Program.

At least since mid-1981, Mexico's debt crisis has provoked sharp drops in imports of manufactured goods and food products from the United States, severely affecting manufacturers and farmers alike in the U.S. Thus, despite additional credits that provide temporary relief for Mexico, the United States government should consider other mechanisms that could bring more lasting solutions to these problems.

Examples of some feasible measures include: a) provide tax credits to banks for their losses on loans that have been less productive than expected because of forces not controlled by the producing unit; b) cancel governmental debts; c) approve reductions in principal, interests and commissions (spreads) on loans by private U.S. banks when those loans are redocumented to longer terms. The huge profits earned by U.S. banks since 1981 makes it possible to adopt such measures. Legally, the institutions that regulate U.S. banks, the Federal Reserve and the Federal Deposits Insurance Corporation, could make these kinds of concessions (based on their March 1986, ruling no. 15) without seriously affecting capital or profits in the banking system. Without a doubt, these measures would encourage economic recovery in both Mexico and the United States.

In trade matters, there are two issues of special interest to Mexico in its bilateral relations with the U.S.: the oil market and the GATT.\* Regarding the first, as a result of the rapid expansion of Mexico's oil production the

\*General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.



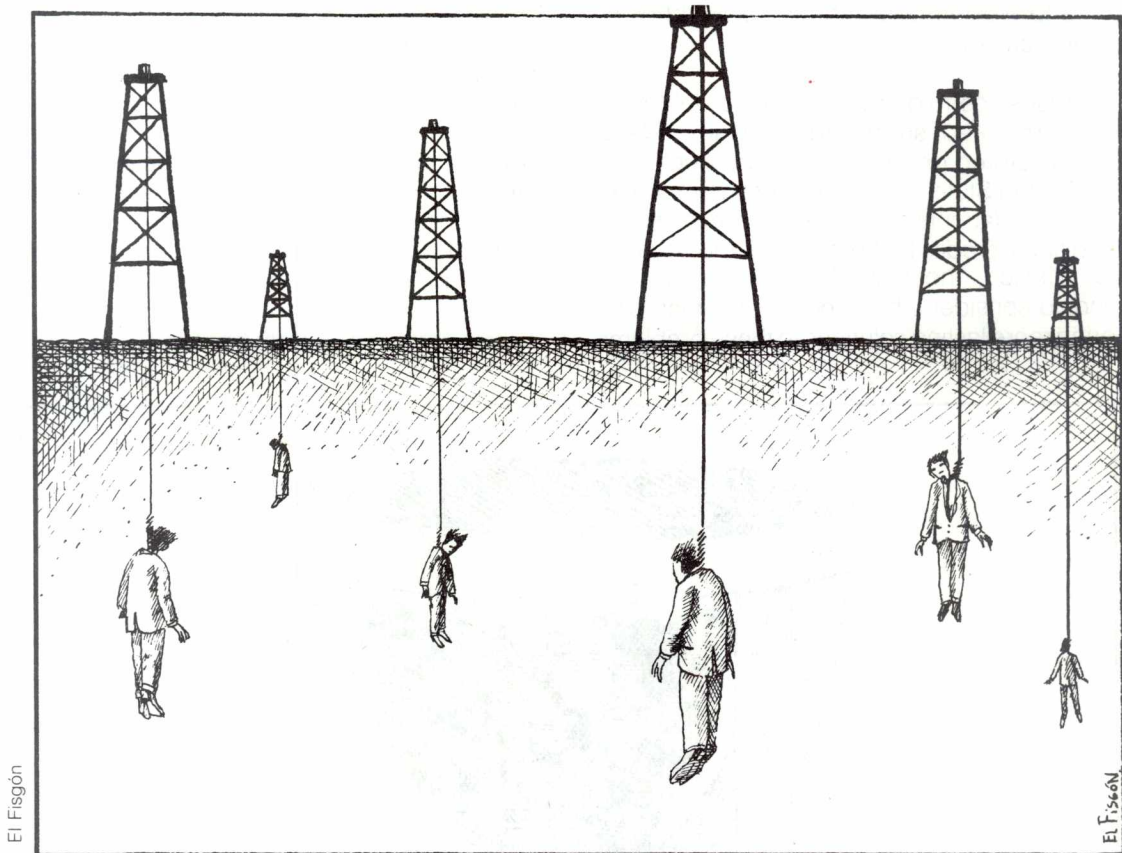
Times of Crisis

## mexican profiles

U.S. was able to replace the volatile Middle East as its major foreign source of oil and rely on Mexico, its secure next door neighbor. And it was able to fill its strategic reserves at a very inexpensive, and perhaps even subsidized, price. Mexico's present economic problems are in part the result of the massive financing provided for the rapid expansion of its oil industry, which sent way beyond potential profitability, given the country's overall economy. While there is no way to compensate Mexico for the enormous benefits received by the United States throughout this process, Mexico's contribution should be given some weight in seeking solu-

it has increased with the recent economic crisis and obviously has an impact on both countries' economies. Mexico hopes to reestablish its rate of development in order to provide more jobs in the country. But this can only happen by strengthening the mixed economy and setting adequate protective controls, both measures which go counter to the Reagan administration's economic dogmas.

Aside from economic issues, Mexico has insisted that the human and labor rights of Mexican workers in the U.S. be respected. It has also condemned certain measures that are dis-



tions for its foreign debt.

With regards to the second issue, it is hoped that Mexico's signing of the GATT will provide immediate protection for a variety of its export products that have a comparative advantage on the market, but that have frequently been blocked by protectionist interests in the U.S., especially in the border area. It is natural that for some time Mexico's capacity to import will be restricted by the crisis, despite opening its own market more to foreign products through the GATT. For the moment, then, the benefits may well lie in having more flexible access to the markets of industrialized countries. Given that the United States is Mexico's principal market, the way the U.S. decides to handle Mexican exports will be the test of how useful it was for Mexico to sign the trade accord.

The migration of undocumented Mexican workers to the U.S. is the simple result of the laws of the labor market; workers go where salaries are highest. While the situation began years ago,

criminary and racist, that violate basic democratic principles.

To sum up: in the annual meeting of Presidents, Mexico did not win any easy concessions. Rather, it seems that in the recent debt renegotiation, Baker Plan conditions were imposed as part of the accord. This implies a chance for modest growth in exchange for the continued privatization, and hence transnationalization, of Mexico's economy. The decision has generated strong resentment in a variety of social sectors, including the intellectual community. Their positions reflect a rather broad consensus in the country that Mexico should reaffirm its right and its political will to move forward with its own national project. Our increasingly interdependent world demands a commitment to detente, tolerance and respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter and other documents developed to facilitate peaceful international coexistence; a commitment and principles frequently ignored or evaded by the Reagan administration. ★

# Crying Need for Regional Movements

*A two-party system is not what Mexico needs in order to strengthen its democratic process*

*Mexico's local elections have generated controversial reactions in the U.S. press. Whereas many Mexicans also regard recent elections as anomalous, sometimes their line of reasoning falls into simplistic analyses which prescribe solutions that are foreign to our system and don't take our idiosyncrasy into account. Given the different interpretations of this issue, VOICES OF MEXICO asked several experts on Mexico's political system to express their views. Manuel Villa is a researcher from the Center for Sociological Studies of the Colegio de Mexico, and is regarded as a leading expert in the field. His views:*

As was expected, this has been a crucial political year to either further stimulate or start to correct the problems that are churning up a crisis in Mexico's political system. This is true both because of the importance of the elections at stake and because of political polarization in some of the states where gubernatorial races were held. The most critical cases are those where the National Action Party, PAN, accumulated enough strength and broad-based voter support to actually contend for the governor's seat and for some mayor's offices: Sonora, Nuevo León, San Luis, Durango and above all, Chihuahua. Though less of a problem but nonetheless important, there are also cases where the left has built a solid political base, such as in Juchitán, Oaxaca.

It would be too long to try to analyze each particular election, even though it would be helpful to do so. Instead, this article will take an overall view of the process, paying close attention to the two most significant cases in recent elections: Chihuahua and Juchitán.

Mexico's political system possesses some particular characteristics, such as its resistance to recognizing electoral victories either on the left

or on the right; its "dangerous obsession with unanimity", as it has been referred to by a group of intellectuals; its proclivity towards the use of extralegal mechanisms even when resorting to them has sometimes meant the use of force. These traits coexist with the opposition's unbending determination to achieve electoral gains; with the broad-based sympathy stirred up by their legitimate efforts, and with a generalized rejection of the system's "full-house" policy. All of this bears analyzing.

In the first place, these factors point to a crisis in the system's ability to attain electoral credibility and to stimulate greater voter participation. Secondly, these traits may indicate a possible trend toward a bipartisan system.

The first conclusion is a foregone fact, and there is no doubt that nothing has been done up until now to seek the means of exchanging imposition for participation in order to regain credibility for the system. Yet how to achieve greater voter participation is not at all clear, nor is it clear whether bipartisanship is an adequate and sufficient means of doing so.

A quick analysis of available facts shows the scant feasibility of a two-party system. At the same time, an overview of the factors this statement is based on reveals some possible reasons for the current electoral dissidence and is helpful in coming up with some valid and realistic responses to the problem.

It must first be understood that even though electoral response to the PAN in many states has been broad and solid, this party is nonetheless a scantily integrated political force. This is true at both the national and local levels. The PAN's electoral force depends on finding local candidates who have voter-sympathy and strength of their own and are willing to be championed by the PAN. These are not party militants, nor

## mexican profiles

do they possess party politics and ideology. And as a last factor, just to mention the main ones, the PAN doesn't represent a specific project. Rather, it tends to provide cohesion for a diversity of demands and insatisfactions, making its votes part of a protest movement but hardly an alternative for government.

Although the PAN received a considerable number of votes in Chihuahua, 35.17% versus 61% for the official Institutional Revolutionary Party, PRI, the truth is neither party defeated abstentionism. Voter absenteeism shrank from a previous 70% of the registered total to 45% this year, but this only moves Chihuahua from a position of extremely high abstentionism into the national mainstream.

If the previous facts and figures point to the PAN's limitation for becoming a national alternative, these others, pertaining to municipal-level elections, are even more enlightening: "up until 1985, only 43 out of a total 2,366 city councils were held by the opposition. The remaining 2,323 were controlled by the PRI. ...the votes the opposition obtained in order to win these 43 city councils represent less than 3% of total voters registered nationwide." (Luis Gutierrez, "Contracolumna" (Countercolumn), "Uno + Uno", July 27, 1986.) We might add that in the nationwide federal elections in 1982 the PAN got only 16.41% of the votes.

The bipartisan option's weakness is obvious despite a certain amount of electoral mobilization on the part of the PAN. In any case, the disturbing fact is that the government is fearful of recognizing other party's gains despite what the figures show.

And just for the sake of exhausting the analysis of the bipartisan option, what about the situation on the left? The outlook is even more dismal. First of all, the left's electoral results in Chihuahua show that the votes of all left parties fell from 7.48% of the total in 1985 to barely 5% in 1986. But the results in Juchitán constitute an even graver expression of the left's situation. Although the left maintained its electoral force, it was incapable of achieving an equivalent advancement in terms of power, and failed to win the city council.

Although there are well-founded suspicions that many votes were "magically" transferred from the PSUM-COCEI left-coalition to the PRI, the revealing fact is above all that the left has been fenced into precisely defined boundaries and has not even been able to consolidate a regional presence. Thus, there is no indication that a nationwide party alternative may emerge from the left.

If neither the PAN nor the left show sufficient electoral strength to shape a national political

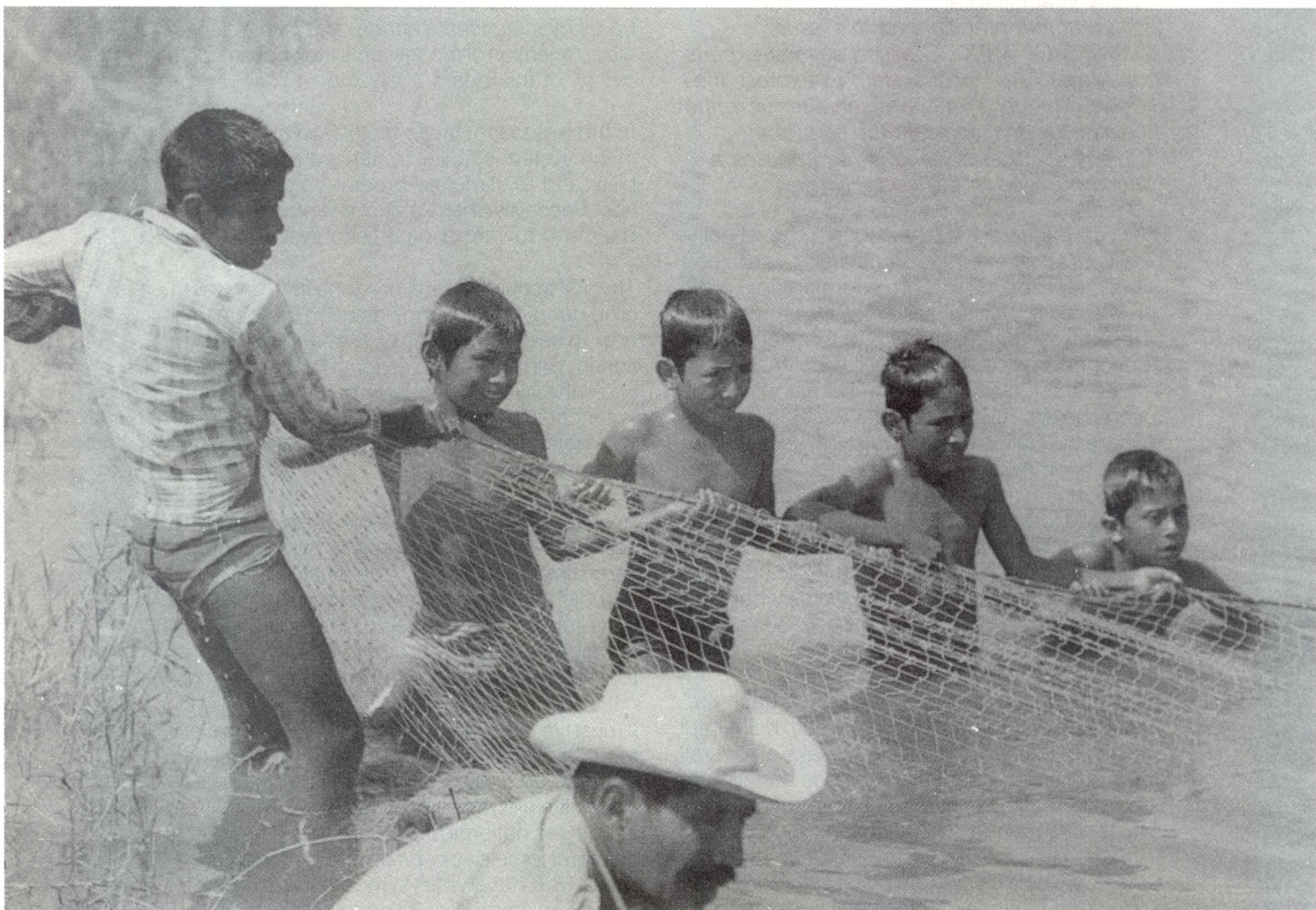


Photo by Garnett and Schalkwijk

Fishing in Tabasco, future generations at work.

alternative to the PRI, and if in most cases these are both local-level forces, what is so critical in the situation and what are the real threats to the political system? Absenteeism is at the forefront, with worrisome figures showing between 50 and 60% of non-participation in all recent elections. A second factor is that the PRI no longer shows definite, legitimate electoral force and seems to be losing voter-appeal. A third aspect of the situation is that all parties, including the PRI, seem unable to capitalize popular discontent and channel it into votes.

In sum, there seems to be a growing chasm

to its own constitution and need for long-term stability. Thus, the regime took on a centralizing federal character, whereas society, on the other hand, is diverse and changeable and tends to be shaped into local and regional units. Thus, to a great extent the state imposed modes and restrictions on society at the state and municipal levels.

The predominantly rural character of much of society at a local level made this imposed centralization tolerable up until the early 1970s. But ongoing urbanization and development seem to be incompatible with centralist uniformity. This is the process the centralized regime seems incapable of understanding and much less of bringing it into tune with its own dominating and self-nurturing logic.

Thus, shaping a national bipartisan alternative doesn't seem to be the solution, since the dominant trend would make both parties lean toward centralization, even if the end result differed somewhat from the current system. The alternative seems to lie elsewhere, specifically in the development of local-level forces whose politics and ideology stem from their own environment, whose size and strength may vary according to the state or region they operate in, and who are flexible enough to work along with the system's logic without having to submit to all-embracing centralization.



Photo from Contenido

Sinaloa is one of the states undergoing political strain and change.

between social demands and available political alternatives. The PRI and the system as a whole point to this critical situation, posing yet another question: what are the reasons for the increasing distance between social demands and political responses to them? The answer seems to lie in the factors that stimulate the outbreaks of electoral dissatisfaction.

A close look at the situation shows that the outbreaks, although isolated from one another in time and place, all point to inconformity at a local level, at a search for a break-down of political inertia at the state and municipal level. At the same time, this factor arises from a situation that was set up long ago and has become problematic for the system as a whole, namely, the way in which relations between the state and society were instituted following the stabilization of the post-revolutionary regime and the formation of the state-party in 1929, and then in 1938 with the establishment of mass-based support for that party.

The dominant, basic trend during both these periods was the extension of central control so that the state could organize society according



Photo by Garnett and Schalkwijk

The Mexican regions are politically diverse because they are culturally and ethnically diverse.

Democracy is a political process that must be built through social processes. It cannot be built from the top of the institutional-political level down, but rather must be done the other way around. The current process of building democracy into society indicates that the forces behind it are struggling only to achieve government of the people and for the people at the legitimate and unquestionable level of local and regional politics.

# Unfettered Democracy

Democracy is not simply the right to vote, it is also the right to choose between different political alternatives

*It is often stated that a working democracy implies the right to vote and the guarantee that the vote will be respected. Yet such formulas often forget that these are only some of the components of a democratic process. The essence of democracy is the ability, or the desire, to enfranchise the majority of the people so that they can freely participate in designing a political project that truly benefits them, without outside interference. In a contrasting analysis to that of Manuel Villa, Silvia Gómez Tagle, also a researcher from the Center for Sociological Studies of the Colegio de Mexico, explores these lines of thought. Her views:*

In this year's local elections, the citizens of the state of Chihuahua elected a governor, 14 state legislators and 67 mayors and city governments. The contradictions of those elections must be analyzed from a variety of perspectives.

In the first place, it is important to remember that the recent political process unfolded within the framework of a very old problem, the contradiction between local interests and the federal government, and even between local political party chapters and their respective national offices.\* In addition, it is important to analyze the process in relation to contradictions between groups belonging to the lay-masonic tradition, deeply rooted in the government and comprising its dominant sectors, and Catholic sectors, long excluded from political power.

The elections also reflected a contradiction between grass-roots concerns, which the left has yet to be able to represent successfully, and a "democratic" project (without adding any adjectives to explain what kind of democracy), proposed by the rightist PAN. And they reflected

the problems of diverse leftist party interests, expressed in several political currents. Trapped within the principal PRI-PAN rivalry, the left has not been able to avoid engaging in alliances -voluntarily or involuntarily- with one or the other party. And finally, the elections reflected the strains of a very particular contradiction, between a defense of the vote and a defense of national sovereignty, created to a certain extent by the sectors of the PAN that have sought support north of the Rio Grande.

For a while now, two tendencies have been developing on the Chihuahua political front. The first is the PAN's growing strength reflected in a revitalized electoral strategy, the naming of younger party activists to leadership positions, a flexible policy regarding alliances with other groups (even with the left!), etc. The other tendency is the PRI's decreasing strength due to internal conflicts and the diminishing importance of certain economic sectors that once gave the party its electoral strength. The latter have lost importance with the development of new productive sectors, such as the *maquiladora*, with the growth of new major cities, such as Juárez, and with the strengthening of the middle classes, accustomed by the economic boom years to certain luxuries and now deeply affected by the economic crisis, etc. It would also be important to examine the factors causing other opposition parties' decreased electoral showing. For example, the Mexican Communist Party (PCM) participated in federal elections for the first time in 1979, winning 18,265 votes. In 1985, however, the PSUM, direct descendant of the PCM and including

\*The main parties involved were: the PRI, Institutionalized Revolutionary Party, in power; the PAN, National Action Party, right opposition; and the PSUM, Mexican Unified Socialist Party, left opposition.

other left forces as well, only won 6,409 votes in the entire state.

All of these factors came together to produce this year's controversial Chihuahua elections, in which the PAN actually had a chance to win the gubernatorial contest. But in 1986, after several years of partial defeats (taken as excessive in our political system), the PRI's desire to win, together with the decision by electoral officials to support the party, overrode all else. Unlike 1983 when the PRI was late in organizing its campaign, this year the party was the first to choose its gubernatorial candidate and

was a great disappointment for many. In addition, the tendencies in state voting patterns established in elections over the past several years were changed. The PRI won 97% of the mayoral races with 58% of the vote (the PAN won only one city hall and the Socialist Workers Party a second), all of the state legislature slots with 57% of the vote and the governor's office with 59% of the vote.

Nonetheless, a more careful analysis of election results shows some weak points in the PRI's victory. In the first place, it is rather odd that with 35% of the total vote (similar to the percen-

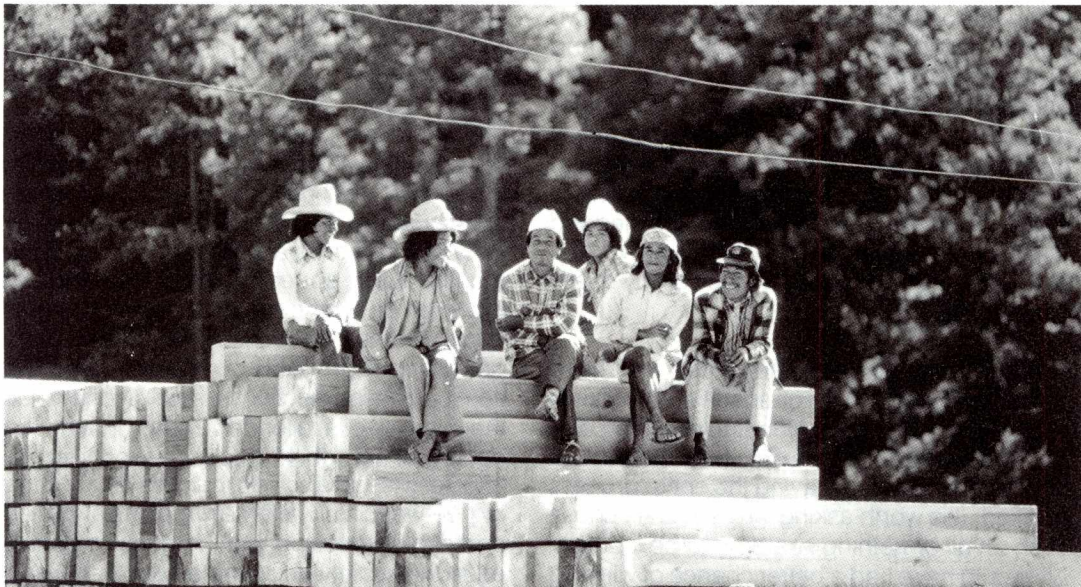


Photo by Sergio Dorantes

The lumber industry is important in Chihuahua.

spared no resources in its all out campaign.

In addition, two novel measures were implemented in an effort to revitalize the party. First, with the exception of Ciudad Juárez, mayoral candidates were elected by PRI base-level members. This was an important move as there has been frequent debate within the PRI about how candidates are chosen. It was the first time this process has been used since 1965, when Carlos Madrazo, noted politician and then president of the PRI, tried something similar. Second, a change in electoral tactics was implemented. 36,000 people, mostly employees in the state bureaucracy, were recruited to get out the vote. Each one of them was required to get at least 10 people to promise to vote for the PRI.

Other measures were taken in an attempt to make use of the state apparatus to control the electoral process. For example, local electoral legislation was modified to reduce the representation of the opposition on specific boards involved in the process, the president of the State Electoral Commission was granted prerogatives allowing him to name "aides," thus making it easier to manipulate things, etc.

Having thus carefully prepared the scene, the PRI won an overwhelming victory. The outcome

tage it won in the 1985 federal elections), the PAN was named the victor in only one mayoral race. In addition, in Chihuahua, Parral, Cuauhtémoc and Santa Bárbara townships, the PAN got almost as many votes as the PRI (between 2% and 17% difference); in Juárez the difference was a bit larger, but it was, nonetheless, a very hotly contested race. In many other townships, however, the PAN won many fewer votes than the PRI, thus producing the following statewide figures for mayoral races: PAN, 233,338 votes and PRI, 391,395 votes.

When the results were made public, there were many protest activities, with broad participation—people from the business sector, community groups, peasant organizations and the Catholic Church, among others. On July 10, the PAN, together with some of these other forces, denounced that there had been widespread fraud and called for a nullification. The PAN took its challenge to the Electoral College.

Comprised of the outgoing legislature, with 4 PAN representatives and no other opposition members, the Electoral College finally met on August 1st to review and pass judgement on the local Chihuahua elections. Three of the PAN deputies resigned (one dissident continued to participate) in protest when the College refused

## mexican profiles

to accept some 1300 testimonies presented by the PAN to substantiate its nullification petition. Shortly thereafter, the College quickly announced its findings. It nullified the counts from 36 of 1800 voting booths, leaving final election results completely unchanged.

At the same time, the PSUM, the mayor of Cuauhtémoc (an ex-member of the Socialist Workers Party, PST) and several other grass-roots organizations, some with ties to the Catholic Church, decided to convene the "Democratic Electoral Movement." Since none of them were represented in the Electoral College, they decided to create mechanisms parallel to the official ones to evaluate electoral results. The outcome was a Peoples Tribunal made up of well-known public figures with impeccable moral and professional credentials. Unfortunately, the Tribunal's findings were also disheartening. The available information was not sufficient to allow them to undertake a general evaluation of state-wide elections. Thus, they ratified some written evidence of irregularities and acknowledged that it was impossible for them to arrive at a definitive decision regarding the validity of official results.

The PAN was the only party that could have challenged the results of specific mayoral or state legislature races. Nonetheless, the party was not interested in partial victories and put all of its energies into having the entire process nullified. It is worth asking why the PAN chose such an all-or-nothing strategy, since it probably would have had a better chance of winning on a case by case basis. Possibly PAN leadership felt that it would be more damaging to the PRI to isolate it completely than to insist on a few lesser victories. Nonetheless, for an electoral party like the PAN, it's not clear that the path it chose actually opened any positive prospects since its position implies giving up its only victory in the recent elections: the municipal government of Nuevo Casas Grandes.

By the end of August protest activities against the electoral fraud were fewer and fewer. It seemed that the struggle for democracy in Chihuahua was quickly losing steam. Only two proposals still remain for the future, and it's hard to predict what their impact might be. One was the decision by the PAN to block the inaugurations of Governor-elect Jorge Baeza and municipal officials elected on the PRI slate, scheduled for October. The other proposal has to do with the transformation of the "Democratic Electoral Movement" into a national coalition that works to protect the vote independent of party concerns. Groups as diverse as leftist parties and the anti-Communist organization, Integral Human Development, will participate together in the new coalition. The idea is to try and broaden the opportunities for democratic activity in Mexico.

Finally, although we've dealt with "democracy" without using qualifying modifiers throughout this article, in the case of Chihuahua, it is

important to explore the implications of the different adjectives that can be used to make the term more specific. Without them it will be very difficult to reach an understanding of the deeper problems associated with the electoral process: the internal weaknesses of the official party; the development of opposition forces that are not particularly pluralistic and the virtual absence of the left; the process of urbanization and the strengthening of a middle class greatly influenced by U.S. life styles to the point that they consider it valid to seek political support from our neighbor to the north; the intervention of the Catholic Church in political matters; and above all, the struggle between the PRI and the PAN, which is really a struggle between the country's dominant classes that leaves most grass-roots concerns and interests virtually unrepresented.

The exercise of electoral democracy, with all of its potential to determine changes in political leadership, is without a doubt a popular demand in Chihuahua as evidenced by the wave of protests and demonstrations during the past few months. It also appears that this demand is being taken up in other states as well, for example during the local elections in Oaxaca and Durango; and it will probably be an issue in the forthcoming Sinaloa elections, as well. Nonetheless, the exercise of a fuller democracy that not only deals with the right to vote and respect for electoral results, but also with the possibility of choosing between truly alternative political projects and of guaranteeing that the benefits generated in the society as a whole will be shared by all sectors, demands that grass-roots interests be adequately represented. This is true for Chihuahua and for the entire nation.★

Silvia Gómez Tagle



Photo by Sergio Dorantes

Chihuahua is the largest state in the nation, an arid, starkly beautiful land.



# Premonitions of Instability

*The path the new president of Colombia will follow is still unclear. Nonetheless, Colombians fear a civil war that could turn their country into a battleground.*

Virgilio Barco Vargas, a liberal technocrat, became President of Colombia on August 7th. The conservative opposition expressed this laconic

opinion of him: "he says little." Shortly before, Barco's predecessor, Belisario Betancur, claimed that he was handing over the office with "all calm on the home front." Barco Vargas responded without mincing words, doing justice to the conservatives' description, "The house is a real mess."

Nonetheless, for some observ-

ers, likening Colombia to a messy house is a rather weak analogy. The country's problems have more in common with an imminent eruption by the Nevado de Ruiz volcano than with a badly organized household. It is probably safe to say that Colombia represents a synthesis of the problems that beset the entire region: the confrontation between the army and guerrilla forces has submerged the country in violence, 45% of the population lives in conditions of abject misery, drug smugglers go about their business with total impunity, a huge coffee crop faces collapsing world market prices, and as if all that weren't enough, the inflation rate is rising and the foreign debt stands at 15 billion dollars (although the debt problem could be considered minor when compared to the situation in neighboring countries).

Thus, it's rather unlikely that many people envy Virgilio Barco's job. From a family with a long tradition of political activity and married to a woman from the United States, the 65 year old, MIT trained economist and engineer will probably continue to say little for now, at least in public.

## PROMISES AND BROKEN TRUCES

The guerrilla situation is probably the most difficult problem left behind by the Betancur administration. In fact Latin America's oldest guerrilla army is the Colombian FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia). Other guerrilla groups in the country include: M-19 (April 19th Movement), with a rather confused ideological line, although clearly nationalist and populist; ELN (National Liberation Army), pro-Castro; and ELP (Popular Liberation Army), Maoist. There are also other smaller and less influential groups.

One of former President Betancur's first major undertakings was to try to bring peace to the country. With this in mind, he devoted enormous energies to meetings with major guerrilla leaders. By 1984 the FARC, the M-19 and the ELN had agreed to a truce. While other groups never formally accepted the accord, they either put their operations on hold or greatly reduced their activities. It was clearly one of the high points of Betancur's presidency.

But the situation didn't last for long; mutual accusations gradually eroded the temporary calm. In mid-1985, the M-19 announced that it was breaking the truce and returning to armed struggle. Things deteriorated further, climaxing last November when an M-19 commando occupied the Supreme Court Building, taking 100 hostages, most of them judges, and demanded that the government accept a list of conditions for resuming the dialogue. Betancur refused to negotiate and sent the army in to take the building. The operation ended in tragedy: all but 12 of the hostages



Photo by CNT

In the midst of nature's abundance, marijuana grows freely and guerrillas hide easily.

## latin american issues

died, along with the entire guerrilla commando. That clearly sealed the split between the government and the guerrillas, and since then, the M-19, as well as the country's other insurgent forces have renewed and intensified their military activities.

The major exception has been the FARC, which condemned the M-19's occupation of the Supreme Court, calling it "an infantile act." They not only reconfirmed their participation in the truce, but also decided to form a political party, the Patriotic Union (UP), that ran as an opposition coalition in the recent elections and won 9 congressional seats.

But the tension continues. The impressive display of security forces at Barco's swearing in was eloquent testimony to that fact. In his inaugural address, the new President reaffirmed his commitment to national pacification while explaining that he would take a hard line "against those groups that refuse to lay down their arms." In the same speech, he congratulated the FARC for having become a political party. In a later statement, referring to the M-19, Barco Vargas maintained that he would not

begin a dialogue until the guerrillas change their attitude.

One of the big remaining questions concerns the Patriotic Union and its future in the country's political life. Representing a clearly defined alternative for many voters, the UP has already produced some important results, winning nine congressional elections even though it became a party just a few months before the voting. What makes its future uncertain is both the extreme right and the extreme left. In the last few months, there has been a veritable wave of kidnappings and murders aimed at UP mayors and legislators. Almost everyone agrees that extreme right "Death Squads" are responsible. The key question, though, is who is behind them. Drug smugglers? Retired army officers? It's very hard to know.

### BOOTS AND VOTES

Just like in many other Latin countries, the Colombian military has never completely given up its direct hold on power. Its strength as a political force today rests on its role in fighting drug traffic and the insurgency.

During Betancur's presidency, the civil government and the army faced off over the issue of national pacification. Many of the truce violations could well have been the result of the Army's open defiance of government policy. For quite some time now, many political sectors have maintained that the truce was the victim of the conservatives' decision to accept army demands, thus keeping the armed struggle alive and assuring the military its quota of power.

Virgilio Barco Vargas confronts, then, yet another set of difficulties in office. He will have to learn how to handle the delicate relations with the armed forces. His new Defense Minister, Samudio Molina, is very definitely a practical man. And Barco himself has explained that he will continue the policy of national pacification, at the same time holding firm against groups refusing to give up their arms. Perhaps his statements reflect an attempt to work a very cautious double deal. The new President will try to display a certain openness toward the guerrillas, while guaranteeing a role for the army.

### THE COUNTRY'S ACCOUNTS

Colombia's economic situation is closely tied to its political woes. In his inaugural address, Barco defined the major lines of his economic policy: eliminate the abject poverty affecting some 45% of the population; reduce the deficit; create jobs; and begin development projects for the country's poorest regions.

The foreign debt is not crushing; as we explained earlier, it's "only" about 15 billion dollars. Nonetheless, coffee still represents the country's most immediate hopes for bringing in more foreign exchange, just at a time when market prices for Colombia's principal export crop have plummeted. Over the next few years the country also could become an important oil producer, with a potential to export some 400,000 barrels a day.

But here, too, there is scepticism, since it is unlikely the oil market will recuperate before 1990, just about the time Barco's term draws to a close. In addition, the development of the country's oil industry is very much conditioned by the political situation. The ELN guerrillas have specialized in sabotaging oil producing facilities; in one of their most recent actions they blew up a section of a pipeline, causing close to a million dollars worth of damage.

Barco Vargas has already issued a series of decrees attempting to regulate the economic situation. In one recent statement the government asked the Colombian people to give it some "breathing room," while at the same time announcing proposed legislation to create 300,000 jobs in agro-industry, urban transport and free trade zones. Measures were also announced that will regulate land tenure through an agrarian reform. In principle, the reform will provide land to some 250,000 peasant families. The program is intended to create more equitable land distribution; currently 4% of property owners own 75% of the country's productive land. This glaring inequality moved the nation's Catholic Church to call on the government to play a stronger role in regulating property matters.

Most observers agree that Barco will implement classic austerity measures in an effort to clean up the deficit problem.

It's not certain how the country will respond, but at least one new factor is developing in this regard. A new labor association has been founded, the Unified Confederation of Unions (CUT), bringing together the majority of liberal, progressive and independent trade unions and representing about 70% of the country's organized labor force. In spite of the fact that the CUT's future director is a member of the Liberal Party and a former Minister of Labor, the new association has not been well received by the country's two other major



Manuel Marulanda, "Tiro Fijo", guerrilla leader turned politician.

labor federations, both affiliated with Conservative Party politics. With some 230,000 members, the two conservative labor groups have both accused the CUT of being leftist and of having ties to drug traffickers. In response, spokesmen for the new organization explained that communist and socialist unions are in the minority and that "in this country even Queen Elizabeth is accused of having ties with drug smuggling."

#### BARCO AND HIS FRIENDS

Virgilio Barco also seems to be very cautious about his country's foreign policy, and in several instances he has sent out what could be read as mixed messages. On the one hand, a Cuban delegation was present for his inauguration even though Colombia does not maintain diplomatic relations with Havana. That immediately opened the way for speculation that relations would soon be reestablished, following the example set by Uruguay and Argentina, South America's fledgling democracies. But to date, Barco has once again preferred to say little. On the other hand, U.S. Secretary of State George Schultz was also present for the ceremony and had a private meeting with the new President. The statement issued after their talk explained that they had not dealt with the question of the foreign debt or the guerrilla movement. Thus, it was presumed that their meeting focused on two even more pressing topics: drug traffic and the strategic facilities that Colombia might grant the United States.

With regards to drug traffic, Colombia's position is a rather embarrassing one. As things are viewed from the U.S., Colombia is a paradise for drug traffickers, serving as the main center for processing Bolivian and Peruvian cocaine and for sending the refined product off to clandestine landing sites in Florida and the Bahamas. The recent participation of U.S. troops in anti-drug operations in Bolivia weighs heavily on Colombia. Thus, a strict legal accord has been

reached with the U.S. regarding the extradition and trial of drug smugglers. Under this agreement, the U.S. may sentence Colombian citizens taken prisoner on U.S. soil and even extradite Colombians from their own country. The Barco Vargas government went on to announce joint operations with Peru to fight drug trafficking, declaring that "we don't need U.S. troops in our territory."

The other crucial issue has to do with a U.S. request to set up radar installations on the Colombian island of San Andres, located in the Caribbean Sea just 9 minutes flying time from Nicaragua. Until now the Barco government has been reluctant to grant permission, arguing that the proposed equipment is out of date. Washington hurriedly replied that it would be willing to install more advanced equipment. It could well be that Virgilio Barco is thinking about distancing his country from the Contadora process, but granting permission for a U.S. radar station on Colombian territory might be seen as going too far, too fast; hence the reluctance. At any rate, it is widely believed that the new Colombian President is interested in a closer alignment with general U.S. policy in Central America, which could well mean backing off from the process initiated by his predecessor.

The fact that it was Colombia that inspired the pantagruelian excesses of Gabriel García Márquez' *One Hundred Years of Solitude* helps illustrate some of the limits on the new administration. Barco Vargas will have to run his government in accord with the country's history and national character. For now, correspondents for two major international news agencies, Reuters and DPA, agree that the new President's administration has been "indecisive during its first month, occasioning premonitions of instability." The question for the future is, will that indecision cause Barco's ship to spring a leak? ★

Irving Roffe

## Reaping the Future

*Though supposedly embarked only in an anti-drug campaign, U.S. military presence has generated an internal conflict in Bolivia.*

In the midst of the worst economic crisis in its history, Bolivia today faces a seemingly invulnerable enemy: drug traffic. The magnitude of the

crisis confronting this scarcely inhabited country (6.5 million people) is expressed in the spiraling fall of its income from exports and the persistent decline of its exportable production, and in an increasingly high unemployment rate along with a loss in the real value of wages.

Hand in hand with the crisis,



Photo taken from Cultural Survival Quarterly

Armed transporter of cocaine paste to traffickers.

## latin american issues

increasing drug trafficking appears as the major political and economic issue, one which came to the forefront last July 14 with the arrival in Bolivia of 170 U.S. soldiers. Their stated mission is to combat the flow of drugs coming out of this land-locked Andean country, but their presence unleashed an uproar among political parties, in Congress, the universities and the unions. The broad-based opposition to the presence of U.S. troops stems from the fact that they are regarded as violators of the nation's sovereignty and dignity.

The U.S. assigned 170 soldiers, 7 helicopters, 2 reconnaissance planes and 15 Drug Enforcement Agency advisors to provide logistical support for Bolivian authorities during 60 days in their struggle against drug traffic. Yet the real length of their tour of duty depends on the results obtained during ongoing operations.

The fact is that for most Bolivi-

ans, U.S. military presence only serves to further complicate the country's already critical situation. This is especially true following the decisive decline in the price of tin on the world market in October of 1985.

Bolivia's Finance Minister Flavio Machicaco recently stated that the base of the country's economy has shifted from tin to coca, the Spanish name for the poppy plant from which cocaine is produced. "We would face runaway unemployment, protests and violence if the narcotics trade were to suddenly disappear," stated Mr. Machicaco.

Drug-related activity currently generates nearly one third of the country's gross national product, and is rapidly displacing tin-mining and natural gas extraction, formerly Bolivia's main economic activities. Cultivation and trafficking of drugs currently provide some kind of income for close to 400,000

people. The drug industry's activity is also complemented by the existence of 80,000 cocaine addicts in the country, according to official figures.

Over the years Bolivia's economy has become progressively addicted to the rising drug industry, now firmly rooted in most of the country's political and economic life. One of the more recent contributing factors has been the displacement of labor from shut-down tin mines to the poppy fields. For example, during 1986 the government has fired 8,000 miners, out of a total of 24,000 employed by this state-owned industry. These measures respond to the official logic concerning what needs to be done in order to gain international financial support, but many are bitterly opposed to them. Such is the case of the Bolivian Workers' Central, COB, which recently polled public opinion concerning the country's problems. Their findings revealed that 97.35% of

those consulted opposed servicing the country's foreign debt and were in favor of a new tax law.

The presence of U.S. troops and agents is deemed undesirable by many social and political groups in the country. Last August 1st, 21 political parties and 27 labor organizations formed the Council for the Defense of National Sovereignty in order to demand that U.S. military presence be removed. The Council's appearance coincided with a 24-hour shut-down in the city of Oruro and with a 20,000 strong peasant demonstration in Cochabamba. Their declaration stated that repression of delinquent activity should be aimed at drug processing and trafficking and not against producers of coca leaves. Many other massive demonstrations against U.S. military presence in Bolivia also took place during early August.



Photo taken from Cultural Survival Quarterly

Peasants arrested at cocaine processing laboratory in Cochabamba Valley.

Yet despite opposition to its policy, the Bolivian government continues to seek whatever kind of help it can get. On August 18, Minister of the Interior Guillermo Bedregal announced a new drug-fighting agreement between the United States and Bolivia which calls for the investment of \$360 million to support joint operations to eradicate the narcotics trade. Nonetheless, the wave of strikes and demonstrations called by the COB and the Federations of Bolivian Mine Workers to protest government policy against the mining industry and the resulting unemployment, have now taken up the central demand that U.S. military and logistical personnel leave the country immediately. This was a front-line demand during the 48-hour work-stoppage called by the COB in support of striking miners and during the March for Life undertaken by 5,000 miners, and it has been taken up by mine-workers on hunger strikes throughout the ailing industry.

Faced with mounting internal pressure, President Paz Estenssoro imposed a state of siege on August 28, and was immediately backed by Washington. The measure was widely adversed in Bolivia, and on September 14, two days after the 60-day limit for the stay of U.S. troops had expired, the Council for the Defense of National Sovereignty issued a communique stating their belief that current U.S. military presence is a pretext to set up a permanent military base in the country. On the very same day, Under-secretary of Defense Chapman Cox declared that given the success of the joint drug-fighting campaign, the Bolivian government "asked us to stay and we have accepted..." Cox added that conversations were underway with other countries interested in U.S. logistical and military support in the fight against drugs. One day later it was confirmed that U.S. troops would remain in Bolivia for another 60 days.

Thus, the problem seems to be projected on into the indefinite future. U.S. military presence

is regarded by most of the population as a form of meddling in "family affairs" and anything that seems to go against national sovereignty continues to provoke indignation and rejection.

Bolivian fabric-salesman Mario Guzmán visited Mexico recently and gave us his point of view. "Bolivia is confronting a new situation in which we must deal with a drug-traffic industry which is part of society itself. This has given rise to a diversity of economic, sociopolitical and crime-related problems. Drug-related income is now four times as large as the rest of our nation-

al income, and this means a parallel economy in which the dollar is sovereign and in which the rate of exchange of our currency to the dollar is destabilized. These facts, along with our geographical enclosure (Bolivia has no coastline), our extreme poverty, the deteriorating price of tin and a lack of alternative economic activities, are some of the factors that explain the measures enacted by President Estenssoro. Yet truly, U.S. military presence does not contribute to solving Bolivia's overall problem..."

With little over a year in power, President Paz Estenssoro

is faced with increasing internal and foreign pressure, most of it related to the drug-traffic issue. The situation is particularly complex at a time when Bolivian authorities themselves have accepted that the eradication of cocaine processing and smuggling would seriously undermine the country's economy. Following 18 years of military regimes, the democratic process re-established in 1982 must now cope with both the economic crisis and political upheaval. The issues are drugs, national sovereignty and Bolivia's right to self-determination.★

Ernesto Rojas



Peasant woman arrested for involvement in coca paste making activities, the upper Cochabamba Valley.

Photo taken from Cultural Survival Quarterly

## Perils of an Occupied Country

*Honduras might be the next country destabilized in Central America. Yet rather than the result of a strong internal opposition, conflict stems from the presence of the contra.*

Alarming consequences are looming for Honduras due to the presence of the counter-revolutionary groups fighting the neighboring Managua regime. Not only is the contra held responsible for robberies, kidnappings and murders, they are also blamed for the displacement of some 25,000 Hondurans, mostly coffee growers, from the border region with Nicaragua where contras are active.

What's more, reports are surfacing linking the contra to the killings of Honduran political dissidents. These incidents took place between 1981 and 1984 when General Gustavo Alvarez Martínez, a close CIA associate, was head of the Honduran Armed Forces.

Yet the most alarming implication of contra presence in Honduras is just now coming to light. Several incidents are revealing the acute power struggle within the Honduran military over their share of the \$100 million in aid to the contra approved by the U.S. Congress last July.

Two armed incidents brought

this situation to public view. One was an attack last July 23, with high-powered rifles and grenades, against a contra house in a residential neighborhood in Tegucigalpa. The second was an assault carried out on August 6 by the Honduran Public Security Force, FUSEP, on the home of Rodolfo Zelaya, an ultrarightist businessman and member of Congress. Zelaya is one of the main providers of goods to the contras, and it has been reported that they spent some \$4 million in his store during 1985.

The first incident is still shrouded in mystery. For his part, Zelaya accused colonels Wilfredo Sánchez, FUSEP Commander, and Roberto Núñez Montes, Chief of Army Military Intelligence, of instigating the assault in order to move in on his business dealings with the anti-Sandinistas.

Both high-ranking officers were removed from their posts following the incident, and General Humberto Regalado, Chief of the Armed Forces, ordered an in-depth investigation, stressing that there are no internal divisions in the Hon-

duran military. Yet local observers insist that these events are merely the tip of the iceberg of the internal disputes raging in the upper levels of the military establishment.

According to political analyst Víctor Meza, Director of the independent Tegucigalpa-based Honduras Documentation Center, CEDOH, "there's no doubt that the \$100 million put an end to the period of expectation that arose in Honduran ruling circles following the refusal of Congress (U.S.) to approve funding for the contra."

When Congress failed to approve President Reagan's aid request last year, Honduras entered a period of "anguish and uncertainty," in which everyone thought only of how to get rid of the contra, who had become "uncomfortable guests" once they lacked funds. But Mr. Meza believes that after the approval of the \$100 million, "a new phase of anxiety, illusions and hopes" has opened up among the Honduran military. Besides seeing the contra as an ace up their sleeve vis a vis Managua and as a means of pressuring



Photo by CEDOH

President Azcona surrounded by the men of power.

Washington into granting more aid to Honduras, the military now see the counter-revolutionaries as an excellent business opportunity. Meza describes the military's attitude toward the contra as one of "incredible, almost gangster-like delinquent pragmatism."

There seems to be little precise knowledge concerning the identity of the different groups within the military struggling to control the aid Washington hands out to the contra. But most sources agree that alignments in this new confrontation are also closely linked to the Armed Forces' internal power struggles.

Ramón Ouelí is an academic who specializes in scrutinizing the Honduran military. He explained to VOICES that before the end of the year the Armed Forces will choose a new chief who will take charge on January 27 of 1987. This election was decided in an agreement drawn up last February between the main promotions of officers when General Walter López was removed as head of the armed forces.

mand and contribute to resolve internal political disputes in the army. The pact also calls for officers of the so-called Fifth Promotion to rise to the head of FUSEP, the navy and the brigades, while officers of the Sixth Promotion would go on to head the army's infantry battalions, acquiring direct command of troops.

The Fifth and Sixth promotions (colonels and lieutenant colonels) dominate the High Council of the Armed Forces, COSUFFAA, the military's highest decision-making body, which is made up of 43 officers. According to Professor Ouelí, COSUFFAA generally follows democratic procedures, since each military chief consults with his staff before supporting or voting against a given issue.

Ouelí believes that Fifth Promotion officers are political and ideological hard-liners. The Sixth Promotion, on the other hand, functions more as a corporate group that comprises some 22 officers, meaning it has quite a deal of strength in the COSUFFAA. A revealing fact concerning both

Negotiations are currently underway to select the new head of the Honduran military. The main candidates are both colonels: William Thomas Said Speer, currently Head of the Armored Cavalry Regiment, and Leonel Riera Lunatti, Head of the First Infantry Battalion and Commander of FUSEP. Both are associated to the Fifth Promotion.

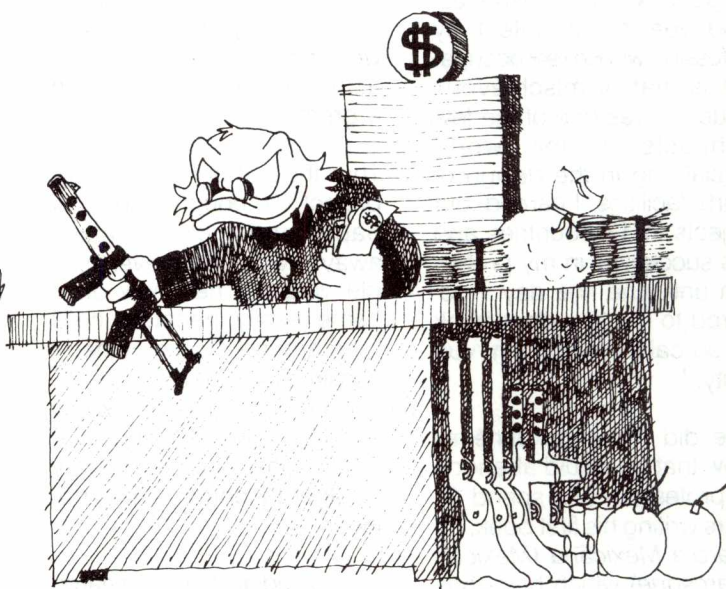
Most analysts believe that above and beyond other political differences, none of the military promotions are anxious for an all-out war against Nicaragua. They stress how some 90% of COSUFFAA's members were low-ranking officers at the time of the war between Honduras and El Salvador in 1969, and thus regard the Salvadoran army as their "historical enemy." This helps to explain why the Honduran military were wary of President José Azcona's visit to San Salvador last July, the first such visit by an Honduran president since the armed conflict 17 years ago.

The director of CEDOH believes the core of the problem is that the Honduran Armed Forces helped promote the

solid and decisive institution in Honduran society. According to most observers, the prospect of internal divisions over the contra issue is an alarming one. In this sense, Manuel Gamero, Director of the newspaper *Tiempo*, stated that the contra have affected both the army's image and its stability, and that the country is undergoing a process of de-nationalization.

Thus, it seems the Nicaraguan counter-revolutionaries have become an internal security problem for Honduras. It's obvious to all that with Washington's help, the contra expects to develop its armed forces to some 20,000 to 25,000 men, practically equal to the Honduran army. What will happen if the contra are again defeated by the Sandinistas and pushed back into Honduras?

Washington's \$100 million to the contra will bring out the fact that "corruption among the anti-Sandinistas together with corruption in the Honduran Armed Forces generates an uncontrollable landslide of corruption," as a local political analyst put it. Given the situation, many Hondurans fear the



According to this agreement the period of time during which a given officer will hold the position of Head of the Armed Forces will be reduced from the current five years to three. This would allow for greater mobility in the chain of com-

military groups is that the Sixth is in favor of punishing those responsible for the disappearance (kidnapping and probably murder) of political dissidents, while the Fifth, with U.S. support, opposes such measures.

contra as an external phenomenon, but now the counter-revolutionaries have become an internal issue that plays a role in uniting or dividing the different factions within the military. There is no doubt that the military is the most

worst. The ghost of Lebanon sheds its shadow over Honduras, a country with at least three armies within its national boundaries. ★

Horacio Castellanos Moya

# Chronicler of Mexican Picaresque

*Mexicans use language creatively to laugh and make friends. A leading exponent of this humorous language has also become its editor.*

Picaresque, the roguish, mischievous turn of phrase known in Spanish as *picardía* expresses the infinite wealth of emotion and experience in the daily life of the people. Just as a Mexican song may break a heart or make it overflow with joy, a good picaresque conversation may seal an indestructible friendship.

The only Mexican writer who has studied picaresque and shown it to be basic and necessary to popular use of language is Armando Jiménez, a 69 year-old architect by profession whose real occupation is that of mischievous rogue. "I was one of the few architects in the world specializing in the design of sports facilities. I carried out projects in 17 countries and was successful in my profession until one fine day it occurred to me to write a book on so-called Mexican vulgarity."

Little did Armando Jiménez know that he would abandon his profession and spend 10 years writing his first book, *La Picardía Mexicana (Mexican Picaresque)* which has gone through 78 editions and sold close to 4 million copies. It's estimated that each book is read by 10 different people which, according to the National Autonomous University of Mexico, makes Jiménez the most widely read author in Spanish after Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, the genius

who gave us Don Quijote de la Mancha.

*Picardía* was an unusual project from the very start. When Jiménez began his work, dirty language was still forbidden in books, magazines and newspapers, and the penalty for this crime could be as bad as imprisonment in Islas Marías, the country's main penitentiary. Jiménez consulted his idea with some of the country's most prestigious artists and writers. He went to Siqueiros and Orozco, the great muralists. He spoke with Salvador Novo, the deceased Mexico City chronicler; with Agustín Yáñez, former Secretary of Education, and with Alfonso Reyes who besides being an illustrious writer was, "a very vulgar punster when he's with his pals." They all thought Jiménez had hit on a great idea.

Thus the author set out on his project. He bought a ream of paper and tucked himself away to write down every single vulgarity he knew of. It came easily because he'd lived around "foul-mouthed" construction workers for years. But he felt he didn't know enough, so he consulted over 2,000 books that in some way or other touched on the subject.

"I followed up on my research in brothels, bars, prisons and the poorest barrios. I scoured the country from top to bottom and talked to people from all different social strata. I went to the town of Alvarado on the southern coast of Veracruz, famous for being the most foul-mouthed city in Mexico, and I was named a favourite son.

"I was surprised to find -adds Jiménez- that cultivated people in the highest positions (two former presidents, several ambassadors, a minister of state, senators and bank managers) were thoroughly knowledgeable in picaresque. This means that in Mexico we're all foul-mouthed and that the most cultured people can talk like the worst stevedore."

The author of *Picardía Mexicana* believes so-called "bad words" are not so bad at all. They can be pretty and funny and allow for greater strength and precision of expression. Yet these words are constantly rejected. "There are taboos and forbidden things in Mexico -says Jiménez. Writing vulgarities was a crime before my book was published. Now they're acceptable in books and magazines, but not on radio or television. For example, if a television announcer were to use the word 'buttock' on the air he could lose both his job and his professional license."

"Buttocks" (*nalgas*) is a dirty word in Mexico even though it appears in the Royal Academy of Language's dictionary, "which is written by prudish, puritan old men." "Nalgas" is the precise Castilian word. Yet, adds Jiménez, "it's forbidden, and we have to make up others such as *pompis*, *nachas*, *teleras*, and *ignacias*. Maybe these are bad words because they keep us from communicating with Spanish-speakers from other countries. If I were to tell a Uruguayan that the nurse just gave me an injection in the catcher's mitt he probably wouldn't know what I was talking about."

Jiménez is a 69 year-old youngster who travels frequently, carrying his thoughts and writings on Mexican picaresque with him. His books are greatly appreciated, especially if they've been dedicated by the author. He tells of how he once dedicated a book to international billiard player Joe Chamaco: "To my friend Joe Chamaco, world champion of three cushion

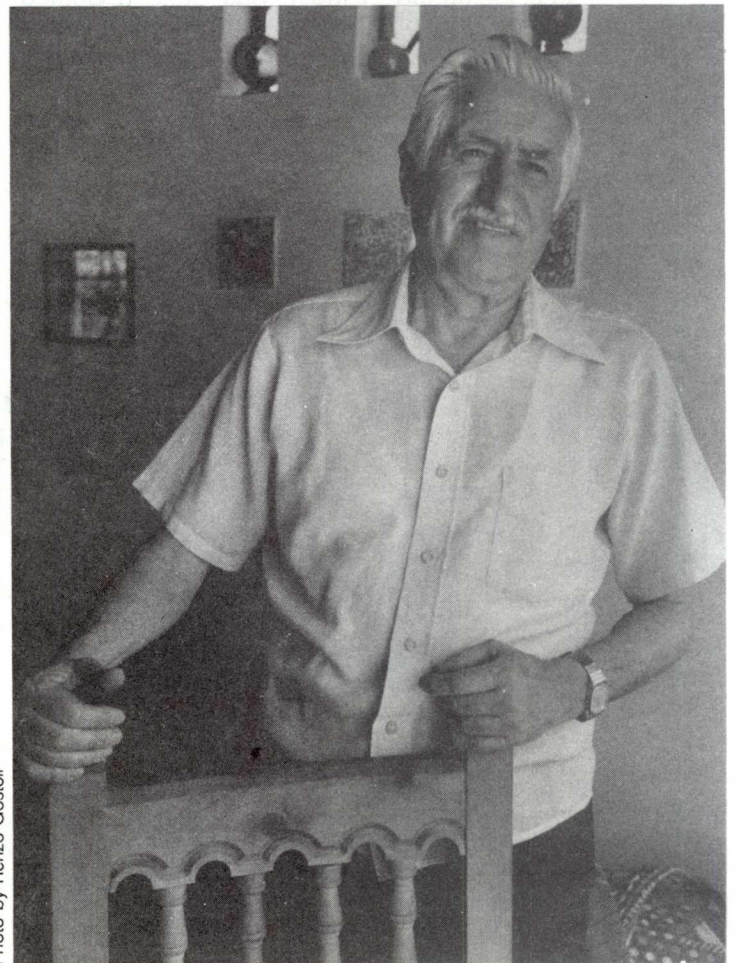


Photo by Renzo Góstioli

Picaresque author Armando Jiménez



carom, from his friend Armando Jiménez, world champion of pocket billiards." It looks serious enough, but it isn't.

"Picardía is not exclusive to Mexicans," says Jiménez. "The papaya is a delicious fruit plentiful in tropical countries, but in Cuba the word means vulva, vagina. If an unawared Mexican in Havana were to ask a waiter for a good serving of papaya, he would sure-

celebrations in Argentina. That night as we were gazing at the fireworks so common in Latin American popular festivities, I was standing next to the first lady, the president's wife, when one of the firecrackers failed to go off. The lady said, *Ya se chingó* (it got screwed.) I was worried, she's said something vulgar, I thought. I later went up to the Venezuelan ambassador who was accompanied by his young and beauti-

winner and a loser, yet rather than a fight it's a creative game of ingenuity and intelligence. Without resorting to so-called dirty words, the *albur* is the highest form of *picardía*. It consists mainly in funny ways of referring to sex by playing with language, and seems to have few equivalents in other languages. It's basically a play on double meanings of words and phrases. Someone may say "chili," and the answer will

popular artists used *albures* to entertain the public." Mexicans live and laugh together, make friends and relax with *albures*. Anyone who can't take a joke is a bad *alburero*. "A couple of expert *albureros* can talk for hours on end, and a foreigner listening in would only think the conversation was slightly unhinged," says Jiménez.

Thus Mexicans, mainly the



The now famous book which has gone through 78 printings.

ly be told: 'Sorry, we don't serve that here.'

"The word *cajeta* is used to mean vagina in Argentina, whereas in Mexico it's a kind of milk and sugar candy. When my Argentine friends come to Mexico I enjoy taking them to a typical candy store downtown called 'The King of Cajetas'. They're usually tickled and ask to have their picture taken to show their countrymen that Mexico's *cajetas* come in all tastes and sizes."

The author tells some other anecdotes: "I was once invited to independence-day

ful wife. She said to me: -Mr. Jiménez, would you like to have a 'palito' (little stick) with me?-. Well, I was speechless. Then and there? How could she make such a proposal in public? I later learned that a 'palito' wasn't what I believed it to be. In Venezuela it means a snack, an hors d'oeuvre or a drink before the meal. "Whereas in Mexico, *echarse un palito* is a picaresque way of referring to sexual intercourse.

Aside from all this fun and games, the *albur*, a kind of pun, is the core of Mexican picaresque. There's usually a



Drawing by Alberto Beltrán

Roguish Mexicans attack a very elitist "Academy of Language".

be "it's hotter with onions," or "cousin" and "bring her over tomorrow."

"The *albur* is Mexico's contribution to universal humour. It was born in Peralvillo and Tepito, popular barrios in Mexico City, and then spread through the circus and the rough urban theaters where comics such as Cuatesón Leopoldo Beristáin, the ventriloquist Count Bobby, Chaf and Kelly, Cantinflas and other

residents of the city's poor barrios, gave rise to their own picaresque, and with it the *albur*, and later this special form of language passed on into society as a whole and became a defining, particular aspect of Mexican sentiment. We can be losers at soccer or in financial matters, at keeping our currency stable or at paying our foreign debt... but nobody beats us at *albures*.★

Jorge Luis Sierra Guzmán



Drawing by Alberto Beltrán

# Aztec Roots Live On at Milpa Alta

Don Carlos López Avila is a living example of the wisdom of the remote times of Anáhuac. A peasant of the Milpa Alta community and depository of the vast and harmonious Náhuatl cultural tradition, don Carlos is the author of several books. Among them are a legendary history of Malacachtepec Momoxco, today known as Milpa Alta, a teaching manual for the Náhuatl language, and a collection of Indian tales that will soon appear in France, since no publisher could be found here in Mexico. Ricardo Montejano interviewed don Carlos in Milpa Alto on July 19th. The following are excerpts from the testimony provided by the Nahuatlan wise man.

## THE ORIGINS OF MILPA ALTA

When Tenochtitlan expanded with its increased agricultural needs, our ancestors came here. Other areas were already occupied. The Tecpanecos were over there, the Toltecs were there, the Chichimecas there, the Texcocoans there. Thus, our ancestors came here to explore these lands where no one had come before because there was little water. Our soils are very porous, and they just drink up the water. There are no springs, but there are underground rivers. And so they came to plant and harvest. That's why I say, look, over there you see, all of the mountains are terraced rock. They made the terraces where they first planted. And from there, they moved to the highland valleys. That's why at first it was called Malacachtepec Momoxco and later Milpa Alta. And our ancestors found good agriculture in those two or three valleys, yes. And in the process, they discovered that the rock was good for writing.

## COATEQUITL

Our ancestors worked the land collectively. This kind of work is called *coatequitl* in Náhuatl. The *milpas*\* were worked jointly; the whole group took care of them. Everyone worked them for everyone else. And the fruits of the earth, from the *milpa* and from their labor was shared equally by everyone. No one

was the owner of a piece of land. There was only communal land. That way of holding land was wonderful. Their traditions, customs, the Náhuatl language, their poems, songs and dances and their impressive philosophy were all rooted in that practice. But one day the Conquerors took away our lands for their

sage to our people saying "Our sun has hidden. Our sun has died and left us in total darkness. Thus, we will reserve, we will hide our way of living, our way of speaking. Let us hide away in our houses the teachings of our elders, so that one day, when the sun is born anew, when its light shines once again on our

That's why we believe it is necessary, it is so important to defend this land. It must always live for the benefit of human life. Each year that goes by, each year that we plant, the earth talks to us. Because that is our life, that is the message we have on behalf of the plants, the land and the cosmos. We live with the trees,



Photo by Trabajadores de la comunicación

Don Carlos, wise man of Milpa Alta, a scarce 15 miles away from Mexico City.

plantations. After the Mexican Revolution, we recovered them as *ejidos*,\*\* and even now we continue to conserve them so that they can be more and more productive for our Indian peoples here to the southeast of the Federal District. We want the land to hold us together as brothers and sisters, as a family, because this is where our traditions and customs are, our Náhuatl language, our leaders, our songs and poems and all of our ancestors' great philosophy.

## CUAUHTEMOC'S MESSAGE

Way back, when Tenochtitlan fell and Cuauhtémoc was taken prisoner, they sent out a mes-

sage to our people saying "Our sun has hidden. Our sun has died and left us in total darkness. Thus, we will reserve, we will hide our way of living, our way of speaking. Let us hide away in our houses the teachings of our elders, so that one day, when the sun is born anew, when its light shines once again on our

## DIALOG WITH NATURE

It is speaking, it is with us. The *milpa* and the countryside, the foliage, the trees, they all speak. The trees remember things that happened in the past, they remember them right now, and they will remember them in the future. We understand -and we know it from our ancestors because our oral tradition has been passed down from generation to generation- we understand that a corn plant, that this very land and everything on it speaks with us, and we speak with them.

we know how they live, we know if one is sick. We know what a tree means for human life. That's what our ancestors taught us. And we learned it; and we shall teach the coming generations how to care for this land because it is a part of our lives and it is a part of our grand culture, of the great philosophy of the Náhuatls who are men of maize.

R. Montejano, transcription.  
A. Noyola (Communication Workers), text selection and correction.

\*traditional cornfields.

\*\*communal property established as part of the land reform after the Mexican Revolution.

# One Year Later: The Earthquake Revisited

Twelve months after Mexico City was devastated by a killer quake that caused over 20,000 deaths and changed the city's center forever, survivors remember the event and commemorate their dead.

*The initial feelings of impotence and despair soon turned into concern and solidarity. Essential emergency and rescue work was taken up by ordinary people on an unprecedented scale. But the tragedy also aggravated previously existing problems. The destruction of thousands of homes was added to the effects of the current economic crisis on the lives of most Mexican families. Many things have happened since. There is more awareness of the need to study quakes, more concern about preventing a future tragedy of the same magnitude. Through a diversity of testimonies, VOICES OF MEXICO presents a panorama of how the disaster is regarded by its victims, how it has become a part of urban folklore, what the government has accomplished during the year that has gone by, and how the National University got involved and is active in a series of matters linked to the earthquake.*



Photo by Renzo Góssoli

Youth pitching in at a vecindad.

# The Victims of Colonia Doctores

The September 1985 earthquakes in Mexico City laid bare the housing situation for a very large number of families living in the capital city. Many have no real housing at all, others live in miniscule and overcrowded quarters, in unmaintained buildings that have deteriorated through the years, with poor services.

A number of very old neighborhoods made up primarily of tenement buildings are located in the downtown area where real estate value is extremely high. Many of these tenements were seriously damaged by the quakes and others were completely destroyed. The bulk of reconstruction and repair work in these buildings has fallen on the shoulders of survivors who got together and formed new community organi-

zations to confront the problems left behind in the disaster's wake.

The solidarity of Mexico City dwellers in the aftermath of the earthquake laid the foundation for a new social consciousness among residents of many, many tenement buildings, districts and neighborhoods throughout the city. According to the refrain of a popular urban rock song written after the tragedy, they aspire to build "a different city, a different country, a different life."

The following are testimonies of earthquake victims who live in one of these old downtown residential areas and belong to the *Doctores* Neighborhood Residents' Union.



Photo by Sergio Dorantes



Death in Mexico, as elsewhere, is loss and pain. It is also celebration and humour.

## Solidarity

There was tremendous solidarity after the earthquake; everyone helped out, rescuing people who had been trapped, hauling water, carrying away people who were hurt, directing traffic, finding food. Everyone participated, but especially the young people. There were many acts of heroism. A little later people felt the need to get organized to deal with housing problems that were made much worse by the quake.

Mr. Guillermo López, Dr. Vértiz Street

## Options

We decided to organize not only to resolve our housing problems, but also to try and solve

some of our other social and economic problems, like creating jobs, forming production cooperatives, rebuilding homes, providing social, health, cultural and recreational services.

Mr. Emilio Salazar, Dr. Bernard Street

## Organization

The people in the neighborhood who were involved in local tenants' unions before are the ones who started the new organization. They had already worked together to defend their buildings from evictions or to form housing cooperatives or to seek joint loans. With the earthquake, people began to organize again. It's truly a neighborhood organization; none of the political parties were involved. That's how

## A Song Dedicated to the Tragedy

The September 1985 earthquakes profoundly affected Mexico City. In addition to the terrible losses, they also sparked the development of a new social consciousness among certain sectors of the population. This new sense of social responsibility and solidarity is increasingly being expressed in different art forms. Composers and popular singers have written numerous works inspired by September's tragic events and their aftermath.

One very eloquent version of the capital city experience was composed by Mr. Guillerimos Velázquez, a troubador from Huapango Arribeño in the Xichú region of Guanajuato. The verses that follow are a translation of a song, originally written in the traditional *corrido* form, dedicated to the Mexicans who helped during the tragedy and to the victims who continue to struggle for better living conditions. The song was taped during a performance by the composer and the "Lions of the Xichú Mountains."



What a great example was set by those Mexicans  
Who helped in the cataclysm's midst;  
There were countless heroic deeds  
That surprised both friends and strangers.

Just moments after the destructive quake  
So many worked with zeal and fearless to clear away the rubble,  
Digging with fingernails and feet, their hands and faces bloody  
Rescuing other human beings for the simple fact of being.  
And perhaps the whole world was watching!

Far from abandoning the terrified thousands to their fate  
People flowed like rivers to seize life from death's grip.  
This fact alone turned misfortune into brotherhood and warmth.  
And it's right to feel proud, even as hardship strikes  
When the solidarity is so very strong!

As always, those who have the least, the humble, the oppressed,  
Give their bodies, blood and lives, their solidarity and support for all.  
That anguished mothers may find peace, that the young and old are joined,  
A sandwich, a soda for those in need and care for the thousands of injured.  
We're still moved by it all today!

Men and women, boys and girls all formed brigades to help  
Find food and household needs, no truce by day or night,  
Many didn't sleep a wink; in shelters and homes they were  
The Samaritans, consoling, lending a hand, digging through the rubble.  
I am thinking of all of you!

There were no doubt the vile ones who stooped so low in fact  
To try to take advantage, like vultures or hyenas,  
But this handful of the wicked were foiled in their aims.  
The evil few in no way dim the people's bright example  
That moves me to proclaim:

What a great example was set by those Mexicans  
Who helped in the cataclysm's midst  
There were countless heroic deeds  
That surprised both friends and strangers.

Like a river spilling over with attention and with aid,  
When people unite there's power, that point was amply made.

The usual indifference, the daily routine  
And city life's inertia were all at once shattered  
As people went from place to place  
Wherever there were needy; what great solidarity.  
And Mexico, the colossal city, was like a river overflowing.

Neighbors organized and gave medical aid,  
Official channels could not meet the great demand,  
Ants' nests of activity were everywhere  
To take up the noble task; and with this somber episode  
Our consciousness developed: when people unite, there's power.

Thousands of people together lightened sorrow's burden  
Formed new organizations that still survive today  
Became a single force of awareness and decision  
Like a river overflowing that grows and doesn't fade;  
When people unite there's power, that point was amply made.

If I seem a bit muddled, I really must explain,  
It's hard to be creative in the midst of so much pain.

Transcribed by: **M.A. Díaz León**, Communication Workers

## special section

the Union was formed, based on previous organizing experiences. That's how it could consolidate so quickly.

Mr. Germán Valdéz, Dr. Vértiz Street

### Our Roots and Our Unity

We've always been united here. But with the earthquake we've all grown even closer. So many of us have lived here for years; we're really like one big family. We all know each other, our children were all born here and they grew up here. After the earthquake we didn't know where to go or what to do, so we formed a little association among ourselves. We began to help each other and to collect money for reconstruction and all the other things we needed. Now we're all in the Union, and that's helped a lot.

Mr. Francisco Melgar, Dr. Velasco Street

### Problems

We've had to face many difficulties even though we are in touch with the Ministry of Urban Development and Ecology and the city government. They've created a lot of obstacles as we've tried to solve our housing problems. They're constantly changing construction standards, they order suspensions on works they've already approved because of supposed legal problems; the owners of the tenement buildings who were expropriated under the Presiden-

tial Decree\* take their cases to court, and we can't do anything. Government officials give orders to stop work and there's nothing you can do; in the meantime, many of our houses are falling down, and we're living in the street.

Mr. José Hernández, Dr. Arce Street

### I Agree

I agree with what *don* Pancho Melgar just said. I agree with everything he said because here in the neighborhood we're completely united. We'd like it better if they didn't interrupt our work so much, telling us tomorrow or the day after, just leaving us hanging. We want something real. We want them just to let us work. If the government really wants to help, that's fine, but we don't want them to try to take us for a ride.

Mr. Felipe Baeza, Dr. Velasco Street

### Building

The Union was set up legally as a housing cooperative to help make housing more accessible for residents, to help get credit and non-governmental assistance so we can have de-

\*Shortly after the earthquake, President De la Madrid ordered the expropriation of some 8000 residential units in areas most severely affected by the disaster. Properties are to be turned over to the former tenants as part of the efforts to solve the housing crisis.

## A Comprehensive Study of Seismic Areas

A few short hours after the earthquake that shook Mexico City on September 19, 1985, the UNAM's Institute of Geophysics sent a team of researchers and technicians to Zihuatanejo to install a series of portable seismographs near the tremor's epicenter. Personell from the Institute of Engineering were also part of the team interested in defining the rupture zone—the area of the fault—to find out its size and location along the Mexican coast.

Doctors Lautaro Ponce and Gerardo Suárez, researchers at the Institute, added that following this first stage of the project, the registers were studied and the epicenters of post-quake tremors were located. This in turn led to placement of the fault's length at 180 kms. (112.5 miles) along the Pacific coastline. Dr. Suárez indicated that they

had also worked with teleseismic data obtained from observatories abroad to determine the earthquake's characteristics, "and we realized it actually consisted of two events. What everyone felt as a single long tremor was actually two different movements with a lapse of 27 seconds between one and the other. This probably had the effect of intensifying the earthquake."

When asked whether there was any kind of natural indication that a quake was about to happen, Dr. Suárez said there were not enough factors to go on to make a prediction possible. "It was known that the coast of Michoacán, where the Cocos platform tends to slip under the North American platform, had high seismic potential and that a strong earthquake was likely to happen," added the scientists. The fault's movements are

neither constant nor systematic because the platforms block and jam each other, accumulate energy and suddenly slide. "There are similar areas in Guerrero, for example, with a long history of tremors. Yet neither the Large Coast nor the Small Coast (names given to these coastal regions in the state of Guerrero) have suffered a serious earthquake since the turn of the century, and this is why one can be expected at any time now. The more time goes by the more energy is stored up and the strength of the tremor tends to be greater."

Doctor Ponce said the Institute of Geophysics, in collaboration with colleagues from the French city of Strasbourg, installed a telemetric seismic network that extends for 80 kms (50 miles) along the coast of Guerrero. "We think another important

measure is to set up new seismometrical stations throughout the country. Tremors equal to or greater than 7.5 on the Richter scale take place at an approximate average of every three years, and there have been some 50 quakes stronger than 7.0 during the present century," added the researcher.

Finally, the scientists underlined the fact that even though work is carried out to reach a better understanding of seismographic phenomenae in order to eventually be able to predict the earth's movements, the most important thing at present is to locate those areas with the greatest seismic potential. These studies would then serve as guides to establish building codes and regulations as well as other types of civil security measures.

Haroldo Shetemul

## What the Government Has Done

At precisely 7:19 on the morning of Sept. 19 President Miguel de la Madrid, secretaries of state, legislators, government officials and military officers gathered for a minute of silence in memory of the thousands who died in the earthquake that shook Mexico City exactly a year ago. The president then proceeded to the center of the Plaza de la Constitución in front of the National Palace and lowered the Mexican flag to half mast as a sign of mourning.

At the same time, people from all over the city gathered at the sites where thousands lost their lives to remember family and friends. Flowers and flaming candles were placed on the ground and everyone held their own moments of silence.

Later the same day Miguel de la Madrid and his retinue gathered at the Garden of Solidarity, built on the site of what was formerly the Regis Hotel, totally destroyed by the earthquake. The president layed a wreath of flowers on the site and stood at attention as part of an honour guard. Then he unveiled

a plaque that reads: "To the solidarity of all Mexicans. September 19, 1985-86."

Yet reconstruction is still not over. The previous day De la Madrid had visited the poor barrios most damaged by the earthquake and handed over the deeds to 6,824 housing units built by the Office for Housing Renovation. This means that 80.9% of this specific program, as well as 75.5% of the four government programs set up to replace housing lost to the 90,000 families left homeless by the quake, where still pending.

At an evaluation meeting held by the National Reconstruction Committee following the commemorative ceremonies, Budget and Planning Secretary Carlos Salinas de Gortari, who also heads the Committee, said that normality will not be a pretext for forgetting or filing away the problems of reconstruction. Mr. de Gortari reported that as of Sept. 15 the National Reconstruction Fund set up with foreign and domestic donations, had received 43.65 billion pesos, 41.416 billion of which had

been used. The Fund's income in dollars came to 14.2 million out of which \$9.8 million had been used.

He also reported that 1,472 damaged school-buildings had been repaired, while the health sector had been assigned 57 billion pesos to replace lost hospital beds, medical equipment and buildings lost in the quake. Yet figures show that reconstruction in health and education alone requires close to 300 billion pesos.

The situation is really still precarious. The country's economic problems hinder the use of available resources to speed up reconstruction. At the Committee meeting President De la Madrid stated that: "We regard the legitimate impatience of those who lost everything as a challenge which must be met with the scarce resources available and as an enormous task that must be carried out urgently. We will continue to stand up to our commitment toward those still suffering from the effects of the tragedy."

Over 20,000 families are still liv-

ing in street camps and shelters, and overall some 68,000 homes need to be built or repaired. On Sept. 19, 1986, close to 100,000 people demonstrated in Mexico City demanding speedier reconstruction efforts and an extension of the 1985 decree that expropriated 4,323 urban properties in order to alleviate the housing problem aggravated by the earthquake. Congress had already picked up on the demand and was studying it. Miguel de la Madrid admitted that reconstruction is by no means over and that, "the wounds caused by the disaster are still open. our efforts are not over yet. Nonetheless, we have come through a painful and difficult ordeal strengthened by greater confidence in ourselves and in our capacity to face up to the challenges imposed on us by fate."

September 19, 1986, was an expression of Mexico's mourning as well as of its efforts to rebuild what nature, in a sweep of her hand, took from us a year ago.

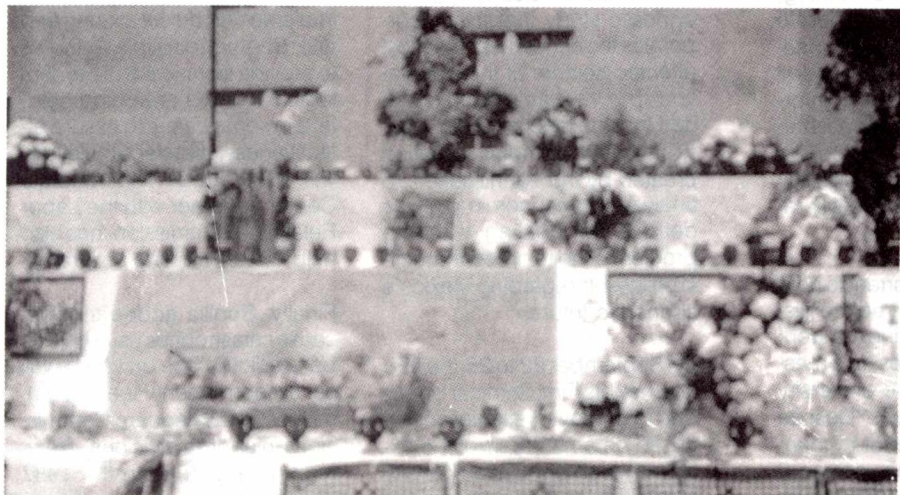
Jorge Luis Sierra Guzmán

cent housing. We want to by-pass the bureaucratic obstacles created by the officials. We want to build.

Ms. Irma Lara, Dr. Erazo Street

### Happy and Sad

When our homes are being rebuilt, we're both happy and sad. Happy because at last we're going to have a house again, but sad, too, because we'll have to go live in the "chicken coops" (slang name for the temporary shelters



Traditional "offering" to the dead at Nuevo León building in Tlatelolco



Some 300 apartments went down in the Nuevo León building, which became a symbol of the earthquake's victims.

Photo by Susan Masuoka

Photo by Susan Masuoka

# The National University's Involvement

Despite the unexpected nature of last September's seismic activity, the university community was able to respond immediately to help victims. The National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), in addition to providing assistance in hard hit areas, devoted major energies to studying the disaster's repercussions as part of its contribution to national reconstruction; and it intensified the search for ways to predict future earthquakes, in the hopes of avoiding the loss of human life and property.

That's how Fausto Burgueño, Director of the UNAM's Institute for Economic Research (IIEc), explained the university's role in the aftermath of the disaster. In an interview with *Voices of Mexico*, one year after the quakes, he continued, "the UNAM was able, in just a few hours, to organize special brigades made up of people from the medical, engineering and architecture schools, among others."

After this first phase of humanitarian aid, the university began to gather information and statistics. The work carried out by the Institute for Social Research was particularly important in this regard, organizing some 300 volunteers to conduct a survey among the victims.

"In general in Mexico, no one was prepared for that kind of contingency, but in the particular case of the university community, our structure facilitated our being able to act from the very first instant of the tragedy," explained the IIEc's director. "The affected areas laid bare very serious problems in the Mexican economy and society. From there, as social scientists, it was extremely important to begin studying the socio-economic impact of the seismic events."

## UNIVERSITY BRIGADES IN THE AFFECTED ZONES

To get a more detailed view of the university's activities after the earthquake, we interviewed

Lauro Bonilla Marín, head of the Social Communication and Information Division of the General Office of Medical Services (DGMS, better known as University City Medical Center). He agreed with his colleague Fausto Burgueño regarding the UNAM's rapid response to the disaster: "By 10 a.m. on September 19, brigades had been organized to provide first aid for victims, to rescue those trapped and to recover bodies and others to catalog medicines and collect foodstuffs. The next day we began to receive clothing and other goods donated by academic staff, students and other employees. Within four days, the Medical Center could no longer store all the donated material, so it was taken to University Stadium. The brigades worked 24 hours a day."

Dr. Jorge Carpizo, Rector of the UNAM, designated Dr. Alfonso Millán, director of the DGSM, to coordinate the university's activities, which at one point included 852 brigades, composed of some 7000 people from the university community. In the days following the quakes, they participated in rescue operations, furnished aid to the victims, inspected buildings, provided psychological therapy, cremated bodies, distributed medicines, provisions and clothing, delivered plasma and blood to hospitals and provided information and advice to the general population. Reports and information on danger areas and the location of shelters and collection centers were transmitted by *Radio UNAM*, the university radio station.

In addition, it is important to note that Dr. Carpizo toured the disaster areas, inspecting the work done by the brigades. In a message directed to the university community, he stated, "Despite the grief in this time of tremendous tragedy and national mourning, we are comforted by the fact that the University is fulfilling its obligations to the country and by our firm conviction that

the whole of Mexican society will soon heal its wounds and advance quickly in the tasks of recuperation and reconstruction. Thank you for your collaboration, your solidarity and your eagerness to help."

## THE UNAM WORKS IN NATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION

According to the Director of the IIEc, one of the UNAM's major contributions to solving some of the earthquake related problems has been to develop research that may provide new ideas for dealing with the very high human population densities found in certain geographic regions of Mexico, as well as for predicting major earthquakes. Virtually all of the UNAM's research facilities are involved in these kinds of activities.

As an example of these efforts, Burgueño mentioned a "Project Proposal to Analyze the Current Socio-Economic Situation and its Perspectives After the September 19th and 20th Earthquakes," published by the journal *Problemas del Desarrollo* (Problems in Development), as "Economic Crisis, Earthquakes and Economic Policy." The main objective of the effort is to add to an analysis of the implications of earthquakes, contributing to the reconstruction process through the development of a diagnostic study that fully incorporates the concerns of the most affected sectors of the population. The Institute's Director added that the idea is to help clarify the very complex situation created by the earthquakes, to analyze the economic policies defined for dealing with the problems and to present specific proposals regarding Mexico's economic future.

On September 22 to 25, the IIEc also held its First Seminar on Urban Economy. Presentations focused on an analysis of the extremely high population density in the Mexico City metropolitan area and the economic crisis among marginal social sectors; both are aspects of the country's

general situation, which together with other phenomena, have produced serious negative effects in the post-earthquake period.

The speakers emphasized that the country's rapid economic growth in recent times created significant modifications in the society's configuration and structure, as well as in the ecosystem. This has led to the consolidation of a highly urbanized population, with more than 50% of the country's people now living in cities. Thus, it was really inevitable that the high degree of urban concentration should have repercussions in the earthquake's aftermath. One of the conclusions drawn was that it is necessary to seek measures, through medium and long term planning, which can reverse the trends of chaotic growth and the over-concentration of the human population.

In terms of the UNAM's academic work, emphasis was placed on the need to define and systematize specific areas of research, analysis and reflection that can help in the search for solutions to the country's socio-economic problems, without ignoring their necessary relationship to the other sciences, as well.

Returning to the very immediate problems associated with major catastrophes, Bonilla Marín explained that the UNAM is taking a series of preventive measures to avoid a repeat of September 1985, when initial responses were insufficient. University experts have designed a permanent plan contemplating basic measures to be implemented before, during and after a natural disaster. Activities to provide technical and psychological training are being held, and in some cases to assure effectiveness, disaster simulations will be staged. The Medical Center, together with the Labor Relations Commission, has also held first aid training programs.

Finally, Bonilla added that because catastrophes usually can't be predicted, the university will set up permanent Health Committees and Safeguard Commissions in all of its divisions. Training will begin during the 1987 academic year.

Haroldo Shetemul



set up in badly damaged neighborhoods) for a while.

Ms. Sara' López de Aguirre, Dr. Vértiz St.

### Work

We went through quite an ordeal for a while, but by making sacrifices you can get so much accomplished. We're working with picks and shovels, men and women with wheel barrels carting away the rubble. The children are working, too, running errands, carrying smaller rocks, everyone. There's the proof that together we can get things done.

Ms. Berta Hernández R., Dr. C. Bernard St.

### Accomplishments

The Union's already built a day care center that's about to be inaugurated. And we set up a clinic and a legal aid office. We've worked on reconstruction plans for 25 buildings, and we're about to start work on them.

Mr. Guillermo López, Dr. Vértiz Street

### Women

Since the men have to go to work every day, we women try to make a little time for the Union.



Women carry on with reconstruction in Colonia Doctores.

We're working in the day care center, we set up a sewing course so we could learn and bring in a little extra money. We also help build our houses, we help the construction workers, but we also leave some of the work for the men.

Ms. Juanita Amaro, Dr. Erazo Street

### Youth

All over the city you could see young people helping out after the earthquake. We were the majority of the volunteers in the rescue work after the quake, and for days after, there were still many, many young people helping out in the streets. Now lots of us teenagers in the neighborhood have organized to help rebuild housing, and we've also organized soccer tournaments and races; we've held cultural and art fairs. Here in the neighborhood there are lots of bars and plenty of other places to go if you're looking for trouble. There's got to be other ways to have a good time, to relax, right.

Mr. Gabriel Ledezma, Dr. Vértiz Street

### The Neighborhood

Our neighborhood is old and poor, with lots of old tenements that are really deteriorated. We are all poor people; our daily lives are very, very simple. We all know each other in the tenement, and we even know lots of people along the street, we always say hi to each other; it's like one big family.

Ms. Juanita Amaro, Dr. Erazo Street

### Social Consciousness

Because of the earthquake we started to talk to each other more, we got to know more about each others' lives, about our families. We've become more united. There was so much solidarity, and we've become more and united because we all have the same problems, and we all want to solve them. That's why we've united more, because our problems are exactly the same.

Ms. Isabel Celia Rivas, Dr. Velazco Street

### The Future

We're not going to stop here.

Ms. Irma Lara, Dr. Erazo Street ★

Compiled by M.A. Díaz León,  
Communication Workers

# A Collection in Support of the Nicaraguan People

*Taking into account the hostile siege against the Nicaraguan people and their struggle for self-determination, as well as the critical economic situation that country faces, one thousand Mexicans belonging to different political and ideological currents began a national fund-raising drive for Nicaragua during the last week of September. Their purpose is to set up an emergency fund that will be used to purchase urgently needed goods for the Central American country.*

*Under the slogan: "In the presence of dollars for war, contributions for peace," the initial funders called on the peoples of Mexico, America and the world to unleash a public opinion movement to alert citizens and governments about the foreign and military intervention against Nicaragua, as well as the risks this represents for peace, democratic development and self-determination. The one thousand politicians, intellectuals and journalists, among others, who signed the call to action, charged that the government of the United States has made Nicaragua a target for its aggressive interventionist strategy, even assigning funds for armed bands whose specific aim is to overthrow a legitimately constituted government. They stated that, adding insult to injury, Washington approved \$100 million in aid to the Somocista bands and then arrogantly dismissed the World Court's finding condemning U.S. aggression against Nicaragua.*

*The one thousand contributed 10,000 pesos each to set up a trust fund with an initial deposit of 10 million pesos (some \$12,500), and called on individuals and institutions to contribute to the cause. The resources will be used to purchase food, medicine and clothing, materials for building homes and schools and medical equipment for hospitals.*

## IN THE PRESENCE OF DOLLARS FOR WAR, CONTRIBUTIONS FOR PEACE Preliminary Considerations

1. The government of the United States has made Nicaragua a target for an aggressive interventionist strategy that assigns funds to armed bands with the explicit aim of "destabilizing" the legitimately constituted government, an original offspring of the Popular Revolution

that overthrew the dictator Anastasio Somoza on July 19, 1979.

2. During the last few weeks, contravening basic principles of international law, Reagan Administration officials, and President Reagan himself, have increased their verbal terrorism in support of their material terrorism fueled by Congress' recent authorization of \$100 million in aid and of CIA support for the Somocista bands. To this must be added Washington's arrogant disobedience of the World Court at the Hague's ruling condemning U.S. aggression against Nicaragua.

3. At the same time, some neighboring governments, under open pressure from Washington, tend to distance themselves from the pacifying, disarmamentist and non-interventionist actions developed in the region by the Contadora Group, and this further adds to the evident hostile siege against the Nicaraguan people and their efforts towards self-determination. To this must be added that U.S. troops, tanks, fighter aircraft and military advisors stationed in North American bases located along Nicaragua's boundaries, also lay siege behind this initial encirclement.

Militarist and interventionist sectors within the United States are trying to impose the East-West confrontation on the situation in order to justify the aggression, all within an outlook that would turn Nicaragua, and eventually the whole of Central America, into a bloody battlefield for the hegemonist powers, with disastrous consequences for peace, stability and civilized coexistence in all of Latin America.

FACED WITH THESE FACTS AND THIS OMINOUS OUTLOOK, WE, THE MEXICAN CITIZENS WHO SIGN THIS STATEMENT, CALL ON THE PEOPLE OF MEXICO AND ON THE PEOPLES OF AMERICA AND THE WORLD TO:

I. Erect a public opinion movement that can keep citizens and governments alike alerted to the ongoing military intervention against Nicaragua and to the risks this implies for peace, democratic development and the self-determination of the peoples of America and the world. Given this course of events, our impassiveness

means abandoning our Nicaraguan brothers and sisters when they face a disproportional military power, which means condemning them to destruction and their incipient institutions to annihilation. Peace in the Americas is indivisible.

II. Mobilize the citizens of the world so that their voices may be heard in behalf of:

— A stop to the bellicose preparations promoted, organized and sponsored by the current government of the United States against the people of Nicaragua.

— U.S. obeisance of international law and of the resolutions passed by the institutions charged with its application.

— A stop to and a rejection of the United States' pressure on Central American governments, in order to recompose favorable regional conditions so that Latin America's Contadora Group and its Support Groups can immediately resume their peace-making efforts.

— Self-determination and non-intervention in Central America.

III. Immediately start a world-wide fund-raising drive and collection of necessary goods for the Nicaraguan people under the slogan:

IN THE PRESENCE OF DOLLARS FOR WAR,  
CONTRIBUTIONS FOR PEACE

We have set up a trust fund in Banca Cremi under the name of "Fund to Support Peace in Nicaragua," in order to handle donations.

We call on individuals, groups and institutions to deposit their contributions in account No. 5168000-6 in Banca Cremi, S.N.C. We mean to start similar movements in other countries, and we call on peace loving people to reproduce this initiative by whatever means available to them, both in Mexico and abroad.

(This statement was published followed by the signatures of 1,000 well-known Mexican citizens.)★


**voices** of MEXICO  
News, Commentary and Documents on Current Events in Mexico and Latin America

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# The Puerto Vallarta Declaration

*Last October 9, Ministers of Justice and Attorney Generals from 12 countries met in Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco, with the purpose of working out common policy guidelines to fight drug traffic and abuse. The countries represented at the two-day conference were the United States, Belize, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Panama, Colombia, Peru, Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Jamaica and Mexico.*

*At the inauguration, President Miguel de la Madrid demanded that the struggle against drug smuggling be conceived as a clear and firm international movement and as a harmonious factor that can help ward off "the risk that these problems may come between us." Mexican Attorney General Sergio García Ramírez said the main object of the meeting was to acquire greater knowledge of the issue at hand in order to improve the capacity to combat drug trafficking and consumption.*

*United States Attorney General Edwin Meese proposed that the United Nations set up a fund to be used in the international struggle against drug trafficking. In his address, Mr. Meese also reprimanded the U.S. press and regreted that there has been irresponsible criticism of Mexico.*

*Peruvian representative Carlos Blancas Bustamante and Ecuador's Jorge Maldonado Rennella both rejected the use of U.S. soldiers in Latin American countries on the pretext of fighting drug traffic. They said the United States should use its troops to combat the use of drugs in its own territory instead of sending them to other countries to attack drug production.*

*The document issued at the close of the meeting was released under the name of "The Puerto Vallarta Declaration." Because of its importance for future joint efforts in the struggle against drug abuse, VOICES OF MEXICO reproduces the complete statement:*

## THE PUERTO VALLARTA DECLARATION

The Ministers of Justice and Attorney Generals (or their representatives) of several countries met on October 8-10, 1986 in Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco, Mexico. Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, United States, Guatemala, Jamaica, Panama, Peru and Venezuela were called together by Mexico because of a mutual

concern for the issues to be dealt with. The purpose of the meeting was to exchange points of view and to stimulate concerted regional actions, all within a framework of respect for each country's regard for its own national rights vis a vis the other countries present or any other country in the international community.

Invitations to the meeting were sent out by Mexican President Miguel de la Madrid to the Heads of State of several American countries, and the event was named "Regional Meeting of Ministers of Justice and Attorney Generals." The representatives acknowledged the Mexican president's initiative and expressed their gratitude for the hospitality of the Mexican government.

A broad examination of the problems of drug trafficking and abuse in the nations represented at the Meeting was made in order to acquire greater insight into its specific characteristics and to strengthen both national and international means of combating the problem. Delegates delivered their presentations without the constraint of a rigid agenda and without intending to adopt resolutions that differed from those adopted by each individual nation. This work-method favored frank and open discussions.

This meeting does not substitute for other forums dedicated to examine the issue of drug traffic and to coordinate actions. Thus, the participants reaffirm the subsistence of previous agreements, methods and mechanisms to study and combat drug traffic and abuse.

The Puerto Vallarta Meeting fulfilled its objectives and allowed the governments represented to carry out an effective examination of the issue. Everyone stressed the prevailing good will and respect for the solutions that each country adopts as an exercise of its sovereignty, as well as the need to favor mutual cooperation according to applicable international and national norms and in accordance with the specific characteristics of these problems.

In view of all this, the governments represented at the Regional Meeting of Ministers of Justice and Attorney Generals decided by consensus to express the following statements:

1. A reiteration of the firm political decision to

forcefully continue in the struggle against the crimes that endanger the health of the peoples represented at this Meeting, and the permanent determination to prevent and correct drug abuse. The gravity and complexity of these problems that cause severe damage to society and its institutions was stressed. It was added that it is necessary to act against this crime against health at different stages, beginning with the planning and financing of the narcotics trade and including consumption of drugs and psychotropics.

2. The unavoidable need for objective in-depth knowledge of the factors that determine or propitiate drug traffic and abuse was recognized. It was stated that an efficient struggle against these problems implies, beyond police and legal measures, a firm and vigorous effort on behalf of social, economic and cultural development, in the belief that this type of factor has a determinant influence on the appearance and development of drug traffic and abuse.

3. The convenience of favoring legitimate coordination of tasks among the region's countries was recognized, taking into account that drug trafficking is an internationally executed crime. In order to achieve this end the countries will adopt the measures that each considers pertinent to effectively share information and provide adequate assistance in penal matters, all within each country's constitutional and legal framework.

4. Taking into account the present characteristics of delinquency against the health of the individual, the family and especially against children and youth, note was taken of legislative and institutional reforms undertaken by different countries. It was considered convenient to further update or modernize national legislation on the matter as well as the means and instruments to apply said legislation, all in the terms that each country considers convenient.

5. It was also noted that several countries lack the necessary resources to strike at these crimes and to correct their causes. Thus, it was considered convenient to favor the use of resources secured by or confiscated from those involved in these delinquent activities in order to support national and international campaigns against drug traffic and abuse. Each participant will review the means and terms of promoting this measure.

6. The convenience of improving technical qualifications and equipment for the development of national campaigns against drug traffic and abuse was emphasized. Thus, participants in the Meeting expressed their willingness to support each other in this respect in accordance to measures allowed for by each nation's legislation.

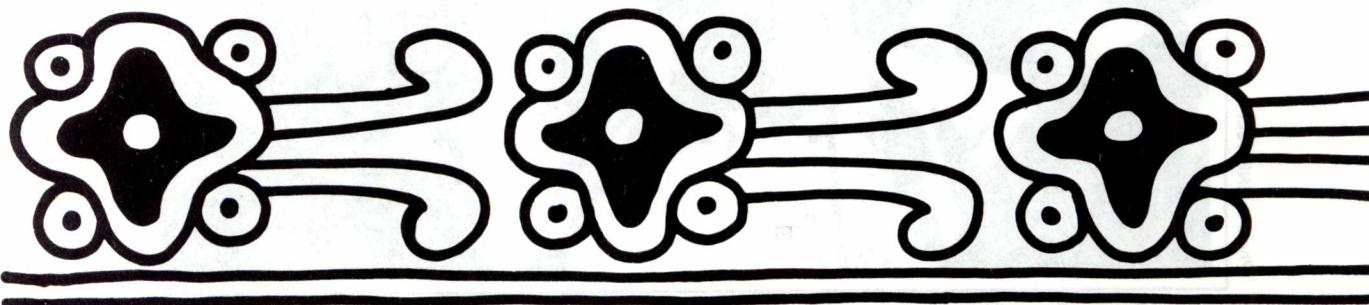
7. Reports were heard on the significant efforts many nations are carrying out to prevent and remedy drug abuse. Within this framework, it was considered necessary to support broad community mobilization in these countries, respecting prevailing norms and traditions, to develop an awareness of the gravity of the problems under examination and of the need to prevent and eradicate them through the joint effort of different social sectors. The development of this awareness in the family, at schools and at the work place is extremely important.

8. Some of the participants proposed setting up a working group or committee in charge of planning measures to further greater regional cooperation with the purpose of effectively reducing production, trafficking and illicit consumption of drugs and psychotropics. The suggestion was left open with the agreement that it should be acted on as soon as possible, at a future meeting of the region's Ministers of Justice and Attorney Generals represented at Puerto Vallarta.

9. Likewise, the usefulness of meetings such as this was recognized, as they serve to stimulate free and efficient exchange of points of view in an atmosphere of mutual appreciation, harmony and respect. Suggestions were heard for possible future meetings of this type to be convened by the interested countries following consultations with the nations represented at the Puerto Vallarta Meeting, and if such were the case, with other countries of America whose presence would be useful depending on the state of drug trafficking and abuse in these countries.

10. The participants stated their recognition of the efforts made by all to be present at the Puerto Vallarta Meeting, as well as everyone's pertinent expositions. They also confirmed their mutually binding and firm resolve to participate in a common struggle against drug trafficking and abuse.★

Puerto Vallarta, October 10, 1986.



# Surrealism and Mexico

A major art exhibit provokes a remembrance of how this school of art came to be associated with the fantasy of the Mexican people.

*Mexico's powerful reality has often touched a sensitive spot in the soul of European artists. Since the surrealist program is one of beauty, eroticism, black humour and sensuality, it is no surprise that it should find itself at home in a country where the transition between reality and fantasy is an every day occurrence. But what nowadays seem a natural convergence had a great deal of difficulty getting off the ground in the late 1930s. Art critic Ida Rodríguez Prampolini, who put together this exhibit, explains why this was so.*

The exhibit "Surrealists in Mexico" opened last August at the National Museum with paintings by the first European surrealists in Mexico. Starting with Antonin Artaud, it comprises the latest

young painters of this school, and includes the work of Mexican artists not orthodoxly aligned with surrealism but who do respond to what that school of painting sought for in our country: the fantasy of the Mexican people. Although lacking formal links to the French school of painting, these artists were inspired by Mexico's myths and spontaneity, its magic and traditions.

When French Poet André Breton, founder of the surrealist movement, came to Mexico in 1938, the press published a long interview on his impressions. "I dreamt of Mexico—said Breton—and I find myself here... Never before have I felt how reality so splendidly fulfills the promises of dreams."

Breton went on to list the outstanding and unusual that he found in Mexico. "...its ever-active mythical past, the marvelous social melting-pot expressed in the exemplary attitude of its foreign policy in recent years (a reference to President Lázaro Cárdenas' policy toward the Spanish Civil War), and something more intimate, the unique way in which a keen sensitivity shows through in their expressions of black humour, which is very dear to me... Mexico tends to be the utmost surrealist place... I find the surreal Mexico in its highlights, in its flora, in the energy that stems from its mixture of races and from its highest aspirations."



Photo by INBA/SEP

André Breton, Diego Rivera and Leon Trotsky in Mexico.

From Mexico's political, social and mythical atmosphere, from its fantasy and folklore, the French poet no doubt singled out characteristics which apparently linked our way of life to surrealist principles. His enthusiasm was all the greater because at the time he visited our country the surrealist movement tended toward the revolutionary left and its projects. Mexico under Cárdenas seemed to be enacting some of the aspirations and petitions that European surrealists included in their Manifesto of 1924.

Fourteen years separated the Breton of the First Surrealist Manifesto from the poet who came to Mexico in 1938, years during which not only the man but surrealism itself changed. Breton arrived shrouded in the fame of controversy, enlightenment and sectarianism, cloaked in the image of the intolerant prophet-inquisitor. He was no longer supported by the friends who originally set out with him on the adventurous attempt to save mankind. Most of them had fallen by the wayside under the pressure of his lashing tongue and of the public indictments metted out by Breton's intolerance toward the contradictions that he exalted in theory. This is why throughout his life the poet was forced to seek out new and increasingly younger followers. We can even understand how the artist's conceit led him to publicly remark on the Mexican press' failure to give adequate coverage to his lectures, since he was explaining none other than the program that art should follow in this atmosphere so potentially akin to surrealism.

When the International Surrealist Exhibit opened at the Mexican Art Gallery in January, 1940 it received the same luke-warm welcome Breton had been given two years before. The show

was organized by a young star of the European movement, the Austrian Wolfgang Paalen, and by Peruvian Poet César Moro. It included works by Dalí, Magritte, Picasso, Masson, Delveaux, Tanguy and other Europeans, along with the paintings of Mexican artists such as Diego Rivera, Guillermo Meza, Agustín Lazo, Frida Kahlo and Remedios Varo. Prehispanic art objects and other so-called works of "savage art" were included along with photographs. The exhibit was mounted conventionally instead of with the excentric flourishes surrealists were notorious for.

Mexican painter Manuel Rodríguez Lozano wrote at the time: "It's naive to bring surrealism to the homeland of marijuana. You don't paint when you're high, you paint when you're lucid, and that's when the reality of the Mexican people is portrayed."

The works of two women painters, Remedios Varo and Frida Kahlo, were included in this now famous 1940 exhibit. Perhaps an analysis of their painting can help explain why the surrealist's program had such a scant following in Mexico and was really only taken up by foreign-born artists, as was the case of Remedios Varo.

This artist came to Mexico from Cataluña in 1942, although one of her works, *Memory of The Valkyrie*, preceded her and was exhibited in 1938. When Remedios Varo came to America she was a fully developed artist with a solid and knowledgeable mastery of her craft. She was firmly rooted in the surrealist school after having lived in Paris with Poet Benjamin Peret, who came with her, and partaking in the close circle of Breton's followers: Paul Eluard, Yves

## Painters of Seven Generations

Works by seven generations of painters were brought together to communicate among themselves and with visitors at an important new exhibit, *Confrontation 86: A Synchronic View of Mexican Painting*. Shown at the Palace of Fine Arts from July 18 to September 7, this sampling of 165 painters occupied six of the museum's large halls. The exhibit was sponsored by the Division of Visual Arts to provide a "balance sheet of Mexico's artistic assets." Works were chosen by six external specialists along with three others from the Division.

The organizers maintain that the show revealed "one of the possible pictorial truths of today's national reality," and that it provided a journey through several

Mexican schools of art: realist, free figurativist, fantastic, lyric abstract, geometric, minimalist, neofigurativist and neoexpressionist. Nonetheless, for this reviewer's taste, the journey was excessive.

The painters chosen to be shown by all of the judges (Tamayo, Gerzo, Soriano, Cuevas, Rojo, Felguérez, Gironella and Toledo) were given 3.6 meters of exhibition space for up to three works. The next group received 3.2 meters for up to two paintings, and the others 1.6 meters for one work.

It is said that Diego Rivera, hyphenation Mexican muralist, often listened to the conversations of the plant kingdom and the music of paintings. If we sup-

pose that common mortals may also partake of that possibility, then this reviewer would have to say, perhaps rather rashly, that he was left with only one thing for certain: *Confrontation 86* offered lots of painting and little music and much noise and, at best, a couple of nuts.

Through the view of these particular eyes, the only memorable and vigorous music was to be found in "The Vocation of Teacher Magdalena" (Belkin; "La vocación de la maestra Magdalena"), "Sacrifice" (Castañeda; "Sacrificio"), "The Hour is Transparent" (Coen; "La hora es transparente"), "Intolerance" (Cuevas; "Intolerancia"), "Without Work" (Dosamantes; "El sin trabajo"), "Time Threatened" (Esqueda; "Tiempo ame-

nazado"), "The Miraculous Lord of the Iguanas" (Flores; "El señor milagroso de las iguanas"), "Crowded and Cornered" (González Rodríguez; "Amon-tonados y arrinconados"), "Adolescent Conversing with a Bird" (Hernández; "Adolescente dialogando con un pájaro"), "Character in the Border Country" (Val Ra; "Personaje en el país de la frontera"), "Pompey" (Rivera; "Pompeya"), "Landscape with Birds" (Soriano; "Paisaje con pájaros"), "Against the Wind" (Vargas; "Contra el viento"), and "Prometheus, Second State" (Vlady; "Prometeo, segundo estado").

Luis Perdomo Orellana



Photo by INBA/SEP

María Izquierdo, *Sueño y presentimiento* (*Dream and Foreboding*), oil painting, 1947.



Tanguy, Joan Miró, Max Ernst and so on.

Remedios Varo's work is a far cry from automatic, unconscious surrealism. Her line of thought has a clear sense of direction that shapes an arbitrarily organized world, and in this sense she came close to the excess of rationality that finally pervaded surrealism. She strongly identified with Breton's idea that "only the marvelous is beautiful, there is no beauty without marvel." Varo painted a world of fantasy, but her starting point and connecting thread is rational and preconceived. Everything is measured and proportioned, and the spark of the initiate is absent. Her images overlap and seem to spring forth spontaneously, yet this is merely a refined illusion. Once you follow her paintings you're never surprised.

This artist's work envelopes us in life and in the happenings in a wondrous magician's world. Yet her sober, prudent story-telling never gets carried away by either magic or anguish. Her paintings leave us with a soothing sense of pleasure and a lingering smile.

Frida Kahlo's work, on the other hand, produces an entirely different effect: it racks our soul with emotions, terror, fear and pain. In comparing the two painters we find that although both are centered in worlds of their own, the Spaniard has none other than that of a visionary little girl. Frida, in appearance also full of herself, her illness and sadness, her thorn-covered face and tearful eyes, is really a mirror that reflects Mexico. Behind her initial images lurks the core issue of our western culture and of man himself: life and death, which in Mexico are regarded as complementary parts of a whole rather than as contradictory.

Frida met Breton and other surrealists during a short stay in Paris in 1937. The poet came to Mexico a year later and included her work in the second enlarged edition of his book *Le surrealisme et la peinture* (Surrealism and Painting.) His commentary was to the effect that Kahlo's work had been conceived in total ignorance of the reasoning guiding him and his followers, yet had nonetheless blossomed into full surrealism. Breton added that Frida's painting was like a ribbon tied around a bomb.

Breton is right about Frida's ignorance of the ongoing French movement when she painted the early part of her work, yet he's wrong to classify her work as surrealist.

I consider Frida Kahlo the most important artist Mexico has produced because of her depth and vigor. Knowledge of the surrealist program may have provided her with additional confidence in her own search, but she's firmly rooted in Mexican and Latin American tradition rather than in the paths of western-world logic that eventually produced surrealism.

Just as it's impossible to tell time and space in the work of Remedios Varo or in Englishwoman Leonora Carrington's, who also lived in Mex-

ico, in Frida the place is Mexico and Latin America, and the time is specific: the nationalistic revolutionary period that followed the Revolution of 1910. Precisely because her work refers to time and space, it's a link with a tradition that starts in pre-Hispanic times.

Frida is nurtured by America, by the concept of good and evil permeating the Mayan poem *Popol Vuh* in the Quiché version we're familiar with even though it was written down in colonial times. As Luis Cardoza y Aragón wrote so beautifully in *Guatemala, las líneas de su mano* (*Guatemala, The Lines of Her Hand*), the work is prodigious in its portrayal of the world's telluric gestation in the struggle between the men of death and darkness—the men of Xibalbá—and the first men of life. The duality between good and evil, heaven and hell, day and night is debated constantly throughout the work. The poem is dense and tumultuous, brutal yet at the same time intensely refined. Man-gods and men moved by magical obsession progress through the dawn of dreams and time, creating and destroying worlds. In this vein, Frida's work reflects destruction and rebirth.

My main point is that there's a constant cultural factor in Mexican art, a flowing of life inhabited by kindred species, by spirits that touch and take in the Mexican people's cultural sap and convert it into poems, sculpted stone, folk-songs such as the *corrido*, votive offerings or acts of thanksgiving. The world of necessity and roots flowers through in Mexican culture, as do survival, the creaking bone of Posadas and blood, be it from a heart cut from the breast or from skin torn from the flesh in pre-Hispanic culture, the same blood that returns in the lacerated village Christ-figures and sprouts like the flower of tradition in the scars of Frida Kahlo's tormented body and in her double heart exploded to bloodletting.

The black humour Breton so cherished is intellectual game and ingenious paradox in surrealism, a subtle and almost pitiless sense of the absurd. In Mexico, in Frida Kahlo, black humour is a wound, sharp pain, destiny and everyday reality that must be accepted in order to carry on with life and death.

It's by no means accidental that Breton's surrealist program for Mexico failed to develop into a school of painting at a time in which the revolution brought the recognition of national tradition and authenticity to the forefront. It was only years later when young generations sought to break out of what they regarded as a cultural barrier and to "broaden their international scope", that surrealism was taken up as a possible program, as were lyrical and geometrical abstractionism. From the 1950s and on we can say there are Mexican surrealist painters who incorporated the European school's teachings. Before that only foreign-born painters, among them Remedios Varo, worked within the surrealist program. But they were also foreign to the Mexican tradition that produced painters like Antonio Ruiz, Carlos Lazo and Frida Kahlo.★

# Community of Central American Writers and Artists

CEAC, the Community of Central American Writers and Artists, was born last September in Honduras, the country that hosts both U.S. troops and the Nicaraguan contra, a situation that threatens to erupt into an all-out regional war. The Community was set up with the double purpose of contributing toward the peaceful solution of the regional crisis while at the same time helping to gather the roots of regional cultural identity.

Central American writers assembled during the Second Meeting of Honduran Writers held in Tegucigalpa with the presence of guests from all of Central America, Mexico and Colombia. They decided to come together around their own field of work and around the need to make an effective contribution to the process of securing and expanding Central American cultural unity. Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras, provided an inspiring backdrop for the event with its

contrast between the modern and the provincial, its hilly surroundings and brand-new skyscrapers, while the tremendous poverty of most Hondurans shows through it all.

The five-day event included round-table discussions, lectures and readings on poetry and contemporary literature, and there was an exhibit of contemporary Central American painting. The National Union of Honduran Writers was also set up during the meeting.

CEAC set out to achieve three specific goals: a) organizing its first Congress next year in Guatemala City; b) setting up a research center on Central American society and culture; and c) editing a regional literary magazine. Significantly, CEAC is sponsored by the National Autonomous University of Honduras, the Ministry of Culture of

Nicaragua, the University of El Salvador and the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences, FLACSO.

The Community's Coordinating Committee was set up as follows: José Roberto Cea and Manlio Argueta for El Salvador; Arturo Arias and Mario Roberto Morales for Guatemala; Galel Cárdenas and Dino Fanconi for Honduras; Rogelio Sinán and Moravia Ochoa for Panama; Julio Valle Castillo and Daisy Zamora for Nicaragua, and Osvaldo Sauma and Rodolfo Dada for Costa Rica.

Thus, CEAC comes to provide an organizational space for the region's writers and artists at a time when unified efforts are required if we are to keep the land of Rubén Darío, Miguel Angel Asturias and Roque Dalton from becoming a terrible battlefield.

Haroldo Shetemul



Photo by INBA/SEP

Frida Kahlo, *Mi nana y yo* (*My Nanny and I*), oil on tin, 1937.

# Towards a National Park in Texcoco's Lake

*Initial steps are finally being taken to save Mexico's Central Valley from oblivion.*

The Texcoco Basin, located to the southwest of Mexico's Central Valley and covering more than 20,000 acres is being recreated as an ecological reserve, the most important of its kind in the country. The "Basin" refers to the area that was covered by the Great Texcoco Lake in pre-hispanic times. The capital city of the Aztec empire, Tenochtitlan, was first built on one of the lake's numerous islands. The city grew to cover virtually all of the islands, creating the "Venice" described by the Spanish conquerors after their arrival in 1510. With the Spanish occupation and the growth of colonial Mexico, the lake began to dry up. Today, its only remains are the swamps on the eastern edge of Mexico City, near the international airport.

The Texcoco Lake Commission, under the direction of the Agriculture and Water Resources Ministry (SARH), explains, "The demographic concentration produced by migratory pressures from rural areas to the city and surrounding areas by people in search of better living conditions has greatly contributed to the precipitous deterioration of biotic resources in the capital city's natural and social environment."

Because these problems demanded urgent action, the Texcoco Lake Commission was set up in March 1971. Including representatives from several different federal and state agencies, the Commission was to develop a plan of action for the future development of the region legally defined as the Texcoco Basin. A March 19, 1971 Presidential Decree established a 60 day period for formulating a plan to meet the following objectives:

- maximize the utilization of water available in the zone for agricultural, industrial, recreational, touristic and other purposes considered convenient for the Valley of Mexico and surrounding areas;
- develop forested, agricultural, industrial and residential areas in the Texcoco Lake (or Basin) area, along with the corresponding communications systems and other services;
- and define the measures necessary to reduce the dust storms in the Valley of Mexico, which originate to a large degree within Texcoco Lake.

## THE LAKE'S PAST

According to Lake Commission officials, in pre-hispanic times the people of the region developed a "water technology" that allowed them to live harmoniously in their natural environment. The algae and other plant life, aquatic birds, fish, insects, crustaceans, amphibians and small mammals that lived or roamed in the surrounding area all formed an important part of the native diet. With the Spanish invasion in 1510 a series of activities were initiated in the rural areas that were to have a profoundly disruptive effect on the previous equilibrium between man and nature. They provoked a variety of sudden ecological changes that reduced local biotic diversity and numbers at an alarming rate.

Finally, according to the Commission, these events gradually resulted in the total desiccation of Texcoco Lake and an even greater degree of ecological degradation due to the added effects of modern-day contaminants.

## THE CONTAMINATING BASIN

According to official figures, the Valley of Mexico has lost some 73% of its forests and 99% of its lakes. To take one case: until 14 years ago the Texcoco Basin seemed much like a moonscape filled with dust and detritus that formed dust storms in the dry season winds, worsening the pollution in the already seriously degraded Valley. The problem had been around for years. In a 1876 message to the country's Medical Congress, Francisco Garay warned that "when Texcoco Lake is low, dust clouds form that rival those in Africa's deserts."

Presently, solar insolation levels in this region are among the most intense anywhere in the country's highlands, and the area is subject to the actions of dominant northerly and northwesterly winds that sweep across it as they move into the Valley of Mexico.

When large lakes still existed in the area, the intense solar heat



What's left of Texcoco Lake.

Photo by Herón Alemán/IMAGEN LATINA

## ecology

produced evaporation processes that led to a rather high relative humidity and acted as a kind of padding or curtain against the winds that abruptly unleashed their cold or warm currents. In other words, the brusque temperature changes that moved toward Mexico City from the north or northeast were buffered when they crossed the lake area. Thus, the Texcoco Lake acted to regulate the region's climate.

But as the region became more desiccated, only a thin film of water survived. That too slowly disappeared, leaving behind soils with very high salt concentrations (about twice that of seawater) that hamper the regeneration of the ecosystem.

### THE LAKE TODAY

One of the options for the improvement and recuperation of these kinds of soils is to plant forage species that accelerate the rehabilitation process by generating a plant cover and reducing soil erosion. Some 40% of the dust storms that affected Mexico City before have been eliminated by programs to create artificial grasslands and by planting 15 million trees in the area.

Despite the profound transformation of the Texcoco Lake area over the centuries, it still plays an important role for certain members of the regional fauna. The area is part of what is known as "the central route," one of four main flight paths used by aquatic migratory birds during their trips south to escape the northern winters. Huge numbers of these birds stop in the Texcoco Lake area as part of their annual migration from Canada, Alaska and the rest of the United States. Artificial lakes constructed in the area provided a habitat for some 350,000 birds from October to March last year.

According to Aníbal Huerta, biologist and head of the Lake Commission's Department of Biotic Resources, a total of 68 aquatic bird species live in the Texcoco Basin. Thirteen of them are duck species, 29 are shore birds, 11 are herons, 5 are sea hens, one is a grebe, another is an ibis and eight are marine species such as pelicans, gulls and sea swallows. Among the most important resident species that reproduce in the area is the Mexican Duck (*Anas diazi*), an endangered species. At one point the population was reduced to only 400; now there are about 2000.

A large part of the waters that reach Mexico City and adjacent Nezahualcóyotl are treated before they are used. There are even artificial lakes that store them and regulate the runoff from rivers to the east of the Basin. Many fish species live in these waters.

According to Lake Commission officials there are several projects underway to convert this zone into an ecological reserve, as well as to develop the artificial lakes for recreational rowing and canoeing. One of these lakes, in particular, "Nabor Carrillo," covering about 2300 acres is proposed for these sports. In addition, it will be used for irrigation, municipal industry and other purposes.

In its important efforts, the Texcoco Lake Commission has taken advantage of the temporary aquatic habitats formed each year during the rainy season to re-establish more permanent habitats, linking them together to form a much larger ecosystem that benefits Mexico City's 18 million inhabitants.★

Jesús Yáñez Orozco

## What About the Monarch Butterfly?

The migration of the Monarch butterfly and its hibernation in Mexico is a unique natural phenomenon. Each year, towards the end of the summer, the entire Monarch population from Canada and the United States east of the Rockies sets off on its journey south towards the dense fir forests found along the neo-volcanic chain cutting across Mexican territory. Some 3000 meters above sea level, these forests cover more than 7400 acres in the states of Mexico and Michoacán and provide ideal conditions for the Monarch's overwintering.

Tens of millions of Monarchs feed on the profusion of flowers that cover Mexico after the end of the rainy season, storing up the fats they need to hibernate for four months. Nonetheless, the most important factor for the Monarch's survival after it leaves the coldest regions of North America is access to specific ecological conditions; these are

found only in Mexico's highland fir forests.

Rodolfo Ogarrio, president of "Monarch, A.C.," a non-profit organization concerned with the butterfly's conservation, explains that a number of processes, especially population growth and the advances of technology, have reduced the extension of Mexico's forests. Thus, the sites used year after year by the Monarch represent some of the last remaining habitats providing the conditions needed for its hibernation.

"This situation," he adds, "makes the project to preserve the Monarch's hibernation habitat an important one for Mexicans. It offers us the opportunity to coexist with other generational beings, a kind of consciousness that we lose from time to time."

He acknowledges that in the case of the Monarch, as in many



Photo by Sergio Dorantes

other similar ones, it's not really the animal that must be protected; the butterfly can take care of itself. It's the habitat that's in danger.

Therefore, the Mexican government's decision to backtrack on a previous decree establishing a Monarch butterfly sanctuary is of great concern. The ecological reserve in the Chincua and El Rosario mountains, in the states of Mexico and Michoacán, where the butterfly overwinters each year, was to have become a sanctuary area for the

species. That decree was replaced by a ministerial-level agreement in which the Ministries of Urban Development and Ecology, and of Public Education will allow researchers to work in the area, using facilities originally constructed for natural resources management.

We hope that this is only a temporary situation and that we will soon have a fully established Monarch butterfly sanctuary in Mexico.

Jesús Yáñez Orozco

# TEPEXCOHUITE: The Magic Tree

*Despite some scientific scepticism, the bark of this Mexican tree seems to cure skin burns better than most known treatments.*

At all hours of the day and night, people with serious burns arrive at the tiny Red Cross hospital in Tlalnepantla, state of Mexico, one of the country's most important industrial areas. They come to be treated with "the powder."

"Is this where you come for the powder that heals burns?" asks an anxious woman, "you see, I've brought my son who was burned."

"Yes, wait just a minute, please."

When the doctor on duty is finally free, the patient is brought in. The doctor examines the burn, asks what caused it and orders the nurse to clean the wound. Then he sprinkles a brown powder on the entire area, saying to the mother, "Don't cover it, don't let it get wet. Let it be just as it is, and bring him in again in two weeks."

Because of the very simple way it's applied, because of its origin and because of the way people come in search of it, the powder seems almost magical. It is prepared by grinding the bark of the *Tepexcohuite* tree, the Náhuatl name for a species that grows in north-west Chiapas and the Cintalapa Valley, also in Chiapas.

People with first, second and even third degree burns come to this health center for attention. Some are even brought in from other hospitals where they were being treated.

Somehow people find out that burns are taken care of in a very special way there and that the results are excellent. Health officials have not put out a formal statement calling for people to seek attention there, nor have they decided to extend the use of the brown powder to other health facilities.

Dr. Rafael Martínez Mondragón, physician for the Tlalnepantla Red Cross, explained that they've been using *Tepexcohuite* powder on first and second degree burns for the past five years, with excellent results. "It's

harder to use in treating third degree burns because muscle tissue and deeper veins are damaged; thus, we need to use grafts or other more extended treatment procedures."

He continues, "Many people come in with burns that are ten days, two weeks or even a month old, and we can't do anything for them. The healing process is too far along, and the powder can no longer penetrate into the wound. It must be applied to raw flesh, so it's best to treat the burn immediately, or at least before a week goes by. Otherwise, we must remove the scar tissue that's begun to form.

"*Tepexcohuite* bark powder is sprinkled on the burned area to form a thin layer. With first degree burns, at the end of two weeks, the scab peels off like bark from a tree. It's like nothing ever happened. At first the skin is rather ashen, but it eventually returns to its normal color. There is no scar."

Roque León, an engineer from Ocozocuautila, Chiapas, was the first to take the bark powder to the Tlalnepantla health center. He tells how in 1923, when his brother suffered a fractured skull in an accident, they sent for a native healer. The old man asked for *Tepexcohuite* bark and used it to cure the injured man. "Since then," says León, "I've been very fond of the plant and continued to do research on it. I later discovered that it not only heals fractures, but also burns and dental infections and that it helps close wounds."

"About five years ago, when a friend of mine was taken to the hospital in Tlalnepantla with a bad burn, I brought him some of the powder."

The doctors became convinced of its curative qualities, and León continued to stock them with the bark. He explains the relatively simple procedure for preparing the powder: "First it is autoclaved at 100 pounds pressure and 80 degrees centigrade. Then it's put in an oven to dry; then



A medicine man as portrayed by painter Diego Rivera.

## science

it's ground and passed through a tanus colare classifying mesh. Finally, it's jarred and stored. It's best to use bark from trees at least nine years old."

The first scientific mention of *Tepexcohuite* dates from 1846, as published in the *London Botanical Journal*. It was classified as *Mimosa tenuiflora* Benth. In his book, *The Vegetation of Chiapas*, Dr. Faustino Miranda describes it as a woody plant growing to about

8 meters in height and covered with white flowers, clustered on dense spikes. It grows in abandoned fields, often forming extensive patches.

In 1984 the country was struck by two major natural disasters. The first was the eruption of the "El Chichonal" volcano in Chiapas, causing countless victims. A few months later, in November, a natural gas facility in Tlalnepantla exploded. On both occasions, the bark of *Mimosa tenuiflora* Benth.

was used with great success.

Nonetheless, despite the evidence produced in those cases, the Ministry of Health showed no interest in the plant. Only after recent television coverage and some publications on its curative properties, did General Director of Health Inputs (part of the Ministry of Health) Dr. Mario Liberman visit Roque León to ask for information on the plant.

To date all of Mr. León's work has been entirely on his own, using only the resources he has at hand. He has still not been able to identify the active substance in the bark; that is, the compound responsible for its healing action.

Popular wisdom and the use of certain folk medicines have often provided the basis for medical advances. Three cases have been particularly important in Mexico: the use of "peyote" (*Lophophora williamsii* Lem.) to produce peyotina and lofoforina; the use of hallucinogenic mushrooms (*Psilocybe aztecorum* Helm. and *Psilocybe mexicana* Helm.); and the use of two plants, known commonly as "barbasco" and "cabeza de negro" (*Dioscorea mexicana* Guill and *Dioscorea composita* Helm.) to produce chemicals for contraceptive pills.

Montserrat Gispert, ethnobotanist at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, explains the importance of folk knowledge for the advancement of science: "Traditional wisdom plays an important role in scientific knowledge because often we find a kind of vegetation or some plants that are new for us, even though local people are traditionally familiar with them. They'll know the name of a certain tree, how it's used, what parts are used, when it flowers and how it fruits. They can often distinguish different botanical species among plants that are very similar in appearance. We may know of some of these things from the literature, but other times, we don't. And even when we do, people often help us to refine our knowledge even more."

"There are natural plant resources that people eat, and we didn't know they were food plants; others that are used medicinally, that we didn't know anything about. So they provide us with new food and medical resources.

"Mexico offers the richest vegetational and ethnic mosaics in the world; plant life is quite diverse, and there are many, many ethnic groups, languages and dialects. Before the Spanish Conquest, all of these peoples had a widely extended culture related to plants. They had an impressive knowledge of plants and used them extensively, especially for medicinal purposes. Nonetheless, for a very long time this traditional knowledge has been ignored. Our health institutions aren't really interested.

"More than anything else, our folk knowledge has served to enrich the multi-national corporations that used Indian peoples' knowledge of "barbasco" to produce steroids for contraceptive pills. They've benefitted more than the people who create and maintain this popular wisdom and more than the Mexican scientific community."

Roque León explains that "almost all the multi-nationals" have gone to the Cintalapa Valley. "They've carried away trees and large quantities of bark. With that, and the fact that community people pull it up to cultivate corn and beans, the plant population has diminished."

Far from benefitting the community, the industrialization of *Tepexcohuite* by these companies could well harm our natural resources, as they extract juicy profits and abandon the communities that have generated traditional wisdom to their fate, forsaking them to their poverty.

Couldn't this plant be used to produce an inexpensive, folk remedy, accessible to all Mexicans? ★

Luz Guerrero Cruz

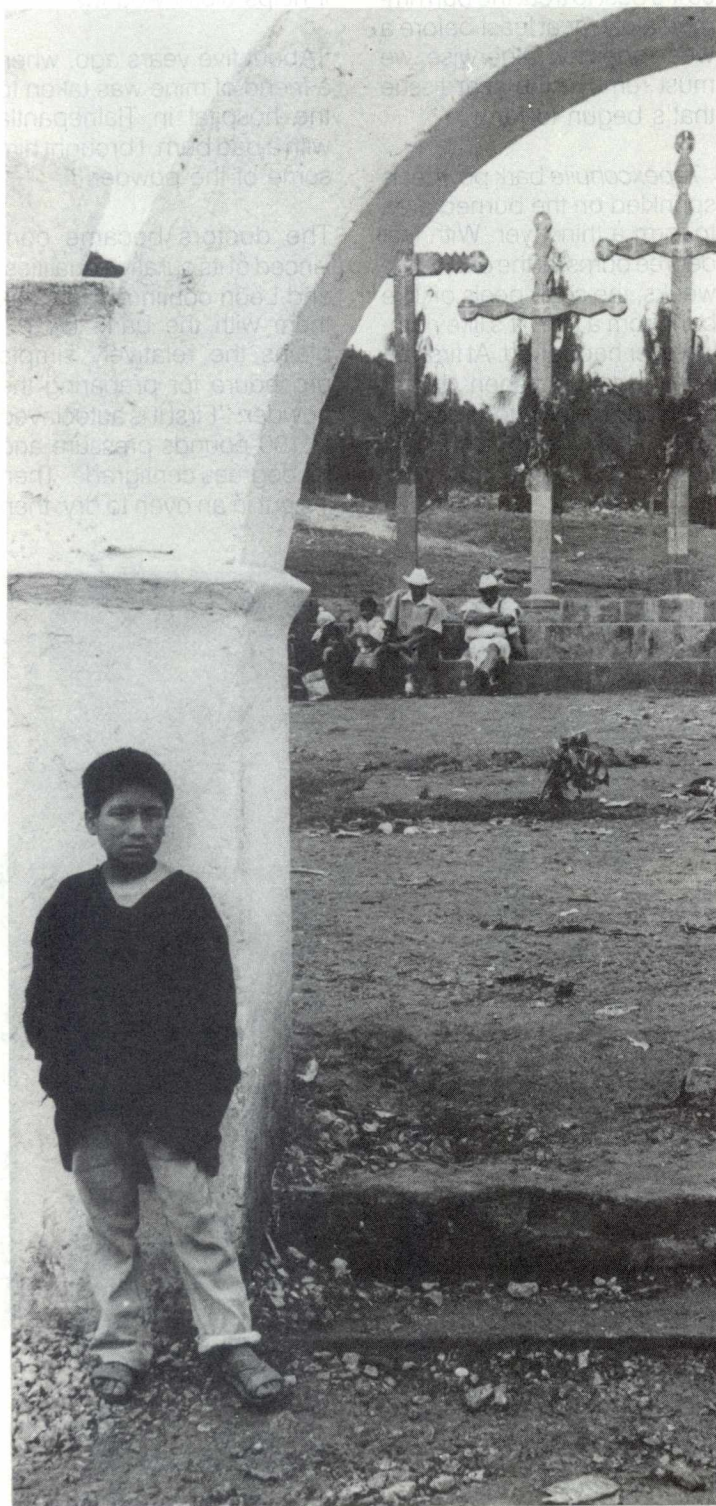


Photo by Marco A. Cruz/IMAGENLATINA

Indian Mexico preserves a wealth of traditional medicinal knowledge.

## Books

### Canetti's Passion for Immortality



Elias Canetti — La Pasión por la Inmortalidad — the Passion for Immortality, Francisco Blanco Figueroa, Editorial Katún, México, 1986.

Francisco Blanco Figueroa, currently the Editorial Coordinator of the magazine *Universidad de México* (University of Mexico), and author of *Obra literaria I y II* (Literary Work), as well as of a book on John Locke, recently published a book on Nobel Prize winner Elias Canetti and his work, in Editorial Katún.

The book deals with Canetti's childhood and youth, and then goes on to discuss aspects of his major works: *Act of Faith*, published in 1935, *Masses and Power*, *Kafka's Other Trial*, *Voices From Marrakesh*, *The Province of Man* and finally, *Theater*. The author's free-flowing, direct style serves to bring out the substance of each of these works by the prize-winning Bulgarian writer.

We find here information on crucial events in the early years of Canetti's life that somehow

shaped the world view of this author whose philosophical insight has gained international recognition. His father died when he was seven years old, and the child developed a life-time love-passion-jealousy relationship with his mother which was often strained. From the time he was very young, this child who wanted knowledge above anything else developed a disproportionate passion for books. The character in *Act of Faith* who sets fire to his library and sacrifices himself with it, somehow symbolizes Canetti's love for the written word to the point of paroxysm.

In *Masses and Power* Canetti takes an outright stand against power, outlining the issue and describing the powerful in such a way that they may be cornered and questioned. Susan Sontag expressed her point of view on the matter in her article "On Elias Canetti": "Trying to understand power from the point of view of the mass instead of using concepts such as *class* or *nation*, is to insist on a non-historical understanding of the issue. Hegel and Marx are omitted, not because Canetti's self-confidence is such that he decided not to mention the usual names, but because the implications of Canetti's approach are distinctively anti-Hegelian and anti-Marxist."

For his part, Canetti explains that, "(...)What I wanted was to take into account everything that could lead me to new lines of thought. (...) I purposefully did not quote these two authors (Freud and Marx) because I wanted to study the most urgent phenomena of our time without applying previously existing concepts." He adds that, "I would give anything to be free of the habit of seeing the world from a historic viewpoint..." The scientist-philosopher protests against death-ridden history and against death. Thus, it can be said of Canetti that he is a conservative in the literal sense of the term. As Blanco Figueroa indicates, he rejects death.

In *Kafka's Other Trial*, Canetti analyzes Kafka's letters to his sweetheart Felice, as no other literary work had such a profound emotional impact on the Nobel Prize-winner. Surprised by the intimacy of those letters that openly dealt with an extraordinary spiritual experience, Canetti found in Kafka a rejection of power from the point of view of the individual, using self-destruction as a means of rejection.

Canetti deals with his impressions

of a trip he made to Morocco in 1954 in *Voices From Marrakesh*, and one of his obsessions is with blindness. In his article "The Cry of the Blind" he explains the deep impression those invalids made on him. Blanco Figueroa quotes this article extensively, capturing the elegantly precise tone, kind and sometimes pitiful, in which Canetti expresses unfamiliarity, interest and even discomfort at the sight of the Moroccan blind.

*The Province of Man* is based on a selection of notes taken by Canetti between 1942 and 1972. Written in a bold literary style, as Blanco Figueroa notes, these notebooks allowed the author to keep his sanity as he worked on *Masses and Power*. The texts Canetti selected for this book are an invitation into his realm of thought. Among the issues he deals with are death, writing, God and power.

*The Wedding* is a crushing play, to use Blanco Figueroa's term, which unmasks the conventionality and falsehood of family life and shows how a wedding really responds to the interest of joining two families for reasons of social status, economic convenience, etc. *The Consciousness of Words* reproduces Canetti's speech on Hermann Broch in which he speaks of the writer and his role. Canetti considers the true writer to be a vassal of his times even if he has to go against current values.

In *ELIAS CANETTI, Passion For Immortality*, Blanco Figueroa helps the beginner discover the Bulgarian writer in an accessible manner, using numerous well-selected quotes of the works he is reviewing. Death is the central issue picked up in Blanco Figueroa's reading of Canetti, whom he tries to understand in his passion for immortality and his hatred of death.

Blanco Figueroa concludes that, "Canetti's passion is for immortality. He struggles against death through literature without losing sight of the fact that death's greatest ally is power, the study of which has taken up a great part of his life. Canetti's work is not yet complete. He is still alive and in search of final victory. The immortality that comes from literature is the greatest assurance that death has been defeated."

The virtues of Blanco Figueroa's work, oddly enough, at times constitute a weakness. The book is useful both to beginners and to those previously caught up by

## odds and ends

Canetti, but although structuring the analysis around the concept of death is valuable, we often had the feeling that greater analysis of the passages quoted would have been enriching, which is not to say the author should have written a philosophical essay.

Blanco Figueroa's purpose was to stimulate interest in Canetti's work, and this he does beautifully. Essays are easily discouraging for many readers and don't necessarily awaken their interest in directly approaching the work the essay deals with. If Mr. Blanco sought to shed light on the Nobel's work by providing a guiding thread to its understanding, he managed to do so. But we are left hungering for greater interpretation and analysis. Although his sober style is definitely a virtue, by the end of the book we somehow feel we've read a succession of excellent quotes that require more in-depth analysis. This review reflects the situation: we deal more with Canetti's writing than with Blanco Figueroa's essay on it.

Despite certain limitations, *Passion* is an agreeable book, easily and quickly read, that can stir up interest in the works of the prize-winning Bulgarian author, even though it does lack the depth and wealth that Canetti should ideally generate in an essayist.★

Pantxika Cazaux

### The True and Marvelous Story of María Sabina, Mushroom Priestess.

*La otra vida de María Sabina (Maria Sabina's Other Life)*, by Juan García Carrera.

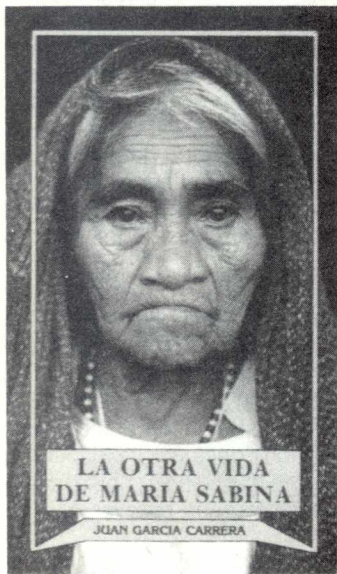
According to her godson and translator, this is the real, desolately marvelous story of the woman who once lifted her feet from the ground and flew beyond the clouds, higher than anyone had ever gone before. She knew the beauty of light as she climbed on the rays of the sun, went seven times around the Lord Sun, husband of the moon, and bathed in sweat returned to tell the story. She visited the ocean, and knew it for a very solitary place where she saw the dead eating and other

## odds and ends

mysteries that frightened her, but with the help of the wind and mushrooms she crossed the width and breadth of it and then said, "How good it feels to reach the other side of the ocean."

She was born two months before her time in Río Santiago, on a day so cold there was nobody out in the streets. She was named María Sabina Magdalena García in honor of the immaculate Virgin Mary Magdalen, and was so small and thin that she fit into the palm of her father's hand.

She herded goats from the time she was very little, and listened to the ancestral conversations of her elders. While chasing a runa-



way lamb when she was seven years old she saw some "hard flowers", the mushrooms that would eventually lead her to fame and solitude.

She picked the "hard flowers", chewed them and knew peace. María continued to wash the dishes, sweep out the house, spin silk thread and hoe the earth. Like God, on Sundays she took a little rest.

After eating mushrooms -she called them little things, wise children- María would sing, dance, whistle and cry, and remember things she knew about even though she had never experienced them. She also raised chickens and picked coffee, owned six mules and sold fabric.

María married three times and each time she returned to her solitude with the memory of the beatings she received from the husband in turn. She had sons and daughters and grandchildren and was finally alone again with only the mushrooms and the misty Mazatec mountains for company.

She was over half a century old when, after eating 30 pairs of "little things" God personally handed her a book and said: "This book is full of wisdom. It contains truth, life itself and all kinds of secrets for healing. The world is yours, there's no turning back. You are to blame if you don't appreciate this book."

As a good Catholic she loved God and the saints and prayed a lot, yet she was still alone.

But the worst was yet to come, and it arrived in Huautla, Oaxaca, in the form of Gordon Wasson, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, Zimmerman-Dylan and many other unknowns from strange and distant lands. María entered 30 years of sleepless nights after Gordon Wasson deceived her and taped her ceremonial chanting. She was accused of being a witch and of selling marijuana. She outlived her former husbands and some of her children and grandchildren.

She continued to communicate with mushrooms, "landslide, Saint Isidore, Little Birds." Films and profits were made out of her life, her songs were recorded and her face was photographed. People wrote books, articles, poems and theses on her and even named a restaurant after María without asking her permission. Many who were looking for some kind of truth, for healing secrets or profits sought her out, found her and used her. And then she'd be left alone again with her sadness and a sense of injustice.

She ended up completely alone, wearing rags and going barefoot, ill and with flies buzzing round her, sleepless and tormented because she had shared her ancestral priesthood with strangers.

And then a Mazatec student arrived at her side, and for four years, between 1981 and 1985, became her helper, translator, godson and adopted grandchild. On the evening they began their friendship, the would-be accountant says María Sabina said to him: "God greets you when you visit this place... Everything is as it was before, no one treads here anymore."

In July 1986 Juan García Carrera, who left accounting for journalism, published 5,000 copies of *The Other Life of María Sabina* out of his own pocket, "without exhibitionism... for the knowledge of Mexico and the world who heard the echos of the renowned mushroom woman."

In his introduction, dated in Huautla de Jiménez, Oaxaca, García Carrera says he writes in good faith. He says he never intended to write a book, but "the chain of injustice, exploitation, manipulation, trickery, etc..." compelled him to tell the story, with his godmother's knowledge.

The subtitle to *The Other Life...* could well be *A report on infamy, sadness, hunger, rage and forsakenness*. The author is categorical when he states that María Sabina ceased to be alone when he arrived. "Our friendship grew and she was happy talking to me," despite the fact that the wise woman continued to eat "tortilla with salt and chiltepe chili." Among them they spoke in the Mazatec language.

*The Other Life...* is written in wild, violent language, and could also be called *María Sabina and her Godson-Translator, Alone Against the World*. There's a passage in the book that perhaps sums this up:

"When María remembered the ingratitude of the authors who churned out books about her life I felt compelled to include a page against those who exploited and defiled her magic world. It's not my intention to attack them, no. I only wish to remind them that the mushroom priestess is still on her feet. This is the real María Sabina, what is left of her. She was no longer the same person they visited when she was still strong and lucid, in full possession of her senses and capable of pleasing and amusing people who had the devil in them. Since her chanting was recorded she no longer chants; she doesn't ingest mushrooms because they've all disappeared; she no longer conducts "highs" because the trips finished her."

The book is organized into 16 disorderly chapter and contains 15 melancholy black and white photographs, and is a trip that leaves you sleepless and with a lingering sense of bitterness. *The Other Life of María Sabina* is a voyage back to the hell and the glory of a desolate sadness that comes to an end at two forgotten moments.

The first is when this humble 96 year-old Mazatec woman dies of chronic acute bronchitis, kidney ailment, moderate dehydration, malnutrition, hypochronic anemia and old age.

The second is when Juan García Carrera, her godson, translator, adoptive grandchild, ethnic

brother and now biographer, is overcome by tears:

"I went to her side immediately. I wanted to give life back to her. I placed my ear next to her heart and the touch of her cold body shook me. I held her hands very tightly and tears flooded over me."

★  
Luis Perdomo Orellana

## Nicaragua's Ethnic Paths



**Nicaragua: Autonomía y Revolución (Nicaragua: Autonomy and Revolution)**, Héctor Díaz Polanco y Gilberto López Rivas, Editorial Juan Pablos, México, 1986.

Héctor Díaz Polanco and Gilberto López y Rivas are Mexican anthropologists who have specialized in ethnic issues. Their book, *Nicaragua: autonomía y revolución (Nicaragua: Autonomy and Revolution)*, allows an insight into how the FSLN and the Revolutionary Government regard Nicaragua's ethnic groups and their situation. Published in Mexico by Juan Pablos Editor in 1986, the book contains testimonies, official statements and documents that illustrate the process Nicaragua has followed in dealing with these issues. It also contains analyses and opinions on the subject by other qualified sources.

The ethnic question in Nicaragua has been the subject of debate for several years now. When the FSLN seized power in this small Central American nation in 1979 the ethnic question was known only to a very few specialists. In general, the existence of different social and cultural groups in the country was practically unknown. The issue was only "discovered" in 1979, particularly what has come to be known as the "Miski-



to problem."

Yet the Miskitos are by no means the only Nicaraguan Indians. Nicaragua is a pluri-ethnic and multilingual country in which different ethnic groups -Miskitos, Sumus, Ramas, Creoles, Garifones and Mestizos- are scattered throughout the vast eastern regions of the country, covering some 50% of the nation's territory. Thus, the Nicaraguan ethnic question is much more complex than just the "Miskito problem", and its roots go back in history to the clashes between Spain and Britain during colonial times.

Most of Nicaragua's ethnic groups live along the country's Atlantic coast, an area that was held by the British Empire for three centuries. This is a fact that determined social and cultural differences between these groups and the rest of the country's population, living mostly along the Pacific coastline colonized by Spain. The British were replaced by the United States during the 19th Century when the local Creole oligarchy proved incapable of staving off either power.

Thus Nicaraguan society was unable to build a national state capable of truly integrating the country's different regions. Instead, what took place was a process of increasing inter-regional disarticulation between the Atlantic and the Central Pacific regions. The process has social and cultural expressions that are further accentuated by existing geographical barriers. This was the complex situation the FSLN inherited in 1979.

*Autonomy and Revolution* contains up-dated, concise and objective information. The documents compiled here will be useful to anyone interested in ethnic issues, in the Nicaraguan situation and in knowing more about the subject that international news agencies have dealt with so extensively. Díaz Polanco and López y Rivas have performed the valuable task of compiling the most important documents dealing with the issue. A variety of original and scientific points of view are laid out in this book, allowing the reader a grasp of the real situation of Nicaragua's ethnic groups.

As early as 1969, in its so-called Historic Program the FSLN referred to a "special plan to favor the Atlantic Coast," which, among other things, called for stimulating "a blossoming of the region's local cultural values that have

evolved from original aspects of its historical tradition." The *Sandinista Popular Revolution's Statement of Principles Regarding the Indian Communities of the Atlantic Coast*, issued jointly by the FSLN and the Rev. Reconstr. Gov., contemplated the region's economic problems and the need to fully develop the Indians' cultural values.

The Nicaraguan government proposed a Regional Autonomy Plan in 1984, both in response to demands posed by the different groups and because internal contradictions pertaining to the ethnic issue had become more acute. The Plan underwent broad-based revisions in which even Indian groups up in arms against the Sandinistas participated. It guarantees the rights of the peoples of the Atlantic Coast and lays the foundations for the respect and development of their specific cultural values within the national framework.

The book includes speeches and articles by Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega, the National Autonomy Commission, Minister of the Interior Tomás Borge, Luis Carrioph'n, Manuel Ortega Hegg, and of course, HePH'ctor DiPH'az Polanco and Gilberto LoPH'pez y Rivas. Three documents from an international perspective are reproduced: the "Manifesto of Latin American Anthropologists and Social Scientists On the Nicaraguan Ethnic Question", the "Statement on the Nicaraguan National-Ethnic Question", and the "Nicaraguan Government's Report to the IX Congress of the Interamerican Indigenous Institute".

All those interested in political, economic and cultural events in the conflictive Central American region will find valuable material in this book to help them develop an independent and well-informed point of view on the subject.★

Pantxika Cazaux

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## Books Worth Reading

**La casa que canta (The House that Sings)**, by Mariana Yampolsky. Ministry of Public Education.

A narrative and pictorial testimony of popular Mexican architec-

ture, this excellent book uses photography to document the shape and structure of Mexican peasants' homes. The materials used in these buildings are the ones that man has easy access to, and they are so close to Nature they seem to be part of the landscape, to blend into their background. Weathered by wind, rain and sunshine, many of these buildings seem to have been in their place forever.

The builders' tradition and experience determine the techniques that are used; the climate, available materials and usage dictate the form. These buildings have little to do with fashion and much to do with the essential aspects of life. Their dignity and poetic sense have been beautifully captured by Mariana Yampolsky's camera. This is a book to savour through the eyes.



**Arboles y arbustos útiles de México (Useful Trees and Shrubs of Mexico)**, by Aníbal Niembro Rojas. Limusa.

Mexico has one of the most contrasting and complex floras in the world because of its diverse climatic, edaphic, geologic and orographical conditions. There are some 20,000 species of vascular plants in the country, many of which are represented by a large number of trees and shrubs. Plants are an invaluable renewable natural resource because of the many products and benefits that can be obtained from them.

Unfortunately, many of Mexico's trees and shrubs are rapidly disappearing, often without having been studied in their role as part of their ecosystem nor in their medicinal or industrial potential usefulness.

*Useful Trees and Shrubs* takes a new look at the country's forests and gathers a considerable amount of information published over the last years on the main serviceable products derived from certain of the most common trees and shrubs in Mexico. The book is aimed at people who wish to broaden their knowledge of Mexican flora and to those interested in the conservation and rational use of plants.



**Peces, moluscos y crustáceos en los códices mexicanos (Fish, Molluscs and Crustacea in Mexican Codices)**, by Zita Basich. The National General Archive.

Zita Basich has put together an exhaustive collection of the aquatic fauna depicted in Mexican codex, revealing this specific aspect of the depth and beauty of pre-Colombian art. Molluscs, crustacea and fish are shown, many of which have commercial and food value and are proof of the wealth of the country's central-plateau lakes (the area in which Mexico City is located), its continental currents and extensive maritime areas on both coasts.

The wonderful technique used by the ancient *tlacuilos* (designers) makes it possible to identify many viviparous species such as sawfish, catfish, parrot fish and several kinds of leaping fish. The artist's morphological precision has the admirable beauty of conventional design. This material is a valuable addition to the study of ancient Mexico's fauna.



**Animales prehispánicos (Prehispanic Animals)**, by Sonia Lombardo de Ruiz. National General Archive.

The wealth of forms in pre-Colombian culture is one of the most important legacies handed down to us by the Mesoamerican peoples. Their iconographic and hieroglyphic representations contain an enormous variety of motifs that can be used in an updated context to support original and genuinely national designs. This is possible because of their peculiar formal categories.

The material brought together in this book was taken from ceramics, painting, sculpture and architecture. The criteria used in selecting the material was strictly thematic, and it is presented in groupings of analogous motifs, combining the styles of different cultures, regions and time-periods.

The images include forms that can be considered naturalistic, others in which the combination of different species' characteristics produces "fantastic animals", and still others in which symbolic forms are only remotely associated with reality. This later type of image is particularly interesting because the level of abstraction and schematization of the designs; especially the glyphs, is considered modern today. In these designs, animal forms are presented in their transition from pictographic to ideographic glyphs.★

## Exhibits

### The Prehispanic Ballgame Tradition

"The Ball Game: A Living Pre-Hispanic Tradition." An exhibit, National Anthropological Museum, June-August 1986.

There they were, the 116 archeological pieces moving through four cultures, the Mayan, Huastecan, Teotihuacan, and Mexica-Olmecan. The largest measured 1.78 meters and the smallest piece, just 6 centimeters, every millimeter of their textures dating from 1200 or 800 years before Christ to 1250 years A.D.

There were 44 ethnographic pieces from the Tarahumaran, Purépechan, Tarascan, Mixtecan, Zapotecan and Mestizo cultures. The 17 illustration on display included sixteenth century etchings by Theodore De Bry and others by Cristoph Weiditz done in 1529.

Even after the 13th World Soccer Cup was over, the stone remains, the other items and illustrations gathered from all parts of the country continued to be shown at the National Anthropological Museum, telling of century-old rituals that are still alive in our tradition.

They spoke of the sacred nature of rubber, born of a tree that grows to 30 meters, but only in humid regions at less than 700 meters above sea level. They spoke of rubber's use in the ball game.

The players were grouped into two teams whose numbers varied from two on two, to three on three, to two on three.

One player, fashioned from now eroded clay, recalled that the game was played on a field in the form of a capital H lying on its side. Walls extended on both sides, at the H's crossbar, and a wooden or stone hoop was hung vertical-

ly (differing from basketball's horizontal hoop position) from each wall. The players tried to put a solid rubber ball through the hoop, using only their elbows, hips or legs. The sport was played everywhere in the region, with remains found from Honduras, north to parts of southeast Arizona.

Why didn't the players of this age-old game use their hands?

With this type of ritual exhibit, one shouldn't ask that kind of question. Time's immediate reaction, accumulated in the figures, figurines, sculptures, plates, rattles and models, is to remain silent, a silence that warns: do not ask, *just listen*.

And so, the rock figures continued chatting; in Náhuatl, the ball field was called *tlachtli*, and the game was known as *ollama*. In the beginning the game was played because of religious and magical beliefs. But there's not a game around that doesn't eventually get its due, and *ollama* later became a sport, with gambling, bets, winnings, losses and even murders.

The vulgar form of the game was simple. You only had to get the ball (measuring 20 to 30 centimeters in diameter) across the field's center line.

The game's sacred form was almost impossible to play. You had to get the ball through the two rock hoops embedded in the lateral walls. Whoever managed to do so automatically possessed all of the spectators' clothing, as well as eternal life. According to the codices, in the sacred game the playing field represents the heavens and the hoops represent where the sun rises and sets. The point that marks the center of the field symbolizes the place in the heavens where the sun makes its daily sacrifice to the moon and the stars. The centerline that divides the field signifies the boundary between opposite forces in constant struggle: light and darkness, day and night.

That's why there is a natural symbolic relationship between the sacred ball game and war. In both, there is a confrontation between antagonistic forces. In fact, ball players were also frequently represented as warriors taking part in human sacrifices. It is believed that the rubber ball symbolizes rain, blood, semen, saliva or tears. Rubber was thought to be a sacred substance, a vital and holy sap. The ancient texts show that rubber balls were an impor-

tant part of the offerings dedicated to a variety of gods and that the gods consecrated it. The copious examples from the codices showing the gods playing ball provide further evidence of the game's ritual importance.

A statue, caught in an eternal trance, took advantage of a brief electrical brown-out to explain further: in pre-hispanic times, the heavens were the playing field for the gods; they symbolized antagonistic concepts, opposing

monkey-vitality; and squirrels, turtles, toads, frogs, dogs, rabbits, owls..."

The statue of Xochipilli-Macuilxóchitl, god of flowers and the ball game, added, "If you really want a better idea of what the game is about, you should read the *Historia de las Indias de Nueva España e Islas de Tierra Firme (History of the New Spanish Indies and the Terra Firma Islands.)*

'...they played with such skill and



Photo by Rogelio Cuellar

The game is still played today in Chihuahua.

forces that through confrontation sought to establish a certain equilibrium in the universe to assure their own survival. As played by real men, the game was transposed from the heavenly matches; the gods were present as the games were played and presided over them. Xólotl, Quetzalcóatl, Macuilxóchitl, Xochipilli and Xochiquetzal were the most important gods associated with this game.

A clay sculpture of a skull with visible eyes and teeth in a neat row, caught in an expression of mockery and fury, suggested that we get back to the game's more profane side. "Ever since a price was put on the game," he said, "poor people have bet ears of corn on it; others bet some of their clothes. The rich gambled with gold, precious feathers and jewels. Those who had nothing wagered their own freedom or that of their children."

A rock carved in a monkey's image intervened, "It would really be more important to list the animals related in one way or another with the ball game." He continued, "For example, they included the eagle-sun; macaw-fire;

cleverness that in the course of an hour they managed to keep the ball moving from one end of the field to the other, using only their hips, never touching it with their hands, nor feet, not even a calf or an arm; it was the same for one side and the other; they never let it stop. It was quite a wonder."

The game is still played today in Chihuahua ("The Ball Race"), Sinaloa ("Hulama"), Michoacán ("Pasiri-A-Kuri" y "Tarascan Ball"), and in Oaxaca ("Mixtecan Ball").

While all that remained of the 13th World Soccer Cup was silence and the garbage in the stadiums, the stones, the clay figures, the other pieces and the illustrations brought together in the National Anthropological Museum during June, July and August continued everyday to assert:

"We played our ball game before Christ came, and after he left; we will continue to play it as tradition, friendship and amusement so long as the sun shines and the moon glows."★

Luis Perdomo Orellana

## Food

### Baroque Mexican Cuisine

Despite the many inroads modern life has made into Mexico, you can still sort out the scent of chili, mole and tortillas mentioned by Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier when he compares Mexican cooking to the French and the Chinese. He believes the three correspond to a certain philosophy, a system, a discourse on method. Thus, if baroque architecture can be understood as a point of view on life where heaven is thought of as an eternal feast, no wonder that our daily life and wordly celebrations are also full of the baroque. This is especially true of the essential ingredients for any Mexican fiesta: mole and mariachis.

Manufacturing mole is a process so baroque it seems to result from a rapture, from ecstasy or some kind of culinary delirium. Mole was born in the city of Puebla, rich in convents, industrious nuns and baroque facades and altars. Mother María de la Asunción, in charge of the kitchen at the Convent of Santa Rosa, was given the task of preparing a special dish for the illustrious Don Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz, Archbishop of Puebla and the convent's main benefactor. Mother María reviewed her best recipes in search of something original, but nothing pleased her. She finally decided to commend herself to Saint Pascual Bailón, the patron saint of cooks. That night she dreamt of the formula for *guajolote* in mole, and early next morning she prepared the bird—a turkey whose name in Nahuatl means "bird with a double chin."

She used a *metate* (grinding-stone) to crush together broad chili, wrinkled raisin chili and so-called mulato chili because of its dark color. She added cinammon, pepper and cloves from China. Then she mixed in ground peanuts and almonds together with plantain and chocolate, and produced a

magnificent paste that was further seasoned with butter and olive oil before being poured over the *guajolote*. Enraptured by their new dish, the nuns got carried away and began adding more ingredients. They sprinkled sesame seeds over it to combine the sweet and the salty and aid the archbishop's digestion. Another nun added onion rings and a third arranged fresh lettuce-leaves around the dish. María de la Asunción added the final touch by decorating the mole with beautiful cut-open radishes.

The illustrious Don Manuel feasted his eyes before trying the new dish and was so impressed he decided then and there to baptize it "mole poblano."

This mole and those from other regions have survived over time and are an essential dish in any important Mexican fiesta. Sometimes cooks give in to temptation and use modern artifacts, such as an electric blender, to grind the ingredients. They may even buy a previously prepared paste, since mole now comes in cans and jars. Yet many families still prepare their mole "the old way" and proudly share stories about how Isabel, Margarita or Señora Sánchez grind on the *metate*, fry the spices and seasoning in butter and olive oil and cook it all in a clay pot over a wood fire. It is still served on the best plate in the house and sprinkled with sesame seed, which is what originated the popular saying "ser ajonjolí de todos los moles" (to be the seed of all moles), meaning a person who likes to be present at all important events.

### CHILIS IN NOGADA

These chilis also originated in Puebla, perhaps in the very same Convent of Santa Rosa. This time it was a matter of showering attention on Agustín de Iturbide, the first ruler of the so-called Mexican Empire instituted shortly after the country's independence from Spain in 1810. It was August, the emperor celebrated his saint's day on the 28th, and the creative industrious nuns wished to make a very special offering to the commander of the victorious trilateral army, guarantor of independence, freedom and the faith.

One of the nuns was obsessed with the colors of the victor's flag and their meaning: green for independence, white for religion and red for unity. She went to market with this in mind and found the usual seasonal offerings: walnuts, chilis, apples, citron, raisins, cheese, almonds and pomegranate.

Back at the convent she prepared a stuffing for the chilis with minced meat and raisins, apples, almonds and acitrón, and covered them with a sauce made of freshly ground and peeled walnuts with cheese, almonds and milk. She added red pomegranate and green parsley leaves so that the dish offered to the emperor would show the colors of his flag. As he savoured the dish, little did Iturbide know that it would last much longer than his empire.

Now as then, the dish is served as a delicacy in restaurants during the month of August, which is when walnuts are in season.

There are still brave women who on Saint Agustín's Day, or to feast somebody whose birthday is in August, will take on the task of preparing the chilis and laboriously shelling and peeling the nuts. Carmen and Dolores do so over a century after Iturbide's empire was lost in history.

### THE TORTA

Since both consist of ingredients immured between slices of bread and can be eaten anywhere and at any time without need of a table or silverware, the torta can be compared to a sandwich. But the Mexican torta is prepared with handmade bread from bakeries that are outstanding examples of our fantasy and extravagance in food. There are all kinds, forms and shades of bread, and love songs tell stories that combine passion with the names of different kinds of bread.

The bread used for tortas is sober, salted, and once it has been sliced open it will take any ingredient. It can be spread with butter, or even better, olive oil, although mayonnaise is the usual modern garnish, and it can contain anything from a scrambled egg on to ham, pork or cheese. Children take them to school and workers eat them on the job (though we must admit they prefer a taco if possible.) Tortas are ever-present items at the desks of bureaucrats, and secretaries eat them seeking out a patch of sunshine at lunchtime.

The torta may seem simple enough, yet it originated in a very complex form. In the old times it was customary to get up at three



Chocolate-rich mole

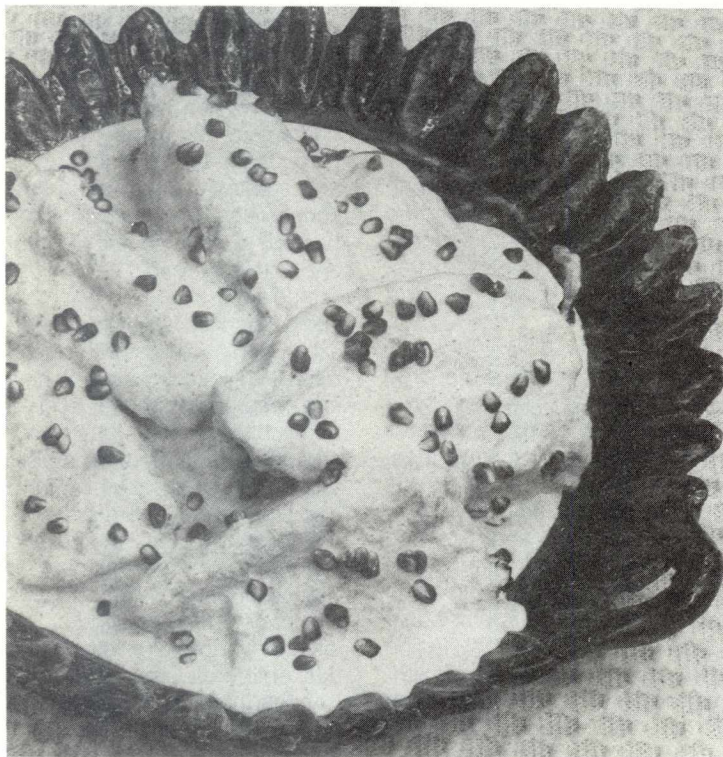
Photo by Pedro Rotger Salmer

## odds and ends

o'clock in the morning to go to the best bakery in Mexico City, La Providencia, where one asked for Guadalupe "the Mole" who chose the best-baked bread for you. Then you went on to buy vegetables and herbs, choosing the smallest carrots, round and cambrai onions with tails and all, and three kinds of chilis: serranos, chipotles and guajillos. You also picked up green tomatoes, wide-eared lettuce, radishes, celery, thyme, laurel and sweet marjoram. At the Izazaga market you

was was cut up taking special care of its heart, which was put in to cook with the chicken before being seasoned with guacamole (avocado sauce), pickled chilis and onion, oregano, sliced cheese and tomato.

Now you were finally ready to place the bread on a damp white-wood cutting board, to take up a very special, very sharp knife (there was once a famous tortamaker who wore down her excellent knife from spreading so much



Chilis in nogada

went to the herb-sellers for a deers-eye, a traditional amulet used for blessing, and purchased a piece of tequesquite, a kind of carbonate. At La Merced market you purchased smiling ranch-chicken, grateful filet, brains that did not smell of sea-breeze, drained turkey, eggs that had not been injected and Chihuahua cheese.

Back at home you put blessed water on to boil for a broth, and you threw in a piece of tequesquite, vegetables and an unwashed chicken lavishly handled to improve its taste. You let this simmer for four hours along with the deers-eye, and checked it constantly. The leg of pork was prepared by smearing it with lard and garlic and then spicing it up with broad chili. The filet was stuffed with almonds, then fried and plunged in pulque (a kind of liquor made from maguey) bought especially for the occasion at "La gloria de la Conesa." The turkey

butter), to slice the bread open with the care and precision of a surgeon, and to wash your hands because of possible microbes. Then you hollowed the bread and proceeded to fill and garnish it with the same frenzy you applied to getting your ingredients together.

The torta is not as old as mole or chilis in nogada, yet its origins are just as baroque. Even in its modern version, today's good torta-makers are constantly inventing minute works of culinary art to please customers at Meche's, Luis', the Thousand Tortas, the Turtles and Fat Abraham's.

De Gaulle spoke of the difficulty of governing a country whose people ate hundreds of different kinds of cheese. How do Mexican rulers feel about the culinary baroque of their people? ★

Teresa de Jesus Yanes and Emma Rizo

## Theater

### Mirror, Mirror On the Wall

How can a play reflect that part of the human condition that no one wants to talk about, or that when they do, they are very careful to keep its secrets from touching their own lives? Contemporary theater that retains traditional discourse and dramatic structures cannot respond to or represent this situation. Nor can the problem be resolved all at once; rather it requires years of experimentation with innovative dramatic forms and speech. *Mirrors (Espejos)*, a new play that recently opened in Mexico, takes important steps along this long path.

*Mirrors* is the creation of a rather odd couple: Juan José Gurrola and Raúl Falcó. Gurrola is an internationally recognized playwright and actor with 30 years of experience. Falcó is young, knowledgeable in all aspects of theater and guided by an indomitable energy to reach the peaks of his profession.

*Mirrors* reveals the authors' difficult lives in the hallucinations of an aviator who unfolds as classic characters: as Narcissus, the handsome man who scorns Eco the nymph and becomes the dandy (the Marquis), who lurks by the pool to feed his spirit on the passionate storms that rage within him.

"That's why not much can be said... Yet again the wax will melt. And once more you will fall into the water that will be your grave where you shall live forever more."

In the cabin of his plane, crashed into the desert on the way to New Delhi, Marquis Narcissus hallucinates a variety of situations that take him from Paris to a sleazy nightclub in the Caribbean. He enters into a philosophical dialogue with Tiresias, confidant of the gods of Olympus, and is condemned to live the rest of his life without Eco's love, whom he once

scorned, trapped in the fleeting love of prostitutes. He will live in the Hell of the fleeting love of prostitutes, love that is bought. Life is constructed in the play through the constant repetition of the daily routine, using the speeches of classic authors such as Sister Juana Inés de la Cruz, Saint John, Villaurrutia and others as the main vehicle for expression. The work is part of an effort to create a new kind of theater, in a world whose logic of development seems to have gone astray; theater that obliterates dramatic conventionalisms: lineal time development, ordered sequences, the narrative climax and all the categories that stifle meaning. It is theater that seeks to fuse art and life into a single, simultaneous experience, that erupts in front of the audience and invites reflection.

The artifice created in *Mirrors* is developed by borrowing the pictorial techniques of a collage, introducing fragments of other separate works into a new and inter-related whole. The technique generally consists of four elements, although they may not always be applied precisely. They are: the section, the previously formulated materials or message, the assembly and discontinuity or heterogeneity. "That way the audience witnessed scenes in which they could see Desdemona, Lady Macbeth and others together for the first time," according to noted Mexican theater critic Bruce Swansey.

Something similar happens in *Mirrors*. Fragments of literary classics move from one context to another. Each quote mutilates the linearity of discourse and time, conveying a double meaning: the original fragment in its context and a new meaning emerging from the new whole. The play blasts out in all directions, yet retains a classic concern: man's fate, love submerged in base passion and all of the contradictions that shape contemporary life.

The absence of a narrative core, an indication of the play's modernism, explains Raúl Falcó, "allows us to use psychic manipulation in profoundly realist theater where we enter the subconscious realm. *Mirrors* unfolds strictly within this rigor and this necessity, while at the same time there is strong dose of reiteration that adds a new element with each repetition as part of fiction's privileged domain." A verbal surface is structured that reflects and represents the characters and situations that enunciate it.

If this were not the case theater would cease to be a "mirror" for life and for the customs that confine us. After all, it is a place of the spirit where St. John, Sister Juana Inés (also of the Cross), Villaurrutia, López Velarde, don Francisco de Quevedo and Lucientes all converge, contributing together to the show's new interpretation.

According to Gurrola, it's a matter of washing down the scaffold where both directors have been the hangmen; they start out by judging themselves. "We both know that there is a scaffold behind intelligence and we want to cleanse those frames for theater. We use a variety of weapons, the most outstanding of which include visual and verbal violence, vengeance, pornography —of great importance— which never becomes eroticism."

#### AN ILLUSION OF REALITY

"Love's enigma was completely protected...and I saw that I was with death, and I saw that in life, I was dead," intoned Sister Angélica. The excellent acting by Juan José Gurrola (Tiresias), Mauricio Davison (Narcissus, alias "The Marquis"), Gabriela Araujo (Sister Angélica), Mariana Botey (Eco) and a dozen other actors creates the daily reality of modern society, marked as it is by increasing emotional complexity and incomprehensibility.

The tragic-farce in two acts and countless disconnected scenes, contrary to its essence, abandons the realist illusion and opens the way to a literary journey that erodes away any trace of credibili-

ty by affirming a mixture of representations in which man's dark side appears and assaults the viewer.

At times humorous, at others dramatic and shocking, the play dilutes and equates sexuality with all of the desires of whoring. Sexuality does not exist, only relationships that are initiated through language: "What is said and what is named defines the possibilities that bodies will come together in one or another way; it is not necessary to understand because it is perceived." That is what creates the possibility that the viewer will identify with what happens on stage.

The constant flow of scenes from different periods completely does away with time as measure and linearity. Rather, it gives way to history's great cycles that seem to repeat themselves in the dialogues of a Greek tragedy, or those of Sister Juana Inés de la Cruz, St. John, Villaurrutia and even Shakespeare himself: "Contemporary man is made up of the same elements as his ancestors, and he continues to suffer from the same contradictions despite the modern world's invasion of us, presenting the same situation behind a different appearance, but at the root of things, we are still the same salt." The challenge for new theater lies in how to treat these unresolved problems, without turning to moralistic formulas or terrestrial forms in use since Aristotle's *Poetics*. An echo of this reaches those viewers who seek a different response to their reality. ★  
Ramsés Ramírez

## Cinema

### GABY BRIMMER, A Gigantic Film Production in Mexico

The cameras began to roll in Mexico City on September 22 as Mexican film-maker Luis Mandoki directs the production of *Gaby Brimmer*. The leading roles are played by noted Swedish star Liv Ullman and Argentine Norma Aleandro (1985 winner of the

Cannes prize for best actress for her role in *The Official Story*, also this year's Oscar winner for best foreign film). Rachel Levin, a U.S. stage actress making her film debut, plays the title role as Gaby. Robert Loggia (*Scarface*, *Prizzi's Honor*) and Lawrence Monoson, who had an extraordinary role in *Mask*, round out the cast.

Hungarian Lajos Koltai (*Mefiste*, *Angy Very*, *Colonel Red*) is photographic director, Alejandro Luna (*Frida*) is in charge of set and Lucinne Donnai, a native of France and long-time resident of Mexico, with years of experience in theater and opera, is wardrobe director.

Very few times has such an outstanding cast and technical crew worked together in Mexico under a Mexican director (in recent times we can only recall *Fox-Trott*, directed by Arturo Ripstein). To make things even more unusual, Mandoki, born in 1954, is practically a debutante in the movie world. While he has made several shorts, he has only one full-length feature to his credit, *Motel*



Photo by Carlos Gatal

The aviator hallucinates in *Mirrors*

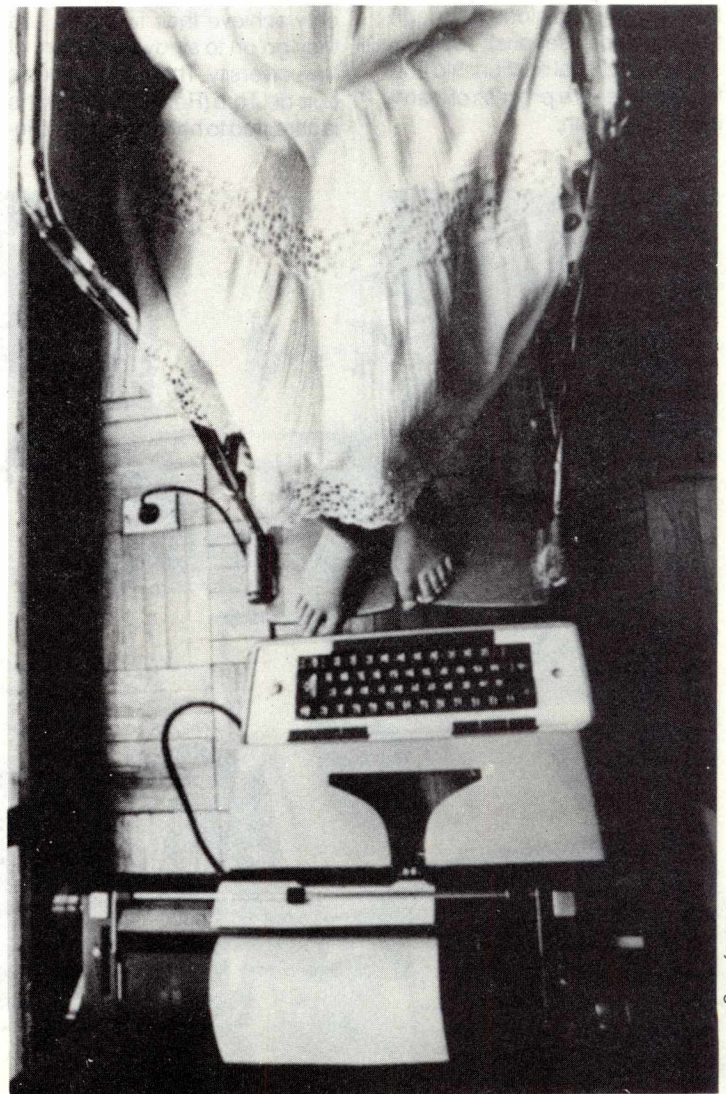


Photo by Rogelio Cuellar

Gaby's difficult way of writing.

## odds and ends

(1983). While not a particularly bad film, it was no gem either (although it did show a fine use of closed and asphyxiating environments). His greatest claim to fame came with a Cannes award for best short film, but even with that, people are asking: How did Mandoki manage to pull together a production like *Gaby*?

### WHO IS GABRIELA BRIMMER?

Gabriela Brimmer (Rachel Levin), daughter of Austrian Jewish immigrants, was born in Mexico City in 1947 with cerebral palsy. Her future was quite uncertain at first, as her parents debated over integrating her into the family or sending her away to live in a specialized institution. Her life changed when a new servant appeared at the house. Florencia Morales (Norma Aleandro), illiterate and of Indian origin, discovers Gabriela's intelligence and sensitivity; and she discovers something even more important, that the child can express herself through the movements of her left foot, the only part of her body she controls. And that is how these two human beings, both marginalized from society and alone (although for different reasons), build a strong emotional relationship and together begin a process of learning and growth.

Institutionalization disappears as a possibility, and Gabriela begins to study at a school for the handicapped. There she falls in love for the first time, with Fernando (Lawrence Monoson). Together they try to break out from the narrow realm of the handicapped to face the "normal" world. Their dream is to be able to attend a regular public high school. But at the critical moment, Fernando pulls back, terrorized, and she is left alone in her project, hesitant and insecure.

As this process develops, Gaby's mother Sari (Liv Ullman) becomes more involved. Carried along by the subconscious fantasy of seeing her daughter transformed into a normal person, she fully supports Gaby's increasing aspirations until "reality's" concrete and fictitious limits give way to Gaby's true condition.

Gaby enters a high school for "normal people" only to discover that if the handicapped world is marginal, her life among the "normal" is a complete island. Nonetheless, she devotes herself to her studies, and Gabriela-the brain and Florencia-the body not only achieve their first goal, but they go on to study journalism at the university. There, Gaby meets Luis del Toro (Robert Beltrán) who is attracted to her courage and in-

telligence. They begin a close companionship. Florencia, together with the mother and father (Robert Loggia), fear another disappointment for Gaby, like the one with Fernando.

When the father dies, Gaby's mother, alone and fearful, threatens to retire to the province. Gabriela seeks Luis' support, and together they look for work for her. But because she is crippled, newspaper editors will not hire her. Seeking another route to independence from her mother, Gaby declares her love to Luis and proposes that they live together. He makes it clear that he can offer her friendship and admiration, but nothing more. And Gabriela is crushed. The mother takes advantage of her daughter's moment of weakness to move the three of them, Gaby, Florencia and herself, to a rest home in the province. By the time she reacts, it's too late, and Gabriela's life is once again how it was before knowing Florencia.

The mother learns she has cancer and goes to the the United States, without explaining the real reasons to the other two women. Florencia once again takes control of things and carries Gaby back to Mexico City. There Gaby gets a second wind and begins her career as a writer. Later the

two women learn of the mother's illness, and Gabriela is understanding. The three reunite, and without demanding explanations, begin daily life together again from a new perspective.

Gabriela-the brain and Florencia-the body continue to work in literature and journalism and together adopt a child: Alma Florencia.

Mrs. Brimmer dies of cancer in 1982.

The above is a kind of synopsis that lies somewhere between the script and Gabriela Brimmer's true story.

The movie project began in 1980 when Luis Mandoki returned to Mexico after studying film-making in England. He first heard about Gaby from a book about her life, written together with Elena Poniatowska. Mandoki contacted Gabriela, who agreed to the project, and they started work. Under Mandoki's direction, she wrote about those moments in her life that could be portrayed in a movie, rewriting some and writing up others for the first time. Using this original manuscript, finished in 1980, a whole string of script writers tried to develop a suitable film script, but none of them satisfied Mandoki, Gabriela or Florencia.

Meanwhile, Mandoki cut *Motel*, his first full-length movie. The Brimmer project seemed illusive. Then in 1983 at the Cuban Film Festival, Mandoki met Martín Salinas, an Argentine film writer who had studied at Mexico's Center for Cinematographic Training. Salinas began his professional career as an animator with *Grupo Cine Six*, winner of numerous international awards for its work, including a film on Pancho Villa and a series for Nicaragua's literacy campaign.

Salinas picked up *Gaby*, laying aside the scripts produced by other writers. He worked only with Brimmer's original material, following her ideas and Mandoki's. Meanwhile he also made his full-length movie, *Noche de Califas* (*Night of Califas*); it had no special merits and has still not opened in Mexico. Mandoki was the executive producer.

It is important to note here, however, that for both Mandoki and Salinas, *Motel* and *Noche de Califas* were really just projects to let them polish the skills of their trade and to help them survive. Their real project was *Gaby Brimmer*.

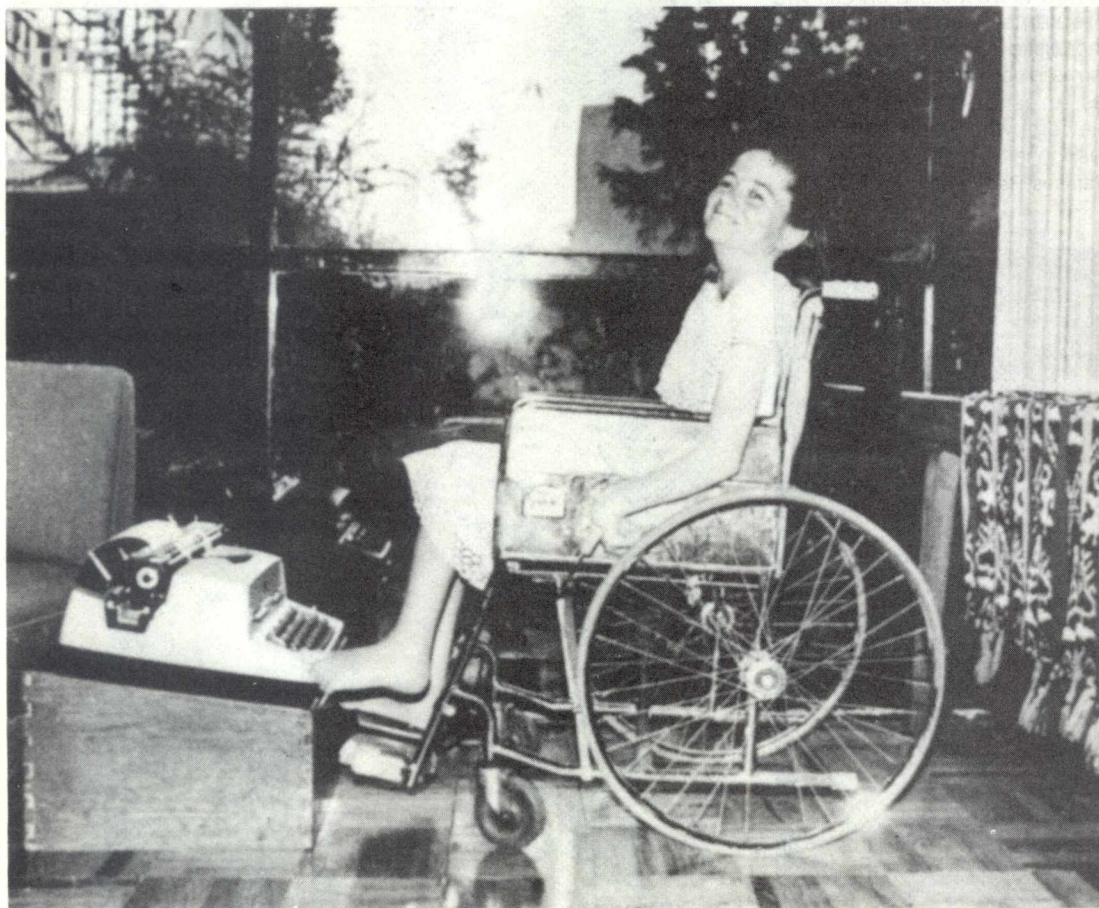


Photo by Rogelio Cuéllar

Gaby Brimmer

As the Mandoki-Brimmer-Salinas team came together, they were joined by U.S. script writer, Michael Love, who worked with Salinas to shape the story's final version. Later, lawyer Pinchas Perry came up with the money to get the film rolling, thus initiating his own career as a movie executive producer.

Today, almost seven years after Mandoki first got the idea for the movie, members of the cast and crew talk about the project that is finally under way.

#### Norma Aleandro:

"I liked the script very much when I read it because there's no speculating with misfortune as is so common with stories like this one. But I said to myself, I wonder what the director's going to do with it. I met Luis in New York, and the first time we talked, it was really just to feel each other out. The second time we met, it became clear that he had no intention of speculating with misfortune, and I accepted immediately...if just one viewer leaves the theater after seeing the movie thinking 'my problems are not so terrible compared to others,' I'll be satisfied."

#### Rachel Levin:

"I think Gaby is a complete person. By this I mean that she has true courage; that is, courage directly proportional to her fears. With that kind of courage you can overcome fear. My case is similar. (Rachel was chosen to play Gaby, aside from her acting skills, because she had been paralyzed by a viral infection for four years.) I've had to work very hard and show a lot of courage to earn my place in theater."

#### Lawrence Monoson:

"There's lots of abuse in TV and movies. I was interested in this project because I didn't find any of that in it. I think that I, Lawrence, have a lot in common with Fernando. The greatest thing in life is to struggle to overcome one's own limitations, even though you may fail. I also think that the limitations often exist in our heads."

#### Lajos Koltai:

"I accepted this project because I think it's important. There are many sick people in all parts of the world, and I think that this film will help us to understand them better. I also hope to have my collaboration contribute to make that happen. For me, photography isn't just the image in and of itself,

the image is drama. The money they pay you and the chance to be in Mexico are important, but they're not everything."

#### Liv Ullman:

"The script is beautiful. It's very original because it shows us a heroine who is not a Rambo or a Superman, but someone from real life who fights with life, not with weapons, but with her intellect and her will to live. I am very proud to be part of a project that glorifies this part of reality. And I'm glad that somebody cares to make a picture that may not seem at first like it's going to be a great box office hit, but may in the end prove to be more enduring and more important than certain other films. I always have great difficulties talking about my characters because my job is to act them, not to discuss them. In this case, even though we're making a movie, the characters are real people. What I can talk about is the real person who was Gaby's mother. I admire her for the decision she made to stand behind her daughter and to allow her to choose how she wanted to live her life. And this, despite tremendous handicaps—and here I refer less to Gaby's physical handicap and more to attitudes in society that do not encourage people with physical problems to develop at the same rate as others. I think it's great to portray such a woman."

After seven years of stubborn perseverance, Mandoki has managed to start filming under conditions that many other directors—even the most established—often only dream about. He's come to his trial by fire at a very young age, and given everything that the film has going for it, there are only two possible results: his leap to glory or his plunge to oblivion.

For Mandoki, Salinas and Perry, for the Mexican and U.S. investors who've put money into this project and for the Mexican film community, we hope they achieve their objectives. As Gaby Brimmer says:

"The reason for filming my life, as Luis and I see it, is not just to show that despite my physical limitations, I've tried to overcome them, but rather it will show that I am not just what I appear to be at first sight: a young woman in a wheelchair...I'm not only that...I have many faces. Do you want to see them? Come take a look! ★

Manuel Sorto

## Music

### Work in Progress: A New Mexican Opera

Fifty-two years have gone by since the Theater of Fine Arts, Mexico's main opera house, staged Puccini's *Tosca*, its first operatic production. Since then, nearly 180 operas have been performed there. Of these, only ten have been by Mexican composers, such as Carlos Chávez, José Pablo Moncayo, Ricardo Castro, Carlos Jiménez Mabarak and others.



Composer Mario Lavista at work

Elsewhere in Mexico, notably at the National University, there have been a few performances, including works such as *Leoncio y Lena* and *Orestes parte*, both written by Federico Ibarra. Many of these operas were never staged again after their opening seasons, and there are some Mexican operas, like *En la encrucijada*, by Manuel Enriquez, that have never been shown. It would seem, then, that opera is not very well established in Mexico's music circles. Thus, a new Mexican opera is always a curiosity.

Years ago, American composer Samuel Barber wrote a short piece, *On waiting for a libretto*, describing the agonizing years

spent looking for a suitable story for an opera until Gian Carlo Menotti provided him with the text for *Vanessa*. Similarly, Mexican composer, Mario Lavista (born 1943), has been waiting for several years to start work on an old, cherished project of his. Lavista chose his text years ago, *Aura*, a short story written in 1962 by Carlos Fuentes, Mexico's best known writer abroad.

Traditionally, composers have chosen texts that offer strong characters, a clear narrative, some twists of plot and a dramatic ending. In this case, Lavista has set a very difficult task for himself and his librettist; Fuentes' story follows none of those traditional lines.

What, then is *Aura* about? Felipe, a young, sensitive historian, is drawn by a classified ad to a dark, mysterious house in downtown Mexico City. There he is met by a bedridden old lady who, for a very good salary, asks him to edit the memoirs of her late husband, General Llorente. The young man takes the job and agrees to live in the old lady's house until he finishes. Once in the house, Felipe

meets *Aura*, ostensibly the old woman's niece and becomes fascinated with her. Slowly, the encounters between Felipe and *Aura* drift away from the real world and move into the realm of fantasy. At the same time, Felipe's work on General Llorente's memoirs bring him ever closer to the family secrets: wealth, power, romance, love...and madness.

In the end, the images of Consuelo, the old woman, and *Aura*, the young girl, become blurred into a single being, and Felipe is trapped in a twilight zone between fact and fantasy.

Why was Mario Lavista drawn to a story apparently devoid of operatic qualities? The composer him-

## odds and ends

self answers this and other questions for us.

"Ever since I read Fuentes' story, I was fascinated by the atmosphere of confinement created by the author and by the way real people and ghosts mingle in the narrative. I have found several examples of this in Oriental literature, especially in ancient Chinese stories and in the plays of Yukio Mishima; there may also be some influence from Henry James. I think the main theme in *Aura* is the eternal expectation of love and the idea that love can transcend death and that lovers can meet after death."

The libretto will be done by Juan Tovar who has written consistently for film and the theater. How will the librettist and the composer approach such a difficult story?

"The first problem confronting Juan Tovar is the fact that *Aura* is basically a non-verbal story, so he has to start by creating dialogues that aren't there, dialogues to be spoken and sung in the opera. There are three main characters in the story: Felipe, Consuelo and Aura, and we must take Aura to be the personification of Consuelo. There is another character, General Llorente, who never really appears in the story; but we learn a lot about him through the fragments of his memoirs read by Felipe. Juan and I have reached the conclusion that the General must indeed appear in the opera as a flesh and blood character, even though he is a ghost. Moreover, we think that the General himself should read his own memoirs aloud. Thus, we would have a nice balance: Aura as Consuelo's personification and Felipe as General Llorente's personification."

What about narrative continuity and the cast?

"We are thinking of a one-act opera, with four singers who must be, above all, very good actors. My idea is of an opera with a lot of acting, a lot of dialogue, a lot of whispering and a little singing; that is, an opera in which we use vocal resources more appropriate to the story's mood."

Will the opera be scored for a big orchestra?

"Definitely not. I want the characters in this opera to move inside a sort of closed aural vault, which will be provided by the music. Thus, I am thinking of using a small instrumental ensemble that will allow me to write in the same style

that I've been using these past few years, emphasizing the newest virtuosic techniques for wind instruments and string. This would be impossible with a big orchestra, but in a small, chamber-like ensemble I can count on having soloists in every chair. So far, I have a pretty good idea of the kind of ensemble I'll use: flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, probably two French horns, trumpet, a pair of trombones, celeste, string quintet and maybe a couple of percussion instruments to add a bit of color, a vibraphone, a gong."

Will *Aura* follow traditional operatic structures?

"On the contrary, I have always thought of writing the work without the usual division into arias, duets, trios and the like. The idea is to build a unity, a whole, without pauses, from beginning to end. In fact, I could say that in planning this opera I have certain role models. Specifically Debussy's *Pelleas et Melisande*, a work in which the music creates a vault that the characters move, act and sing in, but in which voice is not of paramount importance, as is the case in Italian opera. I would also like to play with the time element. In Fuentes' original story everything happens in just three days and two nights. I have talked with Juan Tovar about this, and for the libretto I want no clear divisions between day and night, only a continuous flow of time and space, in which ghosts can appear, come and go about their business in a normal way. The moment Felipe comes into the house, he must know that time has been suspended."

*Aura* will be Mario Lavista's first opera, although he is no stranger to the world of vocal music. To date, he has written no fewer than six works featuring the human voice; one, for baritone and chamber ensemble, another for three unaccompanied choirs and four others, for mezzo, either with piano or orchestra. Lavista has had his idea for *Aura* since 1980. Only recently, after finding Juan Tovar to write the libretto and convincing Ludwig Margules to do the staging, has the project really gotten off the ground.

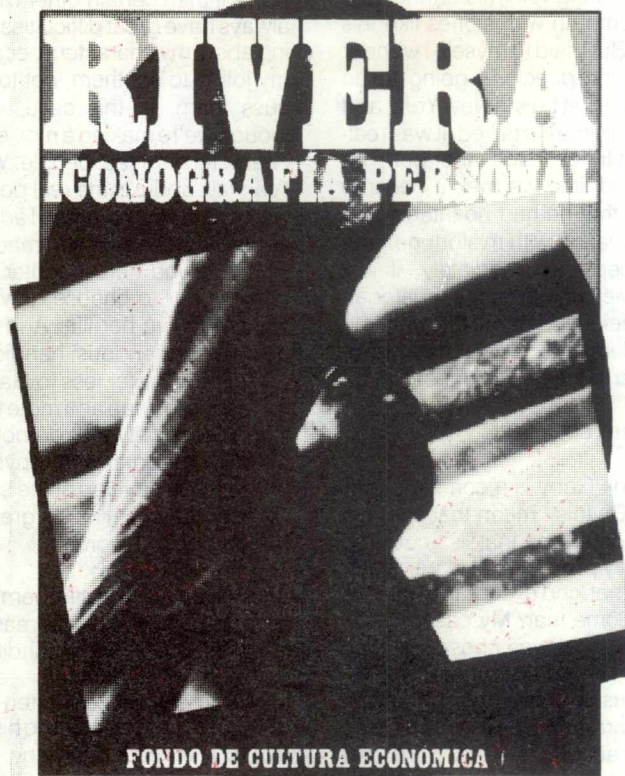
Despite the fate of so many other Mexico operas, even at this early date it is safe to assume that *Aura* will not go unheard. The Fine Arts Opera has officially commissioned the work from Lavista, making it certain that the opera will be staged.★

Juan Arturo Brennan

# RIVERA ICONOGRAFÍA PERSONAL

*Investigación y selección de fotos:*  
Alba C. de Rojo y Olivier Debroise

*Selección de textos:* Olivier Debroise



Pintor extraordinario, militante político excéntrico, protagonista de una época fulgurante de México y del mundo, Diego Rivera es una de las figuras entrañables de la cultura moderna. Este álbum iconográfico narra al lector, a través de 92 imágenes y textos de Alfonso Reyes, André Breton, Lázaro Cárdenas, Guadalupe Marín, Efraín Huerta, Elié Fauré y Edward Weston, entre otros, la vida de este personaje legendario.

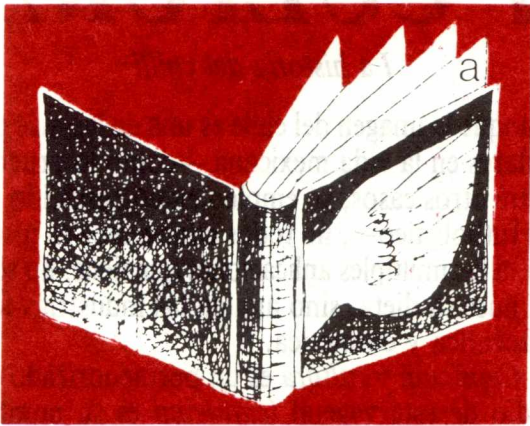


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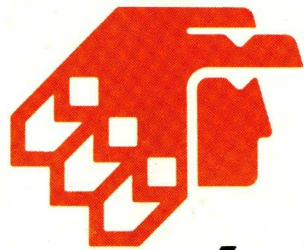


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