

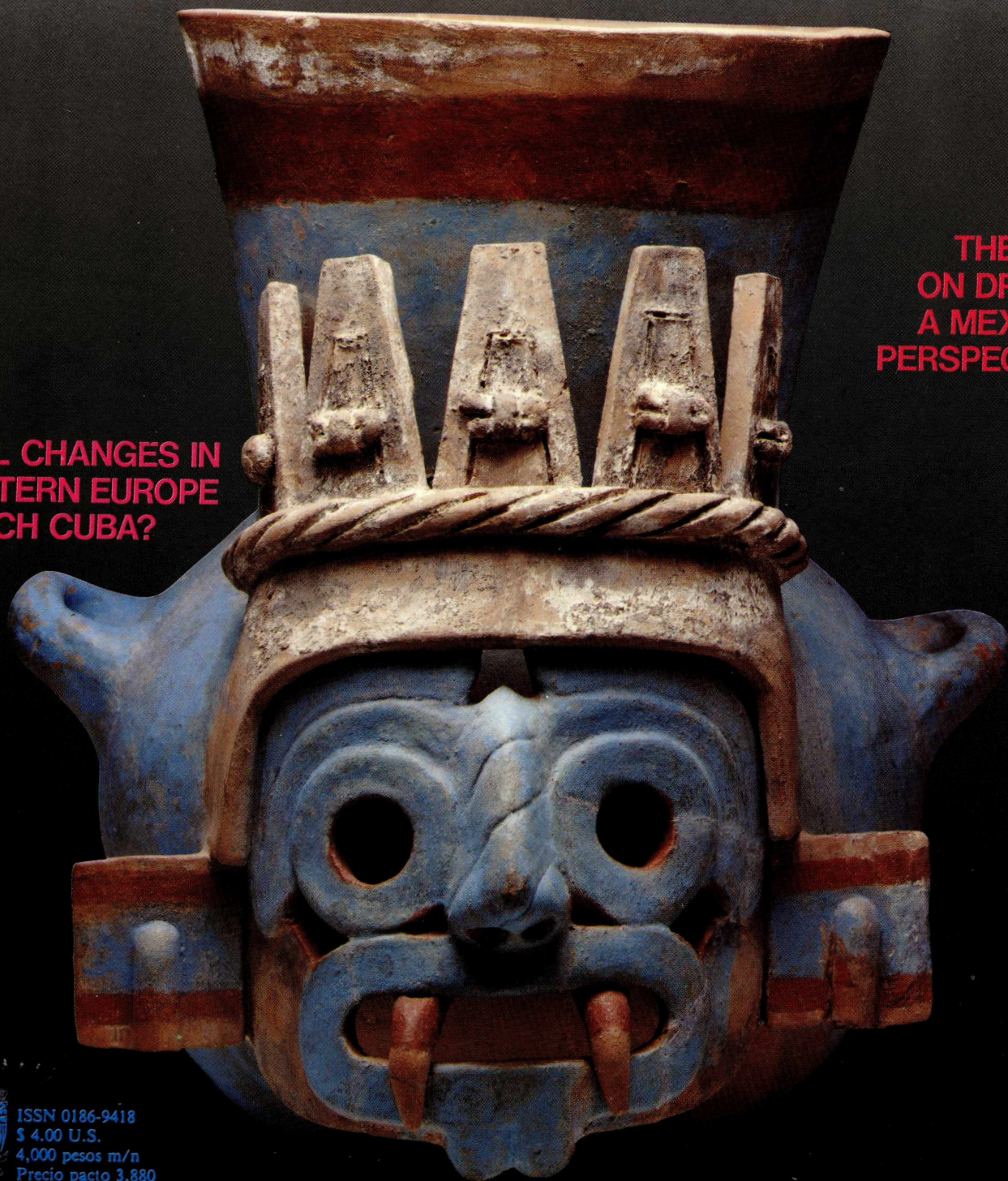
voices

OF MEXICO

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

THE WAR
ON DRUGS:
A MEXICAN
PERSPECTIVE

WILL CHANGES IN
EASTERN EUROPE
REACH CUBA?



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RUBIN DE LA BORBOLLA, PIONEER IN MEXICAN ANTHROPOLOGY

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CONTENTS

October-November-December, 1990. Number 15.

FEATURES

- 3**
THE WAR ON DRUGS: A MEXICAN PERSPECTIVE
by Hugo B. Margain
- 10**
MEXICO - U.S. RELATIONS: DRUG POLICE ACT IN A VACUUM OF RULES
by Blanche Petrich
- 12**
WILL CHANGES IN EASTERN EUROPE REACH CUBA?
by Sol Arguedas
- 19**
TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF UNDERGROUND ECONOMIES
by Teresa Rendón and Carlos Salas
- 24**
NATIONAL SOLIDARITY PROGRAM FAILS TO HELP THE VERY POOR
by Julio Moguel

POINT OF VIEW

- 31**
DANIEL RUBÍN DE LA BORBOLLA, PIONEER IN MEXICAN ANTHROPOLOGY
Interview by Juan Luis Campos

REPORT

- 37**
UNEMPLOYED MEXICANS CREATE MULTIPLE SURVIVAL STRATEGIES
by Enrique Vargas

SCIENCE

- 44**
BRAIN CHEMISTRY AND MENTAL FUNCTIONS
by Ricardo Tapia

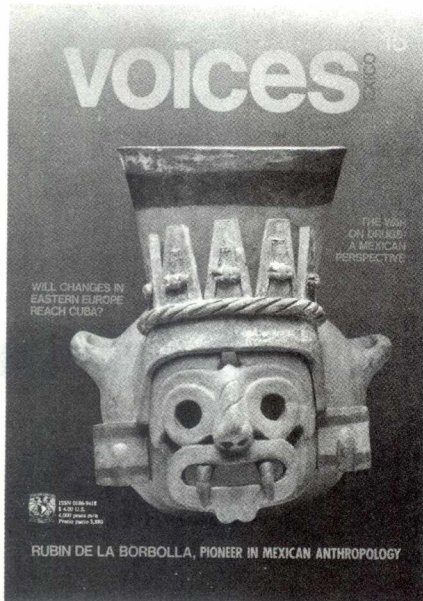
CULTURE

- 52**
FIFTH CENTENARY: INDIAN LANGUAGES DURING THE COLONIAL PERIOD
by Dora Pellicer

BOOKS

- 60**
THE VOICES OF MEDUSA
by Antonio Saborit
- 61**
POPULAR MOVEMENTS IN LATIN AMERICA
by Jorge Luis Sierra Guzmán

THIS ISSUE



Cover: Photo by Michel Zabé
Design by Angélica Hernández

The last decade has seen an increasing pauperization of Latin American societies as governments have struggled against high inflation rates and heavy debts, in an attempt to fulfill the policies of their creditors, the international banking organizations. In Mexico, the processes of economic modernization undertaken by the present administration, have begun to register improvements in some economic indicators (such as investment levels), but salaries do not reflect this recuperation; on the contrary, they have fallen dramatically over recent years, according to figures and the daily panorama. Mexicans, meanwhile, continue to prove their inventive capacities in confronting the crisis with numerous survival strategies, which is proven here by journalist Enrique Vargas in a report on activities of the so-called underground economy. Economists Teresa Rendón, Carlos Salas and José Antonio Rojas Nieto complete the framework by analyzing current economic trends, while efforts to better the living conditions of the very poor in the National Solidarity Program (Pronasol), are evaluated by Julio Moguel, who considers this kind of program a limited one, since it does not reach the very heart of the problem.

In reference to the course of relations between Mexico and the United States, former Mexican Senator and Ambassador, Hugo B. Margain, presents those issues of conflict in the common efforts to combat drug production and trafficking - a joint struggle often made difficult by what Mr. Margain considers unilateral decisions imposed on Mexico by the United States, although his criticism is accompanied by recommendations on each point in conflict. On the other hand, recent changes in socialist nations have led to eager discussions on the "death of socialism"; political analyst Sol Arguedas examines the case of Cuba in this context, arguing that all social changes are part of a very human search for freedom and fulfillment, and clarifies the meaning of such changes, as well as their repercussions all over the world and particularly in Cuba and Latin America.

The fifth anniversary of the Spaniards' arrival in America, to be celebrated in 1992, has already provoked polemics about what this celebration means for Latin America today. Recalling the greatness of former Indian societies, *Voices* presents an interview with Daniel Rubín de la Borbolla, one of the archeologists who discovered the ruins of Monte Albán in Oaxaca in the 1930's, and this is followed by a linguist's appreciation of the effects of the Conquest on the writing of Indian languages.

The celebration of the fifth centenary brings us another opportunity to evaluate the position of indigenous peoples in our societies, beyond the appreciation of their ancient monuments and folkloric customs. Indian groups are working today to revindicate their rights and the moment is ripe for *mestizos* to accept and support their claims.

Mariclaire Acosta

Hugo B. Margain

THE WAR ON DRUGS: A MEXICAN PERSPECTIVE

The relationship between Mexico and the United States is a very peculiar one, since, economically speaking, one country belongs to the North, while the other, on its very border, belongs to the South. The relation not only transcends the geographic framework, but extends to many aspects of the domestic life of both nations, with not always fortunate results. However, it is undeniable that there exists a common desire to make this relationship a harmonic one, and to make it better all the time through agreements, cooperation pacts and other ways. Narcotics is perhaps one of the most crucial issues in the bilateral relationship today. The theme is analyzed here by Hugo B. Margain, whose proposals should be taken into consideration.

Talk given at the University of California, San Diego, as part of the Helen Edison Lectures Series, April 24, 1990.

Bilateral relations between Mexico and the United States have been very difficult ever since our nations achieved independence.

Our most important challenge is to try to handle mutual problems in such a way as to avoid unnecessary conflict. That is the principal contribution we can provide for this and future generations.

In the crucial matter of drug abuse, the Mexican and U.S. governments are joined together in opposition to the production, trafficking, and consumption of narcotics, and also against the "money laundering" and so-called banking secrecy that cover up the illegitimate profits of the criminal narco-trade. Even so, we encounter basic issues that are poisoning the otherwise positive relations between Mexico and the United States. That is really an unfortunate irony: since we agree on the substance of the problem, it is unreasonable for us to have bilateral conflicts about it.

Lawyer. Former Senator. Ex-Professor of the UNAM. Former Ambassador for Mexico in London and Washington. Former Mexican Treasurer. Was Co-President of the Commission on the Future of Mexican-U.S. Relations.

Yet at the moment, we have profound differences with U.S. policies over four issues:

- 1) the unilateral "certification" or "decertification" by U.S. authorities of anti-drug campaigns in other countries, including Mexico;
- 2) the presence of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and its agents in Mexico;
- 3) the problem of so-called "hot pursuit" of smugglers across the border into Mexican territory; and
- 4) the proposal for a "continental army" to combat the problem of drugs in Latin America.

All of these issues have serious and negative consequences for the relationship between the United States and Mexico.

First, the process of "certification" represents a unilateral attitude by the United States that Mexico finds offensive and unwarranted. We do not believe that the U.S. executive or legislative branch has any right to pass judgment on our efforts to deal with the problem of drugs any more than we have a right to evaluate the achievements of Mr. William Bennett.

We need, instead, to respect one another. Crime in Washington DC is a serious problem, but the prosecution of criminal gangs that distribute drugs to American

The process of "certification" represents a unilateral attitude by the United States that Mexico finds offensive and unwarranted

citizens is a matter for the United States to handle. We Mexicans realize that you are facing a serious social and political problem in the U.S. We do not take it upon ourselves to pass moral judgments. We do not attempt to "certify" the policies of other countries. We stand ready to cooperate and to coordinate our efforts. But we do not intend to judge our neighbors.

Every year, the U.S. president sends to the Senate his opinion regarding our policy. The Senate can ratify or amend this executive recommendation. Almost every year, some Senators take the opportunity to denounce our policies and to describe what they think is wrong about Mexico.

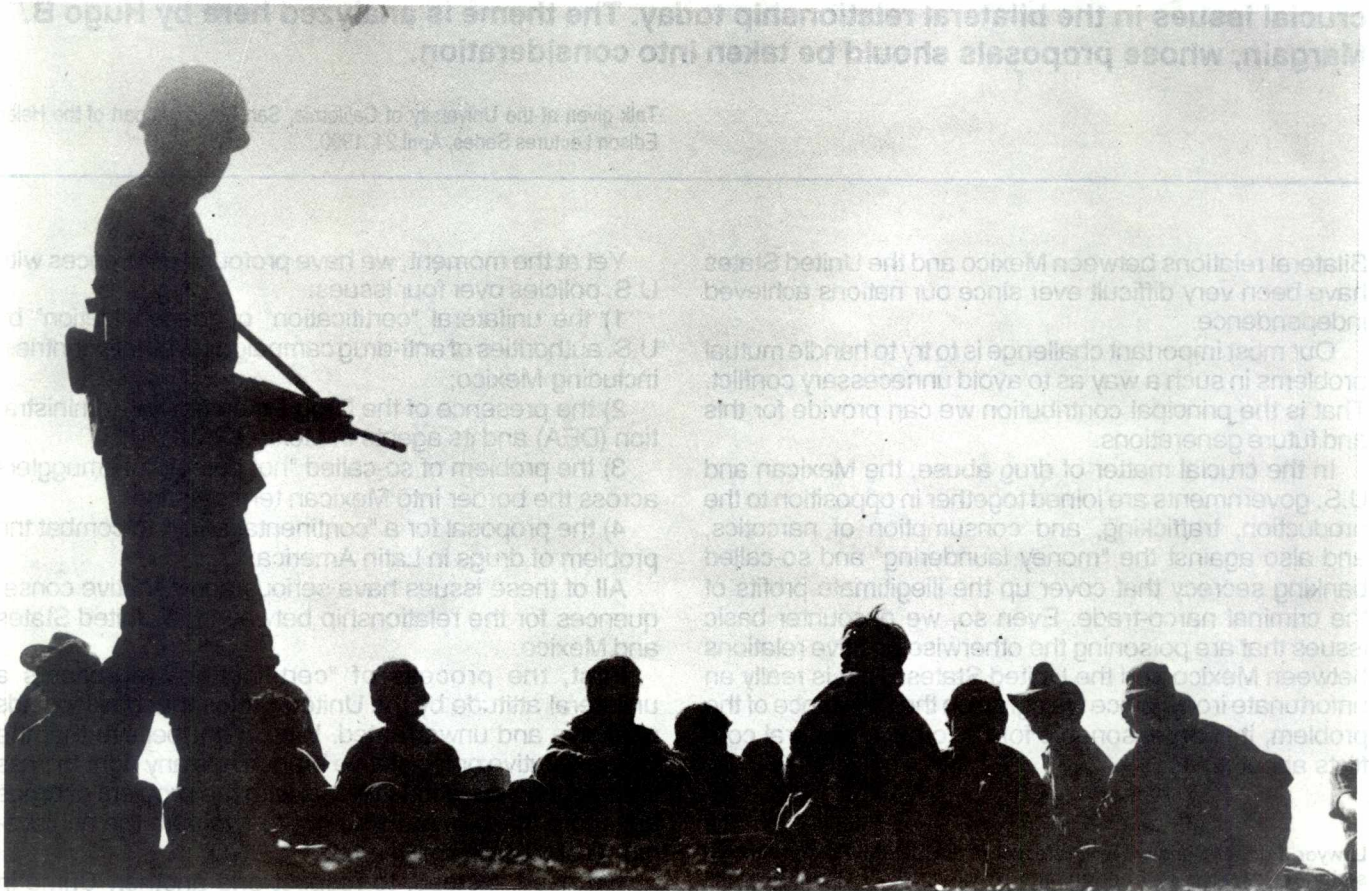
If Mexico were to be "decertified", it would lose its entitlement to the Generalized System of Preferences, a system of non-reciprocal and non-discriminatory tariffs. Mexico would also lose U.S. approval of financial support from international banks. At this point in our development, just as we are emerging from a prolonged period of economic crisis, we cannot afford such adverse measures.

We Mexicans think it is a mistake to mix multilateral economic issues with bilateral political issues. Like other countries, we both must adhere to the rules of the GATT. We do not believe it is appropriate for the United States to "punish" other, smaller countries with commercial or financial weapons on the basis of allegations about drug production or trafficking.

A Multilateral Matter

In December 1988, at a United Nations meeting in Vienna, both our nations accepted the principle of collective responsibility. According to this convention, the U.S. and Mexico (plus other signatory countries) agreed to send to Vienna annually all sorts of information on anti-drug policies. United Nations authorities will produce an annual report on the subject, but they will first send a draft of the report to each member country, to give authorities the chance to make comments for inclusion in a general report that is to be submitted to the U.N. General Assembly. The resulting opinion will not be merely U.S. opinion, or Mexican opinion, but a multilateral, United Nations opinion on what we, both Mexico and the U.S., are doing to deal with the crucial matter of drugs.

That is why we are seeking, for the good of our bilateral relationship, the elimination of this unilateral "certification" by the U.S. The published report from the United Nations will proclaim to the world what our countries are doing, according to procedures accepted by both our countries at the 1988 convention in Vienna.



Agricultural workers, arrested for growing marihuana. Photo by Marco Antonio Cruz/Imagenlatina



'Campaign against Drug Trafficking'. Photo by Carlos Taboada/Imagenlatina

The multilateral procedures adopted at Vienna are far superior to the unilateral and unjust process followed by the U.S.

The unilateral process of "certification" will never be accepted by Mexico. Until it is overthrown, it will continue to be, as it has been, a constant source of deterioration in our bilateral relationship. The multilateral procedures adopted at Vienna are far superior to the unilateral and unjust process followed by the U.S. We do not and will not accept it.

Second, the presence of the DEA in Mexico, though established by mutual agreement, has become a serious point of friction: the assassination of DEA agent Enrique Camarena in 1985 remains a prime example. Moreover, the recent decision of the U.S. Supreme Court (that DEA agents can enter houses in foreign countries without search warrants), creates another bilateral problem. The current dispute over the seizure and kidnapping of Dr. Humberto Alvarez Machain, who was taken from his office in Guadalajara on April 2 and transferred to the United States, offers an example of this problem. (A gynecologist, Dr. Alvarez is alleged to have been involved in the torturing of DEA agent Camarena.)

U.N. Experts

The operation of foreign police on our soil is bad for our relations and bad for both our countries. I believe that the solution is to replace DEA agents with experts from the United Nations who will operate according to the 1988 Vienna convention. This would bring a great improvement in our bilateral relations.

Under this plan, any country could ask this multilateral organization for assistance in the battle against drugs and drug trafficking. Highly skilled experts in modern techniques for dealing with the production, traffic, and consumption of illicit drugs will be made available through the United Nations. There will be sociologists for dealing with psychological problems, medical specialists for helping addicts, and law-enforcement agents to help uphold law and order. If Mexico asks the United Nations for such help in combating drugs and drug traffickers, there will be no further need for the DEA. This will remove a major source of contention between our two countries.

At the same time, we can produce information for the United Nations. We will also produce information for the United States -and we would like to receive information from the United States as well. That will be the best way to enhance our good relations and to avoid the unnecessary confrontations that have been poisoning our bilateral relationship, and, at the same time, weakening our efforts to combat the drug trade.

We share, Mexico and the United States, the same basic purpose: to avoid the production, trafficking, and consumption of illicit drugs. We would like to see fewer

We – the U.S. and Mexico – share the same basic purpose: to avoid the production, trafficking and consumption of illicit drugs

people consuming fewer drugs in both our countries. Given this fact, it seems utterly inconceivable that we should always be quarreling because of two counterproductive instruments in the fight against drugs: the policy of "certification" in the U.S. and the presence of the DEA in Mexico. It would be much better to have a multilateral solution to these problems. That can be found in the 1988 U.N. Convention, which has now been signed and ratified by both our countries.

Respect for Sovereignty

Third, we are opposed to the idea of "hot pursuit" across our boundaries. On this the Mexican position is very clear: the United States is in charge of its "drug war" within its own territory, just as we are in charge of the implementation of our own policies, with our own means. The sovereignty of Mexico continues to be a very sensitive issue for us, due to the fact that, in the past, we have suffered several armed interventions from the U.S.

Fourth, we are against the idea of a so-called "continental army" for fighting drug traffickers, and for this same reason: we are opposed to any kind of blockade, satellite surveillance, or any other such measure that would constitute foreign intrusion on our land.

The 1988 United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, which I have mentioned before, establishes the principle of coordination among participating nations -- and, at the same time, the principle of absolute respect for national sovereignty. We Mexicans feel especially strongly about these two principles: coordination, on the one hand, and non-intervention, on the other.

Notwithstanding such differences of opinion, Mexico will continue to exchange information with other nations (including the United States) and to support the U.N. Convention because we believe that narcotics abuse and gangster organizations involved in the traffic represent a genuine threat to our nation.

In summary, we stand ready to cooperate with the U.S. within the framework of the U.N. convention. We look forward to increasing multilateral action in this area. And above all, we seek to avoid bilateral confrontation with the U.S. in an area where we share the same policy goals.

As for U.S. policy, we think it has been unreasonable and unfair for your political leaders to claim that the damage to American society and citizens comes from abroad, that it is the fault of so-called "producer" nations. The simple fact is that the United States has the world's largest consumer market for illicit drugs. U.S. production of marijuana and other drugs is also steadily increasing. If it is good to destroy narcotics abroad, it is more important to destroy them at home.

In other words: if Mexico were to stop all its drug production and trafficking tomorrow, you would still have

a massive drug problem here in the United States; but if the U.S. were to eliminate all its consumption tomorrow, we would no longer have a problem in Mexico.

Referring to the recent presidential summit in Cartagena, Colombia, the *Los Angeles Times* said in an editorial:

"Rather than going there to tell foreign presidents what to do in their countries to solve our problem, it would be symbolically more precise to have them come to the United States, where both the problem and the solution are to be found.

"The most important front is here, at home. The United States won't taste the first fruits of victory in fighting drugs until it starts blaming foreigners for the problem less, and does more to clean up its own act at home." (Mexico City News: February 19, 1990.) I could not agree more.

Another editorial in the same paper states: "Many Latin Americans resent the heavy hand of the "gringo" superpower to the North; they resent the hypocrisy of being asked to divest themselves of one of their few cash-rich crops; they fail to understand the dispatching of troops and ships to waters off the Colombian coast when the real drug battlefield is in the cities of the United States where drug traffickers control too much territory, terrorize too many frightened citizens and hook too many future mothers and present children on cocaine." (Mexico City News. February 17, 1990).

We Mexicans think it is a mistake to mix multilateral economic issues with bilateral political issues

I also agree with Luis Kraav, who published an article entitled "How to Win the War on Drugs". To him, and to me, the answer is clear: "Victory begins and ends at home". There is no other way. The emphasis must be on education, prevention, and treatment -- at home.

Another recent editorial, this time in the Baltimore *Sun*, under the title "Anti-Drug Crusade and U.S. Habit", presents a thoughtful assessment of the Cartagena conference: "Bush was wise to admit in a Latin setting that the U.S. appetite for cocaine must be curbed by education, treatment and tough law enforcement, if the U.S. is ever to be part of the solution rather than a root cause of the problem".

The Source of the Tragedy

We can hardly deny the wisdom of President Barco's assertion: "... the only law the narco-terrorists do not break is the law of supply and demand". I might add that no country in the world can break the law of supply and demand for drugs. That is the source of our global tragedy.

Over the past several years I have worked with a Bilateral Commission on the Future of United States-Mexican Relations, an independent group of distin-



Tons of cocaine captured by Mexican authorities. Photo by Angeles Torrejón/Imagenlatina

We Mexicans feel especially strongly about these two principles: coordination, on the one hand, and non-intervention, on the other

gushed citizens from the two countries that produced a major policy report in late 1988. In our chapter on the drug issue, we emphasized the critical need for both governments to "recognize that demand for drugs within the U.S. is the driving force for illicit drug production and traffic in Mexico". Our commission also observed that: "International efforts to control supplies at the source have continued to be a key factor in U.S. drug policy...". And as a result, the commission concluded, it should be as important "to eradicate illicit drug production within the United States" as well as within my own country.

Our bilateral commission also recommended that both the U.S. and Mexican governments "take the lead in promoting an international campaign against illicit drugs, in keeping with principles adopted by the U.N. Convention at Vienna in June 1987". (Now we can add the 1988 Convention too.) The report goes on:

"Such a campaign could include the creation of an international drug agency to assist governments that request help in eradication and interdiction campaigns. This group should be located within the United Nations. It

could replace the enforcement personnel associated with existing bilateral narcotic control agreements, such as those between Mexico and the United States (meaning, of course, the DEA). The performance of enforcement functions by a multilateral agency would thus help to reduce conflicts in bilateral relations— between consumer and producer countries."

The war on drugs, as we know, has many difficulties. It is further complicated by the presence of political considerations. In 1969, for instance, "Operation Intercept" had more political motivation than a genuine desire to reduce the trade in narcotics. And from our vantage point today, we can see a long list of programs, operations, plans and policies, that were born and died for essentially political reasons.

Today's war on drugs is, in its essence, a political issue.

The indestructible link between production, traffic and consumption gives way to a war of words: "You are to blame", and it is heard all over the world.

If all crops of natural drugs in any producer country were to be destroyed, the consumption of drugs would continue: the gangsters in charge of the market would simply obtain alternative supplies elsewhere. Other countries will provide them. Distribution will continue through the vast network of the illegal market, and it will continue to provide drugs for millions of addicts and users.

Educating against Consumption

On the contrary, if there is no consumption, the success will be permanent and definitive. The ancient slogan, "no

demand, no supply", can be applied to this illegal market. That is the history of economics. Let us take only one example: during one historical era, the production of lace was very important in order to satisfy a whim of social fashion. When fashion changed, no one produced any more lace. The same could happen today with narcotics.

Evidence shows that, when there is a real campaign against the production of drugs, retail prices immediately tend to rise. So users look for substitutes, but they continue their habits. Suppose there are no more crops of coca leaves. Addicts will turn to an alternative: marijuana, heroin, a "designer drug", or perhaps "ice". Chemical industries are now actively producing synthetic drugs that are just as potent and dangerous as the natural drugs.

It is impossible to halt the traffic in drugs so long as people want to consume them. It is impossible to jail the millions of users and addicts. It is impossible for any government to baby-sit all its citizens.

The long-term commitment must be to educate the citizenry, to inform the public, and to persuade the people against the use of drugs. In a free society, that is our only weapon. Let us explain the terrible and negative consequences of drug use and abuse on their minds, on their bodies, on their families, on their communities, and on their country.

Let us prohibit the promotion of drugs. Let us eradicate the glamorization of drugs.

With regard to law enforcement, the most essential step is defining the target population. The most important,



The Mexican Army collaborates in the anti-narcotics campaign. Photo by Marco Antonio Cruz/Imagenlatina

"The only law that narco-terrorists do not break, is the law of supply and demand"

and most dangerous, are the gangsters who gain enormous profits from their criminal dealings. The policy question is how we can destroy the gangsters and their profits. It is good to prosecute the laundering of money, as we agreed at Vienna in 1988. If we can launch a worldwide campaign against traffickers and their profits, we can hope for a chance of success.

We can agree that the problem has various facets: production, trafficking, and consumption. We can also agree that the most important enemy is not the users in the United States or the *campesinos* in Latin America, but the traffickers, and the corruption they spread throughout society.

Why do people take drugs? For the United States, the Korean War and the Vietnam War had many terrible consequences, including drug addiction among American soldiers. In addition to these wars, we also need to consider two major problems of the modern world: the arms race, and the existence of thermo-nuclear weapons. They are really one and the same. And their impact upon young people is devastating.

The tragedy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki destroyed the balance of human existence. We are, now and forever, uncertain about the future. New generations know that. Consciously or not, they realize that the first atomic war will be the last. And this realization helps explain the tendency for today's youth to turn to drugs. In the aftermath of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Japanese coined a poignant phrase: "Death came from heaven". During our own revolution in Mexico, from 1910 to 1920, we lost a million lives. One of our popular songs philosophized: "If I am going to die tomorrow, why not die today". Even in this era of détente, glasnost, and perestroika, that is a condition that the whole world contemplates.

Let us destroy the cause of that uncertainty – through disarmament. Let us destroy the temptation to indulge in drugs.

Let us also meet the challenge of development, the problem of merging prosperity with justice. *Campesinos* produce drugs because they are trying to assure survival for themselves and for their families. We Mexicans are in favor of channeling the resources now wasted on arms toward education, housing, and health, and toward the reduction of poverty throughout the world. Let us use our resources in favor of liberty, peace, and development. Let us invest the "peace dividend" with wisdom and compassion.

In Chinese ideograms, the idea of crisis is depicted by two symbols: danger and opportunity. Though we now face great dangers in the threats of self-annihilation through nuclear holocaust or self-destruction through drugs, we also face great opportunities. Let us work together to seize the chance for mutual advancement, bilateral respect, and the promotion of drug-free societies for both of our countries. ■

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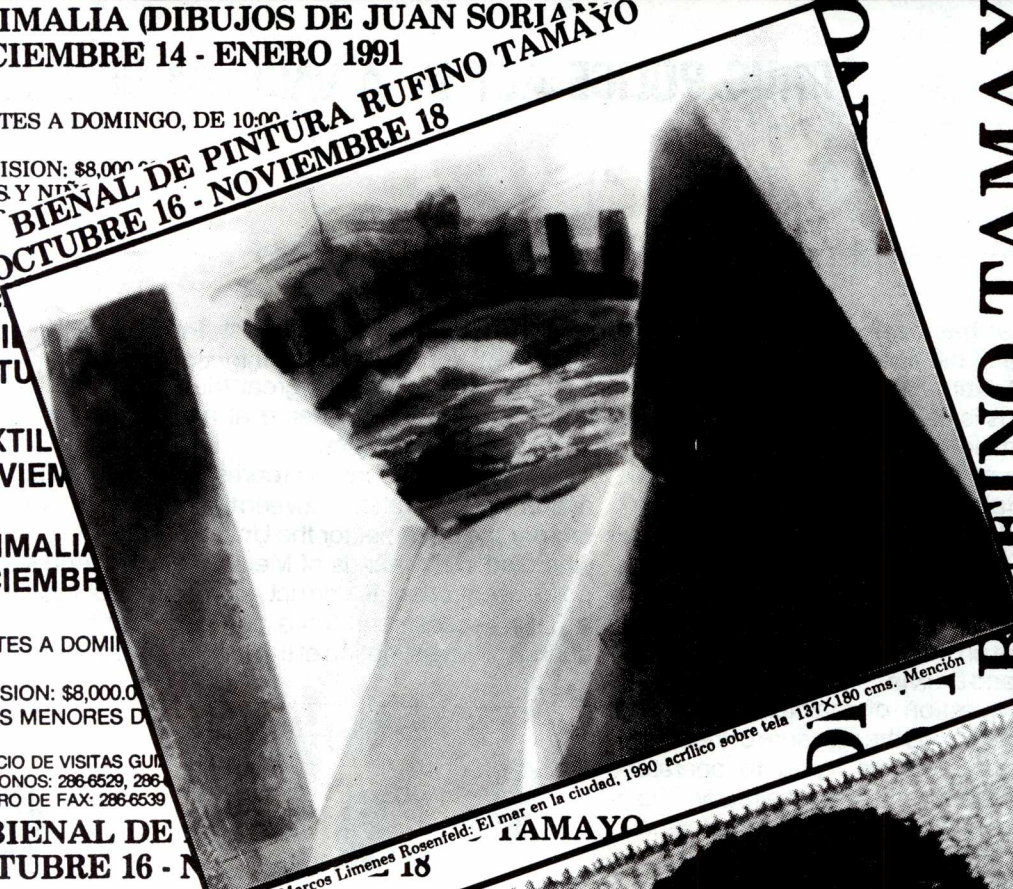
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Mexico-U.S. Relations

Blanche Petrich

DRUG POLICE ACT IN A VACUUM OF RULES

Mexico's northern border has been catalogued by the U.S. government as one of the five "high intensity" drug traffic areas in the world. Naturally, an important front in the struggle against drugs is being developed there. It is also a source of diplomatic confrontation between the governments of both countries. A war in which Mexican authorities loose a battle almost every day. For Washington, and especially for the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), it is a question of applying pressure to get a free hand in the persecution of drug dealers in Mexican territory with similar conditions to those they have been able to impose on the countries of the Andean region, Colombia, Peru and Bolivia.

For Mexico, it is a question of maintaining some measure of sovereignty, vis-à-vis the pressure of the U.S. drug enforcement agents, who are trying to operate beyond their country's borders—and doing it already. The proud statement: "The struggle against drug dealers in Mexico is carried out by Mexicans", constantly repeated by Mexican officials, from President Carlos Salinas to middle level policemen, is challenged everyday.

The most notorious case is, no doubt, that of Humberto Alvarez Machain, a somewhat prestigious gynecologist from the city of Guadalajara, the second largest in the country, who was kidnapped by Mexican policemen paid by the DEA, and clandestinely taken to the United States in early April. Presently Alvarez Machain is being judged in a Los Angeles court, under the charges of participating in the torture of a DEA agent, Enrique Camarena, who was kidnapped and murdered by the heads of the then flourishing "Guadalajara Cartel", in 1985.

According to the U.S. police accusation, Alvarez Machain—called "Dr. Mengele" by the press in that country—doped the captured agent, so that he could survive the torture and give information about what the DEA knew.

But beyond the complex circumstances surrounding Dr. Alvarez and ten co-defendants in a spectacular case, obviously the Mexican authorities are also being indirectly brought to trial.

The process, seen by many Mexicans as a question of personal revenge by the DEA, has awakened the old ghost of the murdered agent, Enrique Camarena, which has already succeeded in provoking serious tensions in the

bilateral relationship in the past. Possibly, although this might not be the express intention of either part, the scandal has soured the great friendship that President Salinas intends to preserve at all costs, with his most important trade partner.

The Camarena case is representative in the history of anti-drug cooperation between the two countries. After his murder, he became, for the United States, the good hero who died in the hands of Mexican crooks. And Mexican police were seen as corrupt accomplices of this murder.

This assessment came out to be partly true, since during the investigation of the case it was found that many



Drug dealers are usually heavily armed. Photo by Angeles Torrejón/Imagenlatina

Journalist

Mexican police agents, including some in upper echelons, were involved in drug dealing. The Mexican authorities carried out a trial and put in jail the most important heads of the "Guadalajara Cartel". This, however, did not satisfy their powerful neighbors and three years later, U.S. authorities started their own legal process.

Mexico has reacted cautiously to the offense of the kidnap. In the beginning, the Mexican Foreign Relations Secretariat handled the case as a problem of sovereignty and asked for the return—not the extradition—of Dr. Alvarez to judge him in the country where the crime was committed.

Several months elapsed and U.S. authorities never answered this request.

As the scandal was beginning to evaporate, the Los Angeles Times revealed the existence of a tactical military unit, operating from the U.S. Embassy in Mexico. The Foreign Relations Secretariat balked: It knew nothing. It expressed its disagreement. Ten days later, the U.S. "explained" that it was a "technical team", including three civilians hired by the Pentagon to operate a computing center as well as radar units, in order to inform the Mexican police about the operations of the drug dealers.

Once again Mexico tried to come out of the incident with dignity, announcing "very clear rules" for the activities of the U.S. agents in its territory. Rules of the game unfortunately established after the game had started.

The Mexican government has made it clear that the principles of anti-drug cooperation are very precise. They definitely include neither carrying out joint operations nor the authorization for U.S. police to enter Mexican territory in search of drug dealers (the so-called hot pursuit). They do not admit the supervision of Mexican police activities by the DEA. They do not accept the militarization of the common border.

They recognize, instead, the need to establish an exchange of information, and to improve the coordination between the police forces of the two countries. They energetically reject a binational police force.

Mexico's problem is that, although the principles of anti-drug cooperation are very precise, the rules of the game are non-existent. For this very reason it is very possible for the players to improvise their own rules, and for the strongest of the two—the United States—to impose its own.

In practice, there is no agreement or bilateral treaty in force, that regulates all aspects of anti-drug cooperation, which started gaining strength since 1970, and since 1982 was formally established with the technical assistance agreements, according to which such assistance would be provided by the U.S. to the Mexican authorities.

The insistence of various U.S. agencies to commit Mexico to extraterritorial operations including hot pursuit, or clandestine activities such as the one that facilitated the kidnap of Humberto Alvarez Machain, dates from 1986, as a result of the mistrust generated by the way the investigation of Enrique Camarena's murder was handled a year before.

There are in fact two bilateral agreements, signed by both governments in March 1989 and ratified by their respective Senates later on: the Drug Traffic Agreement and the Legal Assistance Treaty. For them to enter into effect, a simple bureaucratic procedure is needed: the exchange of diplomatic notes, halted in Washington for unknown reasons.

This is the legal vacuum in which drug enforcement agents freely swim, in spite of all the protests written every week by Mexican diplomats and seldom answered by Washington. ■



Mountains of marihuana, ready to be burned. Photo by Marco Antonio Cruz/Imagenlatina

Sol Arguedas

WILL CHANGES IN EASTERN EUROPE REACH CUBA?

Since changes have begun to occur in Eastern Europe, politicians, philosophers and sociologists all over Latin America -and the rest of the world- are wondering about the meaning of such changes and the repercussions they could bring to countries and movements that sympathize with socialism. An understanding of the motives which led the Soviet Union and other countries to change their way of living requires profound analysis. Sol Arguedas argues that these changes have their origin in the very human search for freedom, and examines the effects these changes in socialism will have for Cuba and for the Latin American region.

"There is true aristocracy in taking the part of the weak, disinherited and exploited."

That we are contemporaries of Fidel Castro exalts all Latin Americans; all who have participated — in one way or another — in his ideals and deeds. Because being his contemporaries is not simply chronological, it is a matter of moral and rational coincidences as the children of a perennially violated and offended America.

Will Fidel Castro see his dream of offering the continent a socialist hope crumble, as Simón Bolívar saw his dream of forming a single, great Latin American nation destroyed?

Will the U.S. see its dream of absolute dominance of the whole hemisphere, as established in its "manifest destiny", fulfilled?

Since the conditions do exist for both possibilities to become reality, it is time to reflect on them in order to better understand our present and propose our future.

Undertaking the discussion of the survival of socialism, or speculating about the forms it will take in the future, would seem premature. Feelings are too heated (and political passions and opinions are exaggerated to the point of caricature among the directly affected parties) by

the collapse of the "socialist block" to permit definitive conclusions to be drawn about the future of socialism. It would appear prudent to wait for the answers which those societies known up until now as "socialist", offer in response to the requirements of the decisive technological change which marks the beginning of the twenty first century.

We should also wait — if we do not help formulate it — for the theoretical work which socialist thinkers and ideologues have undertaken after the dramatic changes which social systems are undergoing currently in both the socialist and the capitalist worlds.

But in spite of advisable prudence and caution in this matter it is impossible to resist the temptation of making

The drama which is unfolding in Eastern Europe and the USSR is very close to home for Latin Americans because of the situation now faced by the Cuban Revolution

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some comments and reflections about the international political context.

The drama which is unfolding in the countries of Eastern Europe and the USSR is very close to home for Latin Americans because of the situation the Cuban Revolution has to face. But because of our proximity with our northern neighbor, the United States, the transformations underway in the international capitalist system are also close to home.

Communists spent years predicting the imminent collapse of capitalism; for the capitalists a few weeks have sufficed for the most hurried, a few months for the slowest, to assume socialism is a thing of the past. If this were true, the hope of the overwhelming majority of human beings who want, here on earth, the justice that religions promise in the afterlife, would have been destroyed without mercy.

The Church Joins In

This hope is indestructible. The Church which surprises us with the call —*urbe et orbi*— that John Paul II has made for a "new evangelism" knows this. The Catholic Church is eager to try to fill the space left in the hope of the poor by the supposed failure of the socialist system.

Approximately at the same time, the Church lashes out at Protestant churches and at rebellious Catholics who espouse liberation theology, which have been gaining ground in Latin America. Latin America continues to constitute, in spite of Poland, the future (in terms of physical and demographic survival) of the Roman Catholic Church.



José Martí, from the cover of *Cuba International* magazine. Reproduction by Alejandra Novoa

hypothesis, could be a reasonable and fertile speculation, if the brilliant political leader John Paul II does not let the irrational hate of Karol Wojtyla towards the "Soviet" socialism that the Polish people suffered, get the upper hand internally.)

It is time to define what has died and what has survived in the historical form that the idea of socialism took: what we have known under the name of "existent socialism", or just plain "socialism" for most people.

Clear Concepts

It is important to differentiate those societies in which socialism was not imposed by the Red Army but was the result of an authentic and profound social revolution (although later – through ideology – an authoritarian, dogmatic regime was imposed). This is an urgent task for independent social scientists or those who are above the mutual recriminations which are made by both groups in swampy ideological terrain.

From this point on in this essay I will worry less about the events in the so-called "popular democracies" in Central Europe and focus more on what is happening in the USSR and our Cuba.

It would not be exaggerated to reinstate an analysis of the fact that the first historical attempt to put socialist theory into practice took place in poor and backward (or underdeveloped) societies – as a great mutation in their evolutionary process – and not as a solution to intense conflicts within an advanced capitalist society, as the previous revolutionary ideologues had predicted.

By definition, socialism follows -or should follow- capitalism in resolving contradictions in a context of advanced economic and social development

Communists spent years predicting the imminent collapse of capitalism; for capitalists, a few months have sufficed to assume socialism a thing of the past

The Catholic Church, inspired by the political genius of Karol Wojtyla, has used this opportunity to jointly punish enemies which fight from within and from without: Marxists, rebellious Catholics and Protestants (Wojtyla also insinuated a future fight against "savage" capitalism).

The Church will have lost before it begins, in the medium and long term, the fight against what "Marxism" has represented up until now, if it does not decide to reconcile itself with socialism. The generalized action of the mass media works against it, against the resignation to their fate that the traditional Church asks of the poor.

Through the "demonstration effect", the mass media displays to the poor, to a degree never before achieved, the opulence of the good life which the rich live here on earth. Of course, the poor will continue to ask themselves evermore urgently: "And why not us?"

With its millenarian perspective the Church should consider – perhaps it is doing so – the probability of a socialism with God, which may be conceived in the Polish laboratory. (This, although not precisely a scientific

This first historical aberration, whose initial successes could be explained in irrational terms similar to those which explain the religious emotions of the masses (but not individuals), must be analyzed again in the light of the collapse of the system defined as "existent socialism". It must also be analyzed taking into account that, by definition, socialism follows – or should follow – capitalism, to resolve the fundamental contradictions within capitalism in a context of advanced economic and social development (and prolonged democratic experience, I would add). The decisive technological transformation of our times forces the revision of Marxist concepts in this respect. And if any, or even all, of the Marxist dogmas were to fall under their own weight, the same would not be true for the Marxist methods of investigation of social and historical phenomena, for the study of which Marxism will continue to be irreplaceable.

That socialism was not implanted as classic Marxists had predicted was a dirty trick history played on these countries. The question, "Why did this first socialist experience began as it did?" has kept many thinkers awake; but the fact that it ended as it did will keep many more up at night.

It does not seem to be a mistake of "existent socialism" that economic centralization was used to finance the triumphant revolution; there was no other way. In the absence of a viable alternative, a centralized political economy accomplished the socialist equivalent of what has been called "original accumulation" in the capitalist system. That is, the basic social wealth necessary to implant the system was created (just as occurred in the capitalist system).¹

When did economic growth and social development come to a halt during the socialist experiment?

That it was not a mistake is evidenced by the fact that the first stages of incipient socialism were characterized by economic growth and, more importantly, because this is the heart of socialism, by significant social development, the latter being the result of social distribution of the economic surplus of goods and services.

When did economic growth and social development come to a halt during the socialist experiment?

First we will undertake a tentative justification of the appearance of a centralized economy. When a society tries to set into motion a project of economic growth and social development, if it is poor and backward as up until now revolutionary societies have usually been, it is obliged to centralize all the economic, financial, technological and above all human resources so that all of them – which are few and poorly administered – can be used efficiently to reach the goal of development. Be it tractors or engineers, investment capital or planning economists, they must be used rationally in space and time.² (Centralization is not unique to socialism; Mexico,

for example, underwent centralization following the consolidation of its 1910 revolutionary process.)

Decentralization

In these circumstances the economies grew, efficiently assisted by an initial revolutionary mystique which motivated and mobilized large social contingents. The economies grew as does a normal foot, which sooner or later feels that the shoe does not fit. This is the moment to decentralize the economy: when a centralized system stops fulfilling its protective role for the economy (like the shoe for the foot) and, on the contrary, acts as a brake to growth and development. It goes without saying that, from this point on, a centralized economy loses viability and, therefore, social support. It can only sustain itself by hardening its accompanying political centralization into a staunch dictatorship, with all kinds of perverse side effects for the development of socialism. This was nothing less than the foundation of stalinism.

A socialist economy should be decentralized when the quantitative growth phenomenon (favored in the beginning by central planning) gives way to the qualitative phenomenon of "self-management" or relative inde-

¹ The cruelty with which this "original accumulation" took place is common to both systems; it is just that the brutality of stalinism is better known because it was practically contemporary, while the knowledge of the inhuman exploitation of labor, in the beginnings of "savage" capitalism, is buried in history books.

² Although this should not be taken as a justification of Stalin, there is doubt about whether Lenin's NEP (New Economic Policy), which encouraged private initiative under state control, would have had success in the lower levels of the Soviet economy. It may be noted in this respect that if Yugoslavia did not obtain the hoped-for success with its self-managed economy it was because it was implanted prematurely in terms of its economic – principally – and political aspects.



Engraving by María Luisa Martín. Reproduction by Alejandra Novoa

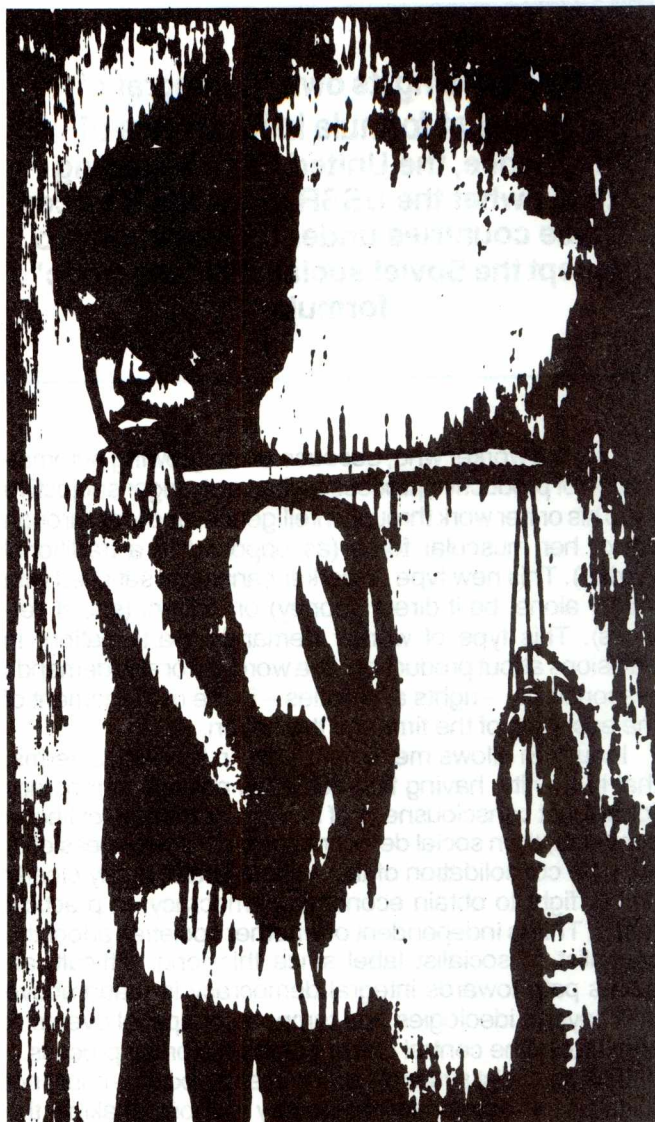
A moment comes when a centralized economy stops fulfilling its protective role, and begins to act as a brake to growth and development

pendence – in respect to the centralizing nucleus – of economic units which have sufficient resources of all types in order to function more or less autonomously. It would not function without a political decentralization which gives way to democracy.

In both cases, in a socialist or a capitalist economy, decentralization should occur as a necessary transfer of economic management from the State to civil society. But in practice this transfer encounters enormous difficulties – the problems of *perestroika* – in socialist societies. Under the capitalist system the concept of "civil society" suffers misinterpretation, since civil society is understood as restricted exclusively to the oligarchy in power, such as occurs in Mexico.

Before continuing with comments about the difficulties of decentralization in the socialist world, I must point out a matter of great importance. It is in this imperative need to transfer to civil society as a whole, the economic management of the State (be it a Marxist-Leninist State or a Keynesian welfare State) – a need which surfaces because the economy "matures", in part influenced by the current scientific and technological revolution – that we must look for the immediate motivation of the sweeping movement in favor of democracy that has shaken the world. A political economy which frees the formidable latent energy of civil society, which feeds on the creative capacity of an ever-growing number of individuals is, without a doubt, the perfect democracy. But... in capitalist society who will receive the most part of the benefits which such an effort will yield? Here words do not suffice; statistics are necessary to show the income distribution in our capitalist societies, both developed and underdeveloped, but above all in the latter.

On the other hand, we can infer the direction in which *perestroika* or the restructuring of the USSR points: towards voluntary, efficient involvement of civil society in all aspects of production, while at the same time, procedures for equal distribution of goods and services are adjusted. It is evident that this is very different from the Soviet Union's supposed "return to capitalism" which those interested in confusing public opinion (or who are themselves confused) declare with great fanfare. It is time, therefore, to question the predominant attitude in conservative circles, whose members simplistically celebrate that they have "won" the cold war, that socialism has "died" and their democratic model has "triumphed". They use these apparent triumphs to explain in a superficial and frivolous manner (as if it were a fight between thugs), the profound historical transformation of the economic organization and political and philosophical conceptions of modern societies.



Engraving by Moshe Gat. Reproduction by Alejandra Novoa

A Dubious Urgency

What we should not accept is that the urgent need for democracy which exists today, be trivialized to the degree of accepting as the full satisfaction of this need, the deteriorated and corrupt democratic formula which the United States is trying to impose by force on the weak countries under its fist. On the contrary, in the immediate future profound innovations will come to light which will contribute to new and original democratic formulas. By imposing its own "democratic" capitalist formula in its sphere of influence, the United States is doing exactly what the USSR did when it forced those countries (and the Communist Parties of the world) under its hegemony to accept the Soviet socialist "democratic" formula.

Besides the role of what we have termed "maturity" (although it is relative) of what have up until now been centralized economies in producing a pressing need for decentralization, there is another even more important element that explains the deep need for democracy. Specifically, the appearance of a new type of salaried worker and a new labor relationship in post-industrial societies, a product of the modernization required by the scientific-technological revolution.

By imposing its own "democratic" capitalist formula in its sphere of influence, the United States is doing exactly what the USSR did when it forced those countries under its hegemony to accept the Soviet socialist "democratic" formula

This is a worker who, because of the growing automatization of productive processes, has a stronger subjective tie to his or her work through intelligence, and less through his or her muscular force (as opposed to a traditional worker). This new type of worker cannot be satisfied with salary alone, be it direct (money) or indirect (social services). This type of worker demands "participation" in decisions about production. In a word, he or she demands responsibility – rights and duties – in the management of the economy of the firm and the nation.

Induction allows me to conclude, in theoretical terms, that humanity, having first achieved political democracy (or at least consciousness of it) with the triumph of liberal concepts, then social democracy (or consciousness of it) with the consolidation of the welfare State, today clearly has to fight to obtain economic democracy, in practical terms. This is independent of whether societies adopt the capitalist or socialist label since this long, difficult, arduous path towards integral democracy is made above and beyond ideologies and temporal or spatial events: it constitutes the central current of the historical process.

The capitalist system – as it currently exists – could not tolerate full economic democracy without shaking the very foundation of the system. But now we also know that the classical revolutionary path does not lead to this type of democracy either.

Reaching integral democracy is one of the dearest desires of human beings, for if expression requires freedom, truly human communication requires democracy. Therefore freedom and democracy are inseparable, as are human expression and communication.



Fidel and Camilo. Reproduction by Alejandra Novoa

Therefore it is not inconceivable that socialism and capitalism could suffer future defeats and failures in their respective efforts in search of freedom and democracy, before reaching both integral freedom and integral democracy for an individual who only exists as an absolutely social being.

The decisive scientific-technological revolution underway today, and the important events that are occurring in both socialist and capitalist societies, lead us to expect true changes in these societies, guided by the determinant principles of the human condition. Nevertheless, as has occurred until now, no society is safe from deformation and deviations, such as fascism and stalinism. If we recognize this danger, we also accept that politics are inherent to all human activities, be they transcendental or simple, daily tasks.

Technology and Social Change

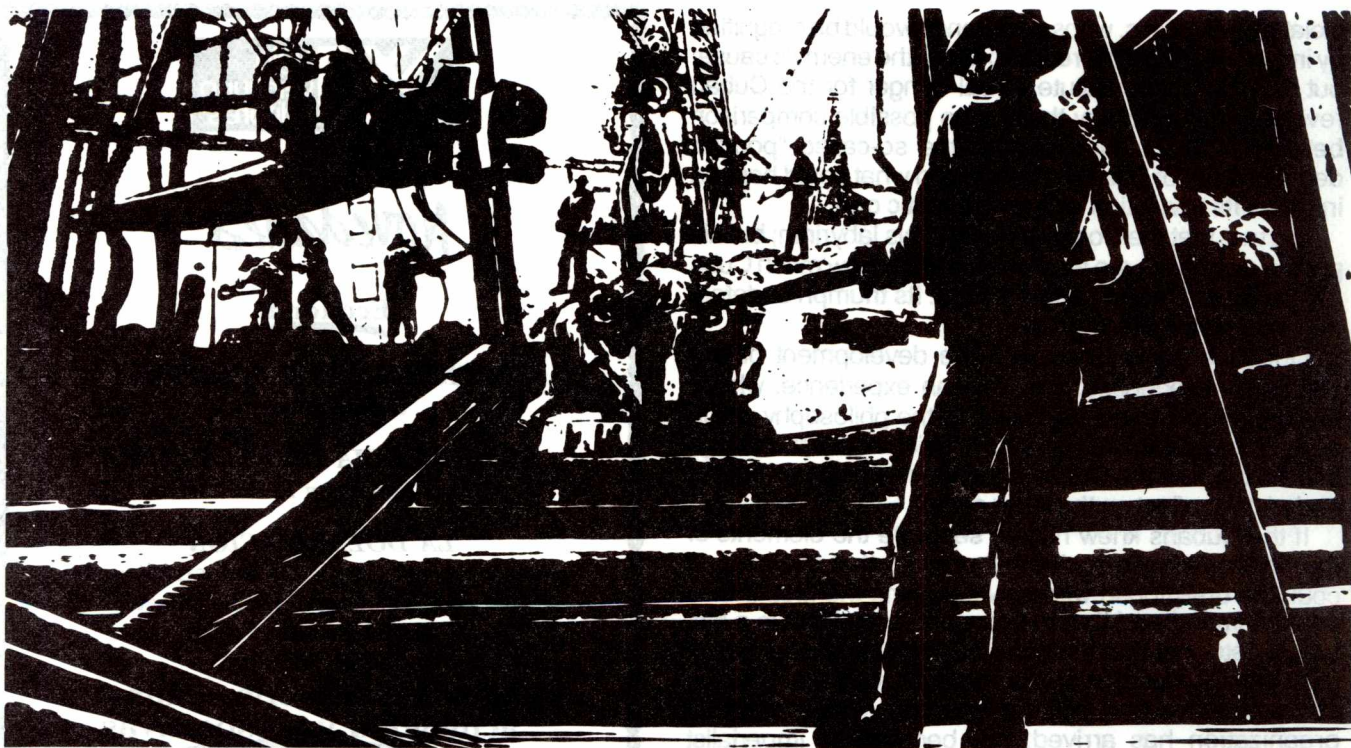
I asked myself previously in this essay about when economic growth and social development stopped in the socialist economies. To affirm that this happened at a moment of qualitative change during which the centralized economy was no longer stimulating and was converted into a braking mechanism, is not very enlightening because this moment cannot be pinned down either. A hypothesis could be proposed relating this moment with the opening to technological change in the West, but this last event cannot be dated with accuracy either. Surely there will be someone in the western world who thinks that the invention of the transistor dates the beginning of the technological revolution of our time; and just as surely someone will reject this idea. In any case, the rapid technological innovations taking place in the West were what made evident – internally and externally – the stagnation and growing deterioration of the socialists' economy.

This evokes speculation about what would have happened if the necessary transformation had been carried out by Krushchev instead of being postponed until Gorbachev's time. Perhaps things would not have been as difficult and complicated as they are for the USSR today. I mean to say that, without specifying when all this began, we can affirm that for reasons intrinsic to its historical evolution – without a doubt because of the lack of political freedom – the Soviet economy was bogged down for a long time (Krushchev, Breshnev, Chernenko, Andropov and, at last, Gorbachev!) and now it is paying the consequences of the time lost.

A Search for Freedom

As opposed to the obstacles which the USSR has found in its efforts towards economic restructuring or *perestroika*, the policy of informational transparency or *glasnost* spread like wildfire. This is very understandable because something which is indestructible in human beings is their desire for freedom.

Freedom constitutes part of the essence of humanity, since the need to free oneself from the womb of nature, to separate oneself from a purely animal condition, was essential to the human condition of pre-human man. Humanity's questions and answers in relation to nature were evermore numerous and complex because their



Yankee Exploitation. Engraving by Leopoldo Méndez. Reproduction by Alejandra Novoa

brain, hands and emotion evolved. Evolution towards full humanity has not ended, but today the predominant character of evolution is social and the biological factor is recessive. Human beings today evolve more within society and less in nature.

In order to evolve, socially human beings use the tools of expression and communication, which if they are looking for integral freedom (or full humanity) should obviously be used in the context of freedom. This is the source of the force which has accompanied the eternal struggle to establish, conserve or recuperate extensive expression and communication in their full human width and breadth.

If freedom is the goal, and the motor which pushes man towards a fully human condition, if the search for it gives meaning and direction to life, how can the identification of human freedom with the removal of obstacles to the "free play of the market forces" not seem ridiculous as well as stingy? Especially a capitalist market which is the very source of all economic and social inequality.

But this constitutes, as we have experienced, the "freeing" formula, the type of "freedom" which the United States imposes on the world with an excess of force made possible by its economic and financial power. Its supposed defense of different manifestations of freedom of expression and communication is refined hypocrisy. (Paying a mercenary army to crush a triumphant popular revolution, in the name of "democratic plurality", and then filling the pockets of opposition parties with dollars to buy votes and consciences, is simply disgusting.)

On the other hand, in the socialist world freedoms were abused (they were scorned as bourgeois) in spite of those socialists who were conscious of philosophical principles pertaining to the true freedom of human beings. Unfortunately the fact that freedoms are useful instruments for reaching freedom as an abstract concept was ignored.

The tasks which *glasnost* and *perestroika* are performing in the USSR today aim to rescue specific freedoms

won and accumulated by civilized humanity. This is part of the rectification and the material and spiritual restructuring within existent socialism, the Soviet interpretation of the universal concept of "socialism".

What About Cuba?

Cuba is a besieged country. It has been for thirty years, since its people and their leaders decided to become independent from the United States. The Cuban revolution was, in the beginning, a revolution seeking independence; it did not intend to implant socialism. What is deeply buried within the Cuban people is the pride of having reached their independence; socialism is the objective presence, the evidence that they are independent. This is why the Cubans are such a difficult enemy for the United States: they are ready to face anything in order to keep out of that nation's grasp. In this their nationhood is at stake.

What is happening to the United States with Cuba could be what happened to Hitler with Russia. It was not the "Soviet Union" which turned out to be invincible for the Nazi hordes, but the ancestral, profound, sweet Mother Russia which uncovered the internal strength which supported her children so that they could survive and live in freedom.

Independence and socialism are so intimately linked in the hearts of many Cubans that they would be unable to separate them. But on the island—we must not forget this—there is also disillusionment, boredom and desperation because of the immobility of the political system and the precariousness of the economy.

Nevertheless, only those who do not know the Cubans, or born since the socialist revolution, could think, believe or hope that the latent discontent could betray the self-defense which they have been engaged in for more than thirty years. (This does not rule out the possibility of

isolated individuals, whose existence would be magnified by imperialist publicity, ready to serve the enemy's cause; but they do not constitute a real danger for the Cuban revolution). This is why there is no possible comparison between what is happening in the so-called "popular democracies" of Eastern Europe and what could happen in Cuba. Its revolution was an authentic one.

It is true that the Commander is in his labyrinth; but his people are too, as are all of us who know how much Cuba means for the rest of Latin America. Its triumph or defeat will mark us for a long time.

Our America is faced with the development of two definitive experiences: the Mexican experience, whose leaders appear to act according to the philosophy which says, "it is better to be servants in a rich house than kings in a shack", and the Cuban experience which has not yet ended. We reflect on the latter case.

If the Cubans knew how to separate the elements of the "independence-socialism" unit, so that the second could be questioned without weakening the first; if they could comprehend that the concept "socialism" is a historical category and therefore susceptible to changes; if they would accept that the moment to make decisive socioeconomic and political changes in their socialist organization has arrived, not because of imperialist threats from their neighbor, but because of pressures from the scientific-technological revolution that affects the world through incredible transformations; if they coincided in the need to search for new definitions for new social phenomena in this accelerated march towards a new civilization...if the Cubans achieved all this, the Commander would come out of his labyrinth, and with him, all of us who are searching for a way out. ■

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Towards a Definition of Underground Economies

It is true that unemployment and poverty lead people to seek various working alternatives in order to survive. But it is also true that these are not the only causes of the phenomenon called "underground economy", which is manifested in many forms, from selling french fries in the street, to illegal transactions. Economists Teresa Rendón and Carlos Salas explain the origins of terms such as "informal sector", "underground economy" and "underemployment", criticize their misuse in current language, and generally clarify our ideas about these concepts.

The purpose of this article is to discuss the relevance of the terms "urban informal sector" and "underground economy" to describe the ways that some parts of the population receive an income and work in some type of economic activity. Recently both concepts have been widely used to describe and attempt to explain the employment problem in developing countries. We will demonstrate that these words do not really explain situations to any great extent. Besides, as both definitions are very ambiguous, there is also the problem of an ideological bias.

After examining the origin and development of the term "informal sector", we will undertake a critique of this concept. We will then look at the case of the "underground economy". Throughout this discussion we will show how the phenomena that fall under these two terms may be both described and better understood if we study them with other categories.

Origin of the Term "Informal Sector"

It is evident that there is a heterogeneity in the productive apparatus of many capitalist countries, especially, though not exclusively, in lesser developed countries. Thus there has been the creation and use of concepts that try to express such heterogeneity. The dual models are a

classic example of this: the economic structure is conceived as the union of two sectors - the modern one and the traditional and backward one (identified with agriculture). If we look at the area of employment we can find the counterpart of these models in the concepts of underemployment, informal sector and, more recently, underground economy. Though the main objective is to analyze the term "informal sector", many of the observations and critiques may be easily extended to the other two concepts mentioned above. In the case of the so-called "underground economy" we can also find that, besides the imprecise relationship that can be attributed to the term "informal", there is a strong neoliberal ideological bias to the concept.

In the sixties, empirical evidence questioned the validity of development theories that talked about a growing absorption of the work force by the modern sector (with adequately remunerated employments) as countries advanced in the process of industrialization. The persistence of whole sectors still involved in agricultural activities and also other types of activities with low wages led the International Labor Organization (ILO) to start the World Employment Program towards the end of the sixties. In the first stage there were various missions composed of experts to examine and try to explain the labor situation in different developing countries. As the final result of one of these missions - the one that studied Kenya - we have the book *Employment, Incomes and Equality in Kenya*, 1972. It is on page six of the introduction to this book that we see for the first time the definition of the term "urban informal sector".

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Frequently, "informal sector" is an elegant way of referring to poverty

The following are some of the notes taken from this introduction:

We must emphasize that informal activities are not only confined to employment on the periphery of the city, to any particular occupation or even to economic activities. Better said, informal activities are the manner of making things, characterized by:

- a) easy access
- b) support by local resources
- c) family ownership of companies
- d) small scale operations
- e) adapted and labor intensive technology
- f) training acquired outside the formal education system
- g) non-regulated competitive markets

Since that time the original conception has become disfigured, the definitions and especially the way of measuring the informal sector has given us inadequate situations (in terms of a pre-established norm) in talking about the workers or businesses that are included under the broad meaning of the term. The worst of these is that frequently, "informal sector" is an elegant way of referring to poverty.

The term then took root in Latin America. The Regional Program of Employment was the main organization to use the term not only in a descriptive way, but also in an analytical way. In using the informal sector as the official framework of interpretation for the employment problem that exists in the cities of "developing countries", the International Labor Organization spread the concept in many of its documents. Due to this fact, people in academic and official sectors started to take notice of the concept and it is systematically used today.

Another element that explains how it took hold is the apparent simplicity of its application. Originally the basic distinction between "formal" and "informal" was related to the difference between salaried and non-salaried work. This was due to the fact that much unsalaried work in less developed countries is carried out in places similar to those described in the previous definition of the term.

This last point is important. The idea of a "urban informal sector" covers a variety of situations that really exist, are really observable and many of them are also very poignant ones.

This also explains why the use of the word has grown so much.

An Umbrella Concept

Examining the employment situation of a country through the concept "informal sector" has caused difficulties in understanding the reality. A heterogeneous productive structure cannot be understood through the elimination of the differences that exist among all the activities that fall under the term "informal" (without overlooking the

common element of many of these activities: the presence of non-salaried work). This element is much more relevant in understanding and analyzing employment reality.

The inherent difficulties of applying the concept of "informal" in trying to measure the size of the sector leads to a broadening of the original term. Thus the productive entities that do not conform to certain legal characteristics are included under the term "informal". For example, if a production unit pays less than the minimum wage, does not enroll its workers in the Social Security organization or does not pay taxes, then it is considered as an establishment of the "informal sector". Secondary aspects are the ones really being taken into account.

They are being contrasted with an ideal norm (in this case, the regulations and obligations of typically capitalist production units). In this sense they do not emphasize the essence of an "informal" production unit in the original sense of the word (the lack or absence of capital).

Productive entities which do not conform to certain legal characteristics are included under the term "informal"



Child toasts pumpkin seeds on the street. Photo by Angeles Torrejón/Imagenlatina

By including survival strategies in the framework of the "informal sector", we can see just how far the term has been extended

The broadening of the original concept implies another important point. We refer to the transformation of the "informal sector" into a type of "umbrella" concept. This then puts very different situations into the same compartment: people working in their own "family businesses", very primitive forms of capitalist business, illegal activities, even begging and in general all types of survival strategies. By including survival strategies in the framework of the "informal sector" we can see just how far the broadening of the term has gone. In this sense it is no longer describing certain production units with low levels of invested capital (and the consequences for the persons involved in this). Rather, it is covering activities which contribute to the survival of individuals, but which cannot be considered as economic activities. This is explained by the way the International Labor Organization talks about the concept of "work" in the sense that it emphasizes only the idea of obtaining an income. This is not how we traditionally understood the word: an activity destined to generate or distribute some type of merchandise.



Musicians earning their living in Jerez, Zacatecas. Photo by Angeles Torrejón/Imagenlatina

There is also an additional problem. When we speak of "informal", a series of wrong connotations arise. For example, traditionally informal activities are identified with precarious activities with low incomes. But if we examine the income of certain commercial activities -that generally don't comply with the regulations of labor legislation- and where family labor is abundant, we can see that the wages are higher than those that come from salaried jobs in the same sector and also in certain branches of the manufacturing sector.

Employment and Labor Market

We must also add another element of a technical nature to this discussion: the generalized use of the concept "informal labor market". By examining this concept we will be able to get to the nucleus of the confusion that is inherent in the generalized uncritical use of the idea of "informal".

If we really want to examine the terms "informal sector" and "underground economy," then we must start by looking at the two terms which are used indistinctly as if they were synonymous: labor market and employment. Thus we have in Tockman and Sousa's well known work¹, (that marks the beginning of the use of the term "informal sector" in Latin America), the chapter entitled "The Formal and Informal Sector of the Labor Market". This identification enables the authors to divide the economic activities of the population into two sectors, introducing a dualistic understanding into the interpretation of the problem of employment in our economies.

There is also a false analogy with the dualistic conception or the trend known as segmentationalist, originated in the work of Anglo-Saxon authors, and which tries to explain the persistent wage differences between workers, particularly in the United States.

According to this theory, the wage differences are explained by the existence of segments in the labor markets. A segment is integrated by the specific activities of a company (the so-called "internal market"), while the other segment (the "external market") is composed of low salaried occupations in general.

It is pertinent to indicate the conceptual mistake implied in identifying employment and labor market. When we speak of a market we are referring to the sale-purchase of a specific commodity. Therefore, the term labor market has the connotation of the sale-purchase of labor. If we see this from the perspective of employment, we are referring to salaried employment. Instead, when we speak of employment, this term encompasses the whole population involved in the production of goods and services, which are the object of commercial exchange, regardless of the production relations through which this productive activity takes place. Thus, employment and labor market are not exchangeable concepts, since the amount of employment is always larger than the salaried part of the population.

1) Víctor Tockman & Paulo Renato Sousa, (1975): "El sector informal urbano" en: *El empleo en América Latina* ("The Informal Urban Sector" in *Employment in Latin America*), CLASCO/Siglo XXI, México.

This last statement is valid even in the most advanced forms of capitalism, since there are in its midst some occupations that are not salaried (direct producers who sell the product of their work and not their labor force). Due to the fact that in advanced capitalist countries a large proportion of those employed are wage earners (this proportion fluctuates between 75% and 92%), the near identification in them between labor market and employment is justified. But this is not the case in developing countries.

Likewise, the concept of economically active population, on which conventional statistics of employment are based, implies the idea of labor force. And it is precisely the lack of precision of this term in situations where there is an important presence of non-salaried work that limits its application for the purposes of explanation.

The term "informal" was originally intended to account for certain characteristics of production units where non-salaried work predominates, as well as for the impact that they have on the personnel they employ. Nevertheless, the concept is widened to cover even the survival strategies of certain social groups. The main weakness of the term lies in the broad range of activities that fall under the term "informal".

Nowadays, the concept of informal urban sector tends to be displaced by another more spectacular one, but not radically different in essence: that of underground economy. This concept, as well as the previous one, is scarcely useful in understanding the occupational problems of a country such as Mexico, insofar as it encompasses drug dealers, peddlers of all types, including home service personnel, freelance professionals and tax evading companies.

The following section explains the origin and diffusion of the term, and shows the insufficiency of attempts to measure it, carried out in Mexico to date.

The So-called "Underground Economy"

The existence of economic activities that are not registered in the national records of countries, is an idea present since the origin of national accounting systems, in the early post-war years. Perhaps the first important attempt to measure the non-registered contribution of certain activities was in a paper by J.A. Dowie, from 1970². In this article he attempted to measure the contribution to the United States' Gross Internal Product, of certain activities outside the law, that are not accounted for in national records. Little by little, the idea of measuring the size of economic activities that are not registered as part of the GNP, began to gain strength.

The sector of the economy that is not accounted for this way gets different names: black, illegal, covert, non-declared, non-measured economy. The term most widely used today was coined in 1977: underground economy. The term was reclaimed by the ILO since 1980 and the most accepted definition today is the following: "The underground economy encompasses illegal transactions (in currency or in kind), fiscal frauds (evasion, understatement) and clandestine work. This last term includes

2) J.A. Dowie (1970): "Illegal Activities - As Measured and As Not". *The Economic Record*, Vol 46 (November), pp517-519.



Music to sell virgins. Photo by Heron Alemán/Imagenlatina

The term underground economy generally refers to activities not registered in national accounting systems

non-registered workers, non-registered crafts makers and non-registered multiple employment."

The ILO adopts the term due to the fact that it apparently makes it possible to explain the rise in economies such as the Italian one, characterized by an economic takeoff not accounted for in the official records of the GNP.

Now, the generalized use of the concept is a consequence of an offensive by the most conservative sectors, both in Academia and in business organizations. The reason for this is that the existence of non-declared activities is explained in terms of an excessive presence of government in economic activity or in its regulation.

Legal regulations as well as the tax burden are emphasized. This last item is always considered excessive. And therefore, the diffusion of the term has gone hand in hand with the offensive against state intervention in the economy, which has characterized the position of orthodox economic circles since the end of the last decade.

In Mexico, the first attempt to measure the size of the "underground economy" was made by the Centro de Estudios Económicos del Sector Privado (CEESP) (Center for Economic Studies of the Private Sector), in a book titled, precisely, *La economía subterránea en México* (The Underground Economy in Mexico), published in 1987. Two methods are employed for quantification: the so called "physical input" and "cash demand". The conclusions of this book are illustrating. The size of non-declared activities is explained, according to the text, by the excessive tax burden, by the suffocating bureaucracy and by corruption.

It has been conclusively shown that the econometric results shown in the book lack technical precision. Furthermore, as these deficiencies are corrected, the results show blatant contradictions between the two methods used by the Center to measure the size of the so-called "underground economy".

Final Comments

The concepts we have examined (informal sector and underground economy) have as a precedent the old concept of "underemployment" or "subemployment", from which they differ neither essentially nor in their explanatory potential.

We have tried to prove in this paper that the application of both concepts omits traits that are important for the explanation of the occupational structure of our country. Moreover, they cannot explain the origins of the occupational problems presently faced by an important part of the population.

They emphasize secondary elements which emerge -implicitly- from opposing the characteristics in which non-salaried work is carried out, to those of capitalist



Three of the millions of children who live on the streets of Latin America. Photo by Angeles Torrejón/Imagenlatina

production and salaried work. For instance, they forget that labor legislation serves to regulate the relations between labor and capital in conditions of salaried employment, and pretend the inclusion of all workers, wage earners or not, under this legislation. This is an argument that may be valid, but labor laws are not intended to have such a wide range in their application.

Similarly, to speak of activities carried out beyond the legal criteria, is only a description and not an explanation of the underlying causes for their appearance or their proliferation. This, without forgetting the role that both concepts have played in the conservative offensive against state intervention in the economy.

If we wish to advance in understanding the occupational problems in the country -a necessary starting point for any strategy to solve them- it is necessary to redefine or even to abandon both concepts. We believe that the activities now encompassed under the heading "informal sector" or "underground economy", can be described and explained using other already existing categories, which do indeed have a precise definition. As an example we can mention the category of non-salaried work, spoken about previously. ■

National Solidarity Program Fails to Help the Very Poor

Julio Moguel

It is well known that Mexico is passing through one of its worst crises in history, which is being faced by the government of President Carlos Salinas with several strategies. One of these is the National Solidarity Program (Pronasol), launched in an attempt to combat "extreme poverty". It consists in channeling resources to the most marginal zones of the country, in order to help them to prosper. Julio Moguel analyzes the Pronasol, its details, implications and possible results.

Many were surprised that the theme of combating "extreme poverty" was included in the economic program proposed by President Salinas de Gortari at the beginning of his government. Some thought it was a kind of formula to attack Cardenism, something within the framework of traditional concessions made in order to recuperate votes and consensus. Others described it above all as a legacy of old and well known "populist" moves, supposing that the Salinas government was not prepared to radicalize its reform proposals.

The setting up of the National Solidarity Program (known as Pronasol), headed by well known "populists", or by former left-wing militants,¹ increased the suspicion that the Salinas administration would try to govern with both hands – that is, with the directive force of the right hand, without hiding or forgetting to use the left hand. Other events also helped create the illusion of make-up: the imprisonment of Joaquín Hernández Galicia ("la Quina"), head of one of the most traditional and corrupt trade unions of the nation (the petrol industry workers), and of Eduardo Legorreta, well known leader of the Mexican finance world.

These events led observers to suppose that the regime would respond to old demands made by the masses, hitting at traditional powers in order to extend democracy and giving substantial resources to attack the extreme evils of poverty.

When the Program was presented, it was with an unusually realistic discourse, which led to the reaffirmation of the hypothesis that "now indeed" there would be a true interest on the part of official powers to abandon old demagoguery and to make a frontal attack on some of the country's most serious problems caused by inequality and poverty. The Program opened its doors to indigenous communities, indigent zones, backward urban areas and to peasants with scarce productive potential (especially those who grow crops just once a year, during the rainy season). According to Carlos Rojas, executive director of Pronasol, "social backwardness was now unbearable for the country and threatened to become a question of national security".²

Another commitment was being made explicitly and emphatically: there would be no discriminatory treatment; rather, there would be dialogue "with social organizations and with municipal authorities, independently of whether or not they are identified with some political party".³

Land of Plenty?

In 1989, Pronasol had a budget of 1.7 billion pesos, and in 1990, 3.5 billion pesos. But very soon, Pronasol stopped being a specific program, with clearly limited plans and resources, and began to appear all over the place in the "Convenios Unicos de Desarrollo" (Unique Agreements for Development) (CUD), as the ready cash of the President, in the form of municipal resources or for political campaigns. In the first year of the Program, several non-

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An attempt to solve some drainage problems. Photo by Carlos Taboada/Imagenlatina

government social organizations were able to obtain access to Pronasol funding without having to negotiate with state governors and without having to pass through the red-tape filter of their respective state governments. With few very exceptions, this situation changed in 1990 in a significant way, as the greater part of the "packages" of solidarity investment were made part of the programs run by COPLADES* or by the CUD. Besides – although there were a few exceptions – those who now acted as spokespersons and bridges for the investments were not social organizations or producers. These were replaced by local governments, specifically, the Municipal Solidarity Councils. This change created enormous complications for those regional organizations not affiliated with officialdom, with respect to real participation in negotiations and subsequent access to funding. However, this did not mean the "institutionalization" of the management and programming of all the resources, as the Presidency of the Republic continued to use a good part of the funds according to its discretion, and following fundamentally political criteria.

The Problem of Salaries

But neither the impressive investments made by Pronasol in Chalco – one of the poorest municipalities of the country – nor the celebration of the "National Solidarity Week" (from August 2 to 8), could hide what cannot be hidden. The assessments began to be less optimistic. After a year and a half of Salinas government, the macro-economic indicators gave negative balances on all those factors directed to recuperate the standard of living and to fill the popular shopping baskets, thus making evident that Pronasol was a program with few capacities to compensate for the poverty levels. The minimum wage, as well

In 1989, the salary level of the manufacturing industry "was exactly half that of the years 1980 and 1981, and only 43% of the 1976 level!"

as wages in the manufacturing industry, experienced a continuous decline. In 1989, the salary level of the manufacturing industry "was exactly half of that of the years 1980 and 1981, and only 43% of the level of 1976".⁴ In 1976, salaries represented 45% of the national income, but they fell to represent only 28% of the national income over the last two years. In contrast, the representation of capital in the GNP rose from 54.8% to 73% during the same period.⁵

In rural areas – Pronasol's "favored" area of influence – productive conditions did not improve, nor did the greater part of the rural population find ways to improve their standard of living or of lessening the weight of misery.

The violently rapid liquidation of state owned companies, the step "from a policy of indiscriminate subsidies to one of selective subsidies", and the elimination of guaranteed prices – among other factors – has put numberless groups of rural producers in a critical situation.⁶ Changes in the credit system have been made according to the logic which makes a clear separation between the productive and the non-profitable. Thus, FIRA** now specializes in those "profitable producers", Banrural attends those "potentially profitable", and Pronasol attends to the miserable. This perverts the relation between the

FEATURES

State and the poor or moderately poor peasants, because receiving funds for a "lost cause" stimulates corruption or the malversion of funds among those of the lower ranks, while it generates irresponsibility and carelessness in those who hold power. Besides, the use of resources "on loan" in the form of gifts, reproduces other vices, given the expectation that a concession of this nature will be repaid in the form of certain fidelity in political action or in the electoral booth.

Other problems have come to light besides those mentioned above. Significant resources of Pronasol do not reach the needy communities, because they are "filtered" or tampered with by local bosses (*caciques*), political intermediaries or state governors; discrimination in the use and management of funds has become evident: small amounts for opposition groups and a lot for those faithful representatives of the governing party, while lack of planning and forethought is evident. Thus, seen globally, the logic which combines policies of extreme austerity and "liberalization" of the economy with others supporting "the poorest groups", is at least, to be suspected of ingenuousness or of hiding its precise objectives.

Armando Bartra puts it in the following way: "Just like the wife of the factory owner who used to organize charitable breakfasts to benefit the poor who were made so by her husband, the current Mexican government has created an assistance program to help the population which it empoverishes more every day with its economic policies.... Aspe (the Federal Treasurer) makes them and Rojas redeems them. Only that the man in the Treasury is quicker and more efficient than the man in Pronasol. Or could it be that one hand should not know what the other is doing?"⁷

Various indicators, then, have led diverse analysts to suppose that, far from being a "populist" face of the government, the formulation of programs like Pronasol fitted perfectly with the neoliberal logic of the Salinas administration.

This pattern, widely recommended by the World Bank, is the following: separate the policies of increasing productivity rates from those of helping the poor; avoid all kind of confusion or distortion in the management of public resources, giving alms to misery and capital to the "profitable and productive" areas. But the pattern does not conform with making this clear separation between areas of poverty and those of real potential productivity. The scalpel is applied to the finest tissues, to divide the poor from the "extremely poor". The first will gradually have to assume the challenges – and costs – of development; the second will have to find a way to become deservers, firstly, of the title, "poor".⁸ Mexico only has to make this pattern "adequate" for "its realities", namely, to its corporate system and its dominant party (that which Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa described as the "perfect dictatorship"), and to the necessities of the struggle against Cardenism.

The logic which combines policies of extreme austerity with other policies supporting the "poorest groups", is at least to be suspected of ingenuousness



Neighbors get together to improve their habitat. Photo by Carlos Taboada/Imagenlatina

Solidarity – with whom?

Some Pronasol funds have found their way to areas where the PRI's opposition dominates. However, while it is true that independent social groups and democratic municipal governments like that of Juchitán (in the state of Oaxaca), have received benefits from the program, no-one has failed to notice that the greater part of the Program's funds have been channeled through the traditional corporate mechanisms – that is, those social organizations controlled by the government. This has meant that the proposed objectives, in a great measure, have not been achieved. In the state of Durango in 1989, the National Confederation of Popular Organizations (CNOP) (one of the three pillars of the PRI), received 75% of the Pronasol budget in that state, in spite of its limited capacity (due to the crisis and to the lack of real links with organized social sectors) to put the projects into effect. In the same year, the Central Nacional Campesina (CNC, the PRI's organized rural sector) received around 60% of the Pronasol's funding in Oaxaca.

The intentions of the federal government, to direct these funds to organized communities which have certain capacity to promote their projects, have fairly frequently come into conflict with the well-established interests of local bosses and power structures, members of local groups which still dominate in a major part of Mexico's



Children lack adequate recreation areas. Photo by Marco Antonio Cruz/Imagenlatina

rural areas. Such is the case in the state of Hidalgo, where the state government and the regional delegation of the Budget and Planning Department (SPP), have refused to allow those social groups which operate outside the official party, to have access to benefits of the National Solidarity Program. In this tiny state, organized *campesinos* and Indians from dozens of communities in the Mezquital Valley⁹ applied for support for development of productive processes which are already fairly well consolidated at the local level, but which need an economic investment to make them become programs of community development and benefit at regional level. The communities which applied for the support did not come to the Pronasol offices with empty hands: they presented their proposed program, based on their own existing infra-structure, such as corn mills, sewing workshops, crafts co-operatives, collective stables and poultry farms. The wide experience accumulated over several years in managing finances and the guarantee that this capacity would permit an efficient use of the investment, were not sufficient arguments to "unblock" the flow of funds.

Applications for the introduction of electricity and drinking water made by various small towns of "extreme poverty" in the same region, received similar treatment, even though, in the majority of the cases, these requests had been made up to ten years before. Those in charge of Pronasol in Hidalgo explained that the municipal presidents were responsible for choosing those communities which would receive benefits. The political nature of this choice was plain: to give just one example, in the municipality of Cardonal, in spite of the existence of a fairly large number of communities without electricity, the only town to receive the service was the home town of the local municipal president.

The communities which applied for Pronasol support did not arrive with empty hands, their proposals were based on an existing infra-structure

Another example of "discrimination" in the management and use of Pronasol funding occurred with the Coordinadora Nacional de Organizaciones Cafetaleras (National Coordinator of Coffee Producing Organizations) (CNOC).¹⁰ This case is particularly meaningful, given the importance of this organization in the areas which were to receive funds from the Program – in Guerrero, Oaxaca and Chiapas. In the study mentioned above, Luis Hernández points out: "The CNOC has been extremely cautious in its relations with the state. Although many of its organizations have benefited from concertation agreements, others have been discriminated against for political reasons. In reality, the CNOC as such has no single concertation agreement."



Will government funds reach these people? Photo by Marco Antonio Cruz/Imagenlatina

Although the presence of Pronasol has been advantageous in many cases, in others it has had negative consequences for producers' organizations. The programs of social concertation have many closed doors.

But Pronasol is not only perverse when seen in relation with certain social organizations and the few municipalities governed by opposition parties. It is worth while mentioning here what appears to be a relatively new element in the Program, such as the Municipal Solidarity Funds. Recently, the official in charge of the program informed that there exist some 1,400 actions of this nature, "in more than 50% of the municipalities of the country". There also exist Solidarity Production Funds, which "go directly to local councils and which are attending the necessities of peasants who live in zones of extreme poverty". And finally, there is the Solidarity Program for a Quality School, in which the local councils also participate.

To sum up: the local councils acquire a peculiar central role in the national program designed to attack and to remedy in some way, the problems generated by extreme poverty. The council serves as a reception center and as a nucleus of planning and support; a bridge in the relationship between the federation and some of the most dispossessed social groups; a key structure in political concertation and negotiation.

Conditioned Resources

A close-up view of the situation enables us to see the problems and obstacles more clearly. Recent negotiations between the Mexican government and the World Bank led to the approval of substantial funding to abat

Recent negotiations between the Mexican government and the World Bank led to the approval of substantial funding to abat extreme poverty in the states of Oaxaca, Chiapas, Guerrero and Hidalgo

extreme poverty in the states of Oaxaca, Chiapas, Guerrero and Hidalgo. But there was a condition: the funding had to be channeled through local councils, with the obligation to create Municipal Solidarity Councils which in turn, would promote and take charge of the formation of Municipal Solidarity Committees. The first problem: the corresponding Councils should be made up by the local municipal president, a representative of the state governor and a representative of the municipal delegates or commissaries; the Council Treasurer is also a member, but without a vote in decision making processes. The local authorities are obliged to accept this composition of the Council, which once formed, has the legal capacity to create the Committees which will administrate and carry out investments and programs.

The second problem: investments made by the Municipal Fund should not be greater than 50 million pesos per project – this practically prevents any programming or development of community projects which want to go further than simple remedies or secondary repairs. The reasons for this must be very diverse and complex, but

they also have something to do with a certain perversity of our modernizing impulse, which does not expect any productivity from the poor, and which deals with the poor in terms of "comprehension, support and patience".

There are no democratic means of control over the spending of the funds or over the structures which carry out these duties which could assure their efficiency or the correct use of the investments. The Committees are responsible to the Councils, which in turn are responsible to the state and federal authorities. These are the traditional structures of control and state planning; thus, these same structures have the last word on the use of Solidarity funds, and the influence and power of local bosses (*caciques*) and governors is reaffirmed by the fact that most funds are channeled through organisms such as the COPLADES* or the CUD. In this system, Pronasol resources can reach and be useful to the very poor only with difficulty. The resources are lost in the neverending network of traditional power structures, and are used to serve established interests and to strengthen the state's corporative structures. ■

*COPLADES: Comité de Planeación y Desarrollo (Planning and Development Committee).

**FIRA: Fondo de Garantía y Fomento para la Agricultura, Ganadería y Avicultura (Agriculture, Cattle and Poultry Raising Fund).

NOTES

1) The Pronasol Consulting Council was basically made up by former personalities of the Mexican political left. Carlos Tello, member of the political bureaucracy which participated directly and actively in the decision making and carrying out of the Bank nationalization in 1982, was named its President. The Program's executive direction was placed in the hands of Engineer Carlos Rojas (subsecretary of the Budget and Planning Department - SPP), who was an important figure in other years as an active researcher and militant of some popular movements.

2) *unomásuno*, July 20, 1990. Half way through 1990, Pronasol made known a study entitled "Guidelines to combating Poverty", where the great national dilemmas were acknowledged "with realism". It is worth our while to mention some of these here.

Millions of tons of corn produced in Mexico in 1981: 14.6; in 1987: 11.6. Basic foods imported from 1960-1969: 689,000 tons; from 1981 to 1989-90: 60 million tons.

Percentage of the public investment destined to rural areas, in 1980: 19; in 1990: 5.

Percentage of the population which eats less than the minimal recommended nutritional level: 40.

Of every 2 million births: number of children who die during the first few years of life due to nutritional problems: 100,000.

Percentage of inhabitants of rural areas who registered some degree of malnutrition in 1985: 90.

Number of Mexicans who have no access to institutional health care; 14 millions; Number of Mexicans older than 15 who have not finished primary school: 25 millions; Percentage of government spending on education in relation to G.N.P. in 1981: 5.5; in 1987: 3.6.

Estimated national housing deficit 1988: 6-7 million homes.

Number of Mexicans whose basic necessities are not satisfied: 41 millions; Number of Mexicans who live in conditions of extreme poverty: 17 millions.

See: José Woldenberg: "Poverty (no comment)", in *La Jornada* September 1, 1990.

3) *unomásuno*, July 20, 1990.

4) Antonio Rojas Nieto: "Salario y modernización salvaje" (Salary and savage modernization), *Hojas*, #3, September 1990.

5) *Idem*.

6) In the modernizing perspective (of Salinas de Gortari), the agrarian problem has got nothing to do with the polarization generated by the policies of reprivatization and of exportation of agricultural products – policies dominant since the 40's - but only with inefficient subsidies of paternalist populism, which lived its very brief spring during the 70's According to the 1989-94 National Development Plan, "reversing the deterioration" in the rural sector is a "long term" matter. "In the short term, the strategy should be to support price stability and protect the well being of the low-income population". Armando Bartra: *Modernidad, miseria extrema y productores organizados*. (Modernity, extreme misery and organized producers) *El Cotidiano* # 36, July-August 1990.

7) *Idem*.

8) The World Bank recommendation operates in various Latin American countries which have assumed the logic of development promoted by the so-called neoliberalism. Thus "pronasoles" exist under diverse names and in diverse manners (for example, the "Social Investment Funds").

9) These are communities where Cardenism has a significant influence, although this is expressed not so much through organized groups, but rather through voting patterns.

10) The CNOC is an independent organization which has been able to advance very rapidly towards a propitious terrain, with precise ideas on how to confront programs of the State coffee company Inmecafé, and on how to generate – alternative – social spaces for productive initiatives. An important paper on this theme is the analysis of Luis Hernández: *Nadando con los tiburones: la experiencia de la Coordinadora Nacional de Organizaciones Cafetaleras*. (Swimming with the sharks: the experience of the National Coordinator of Coffee Producing Organizations). Mimeograph document.

11) *Idem*.



And there are people even poorer. Photo by Marco Antonio Cruz/Imagenatina

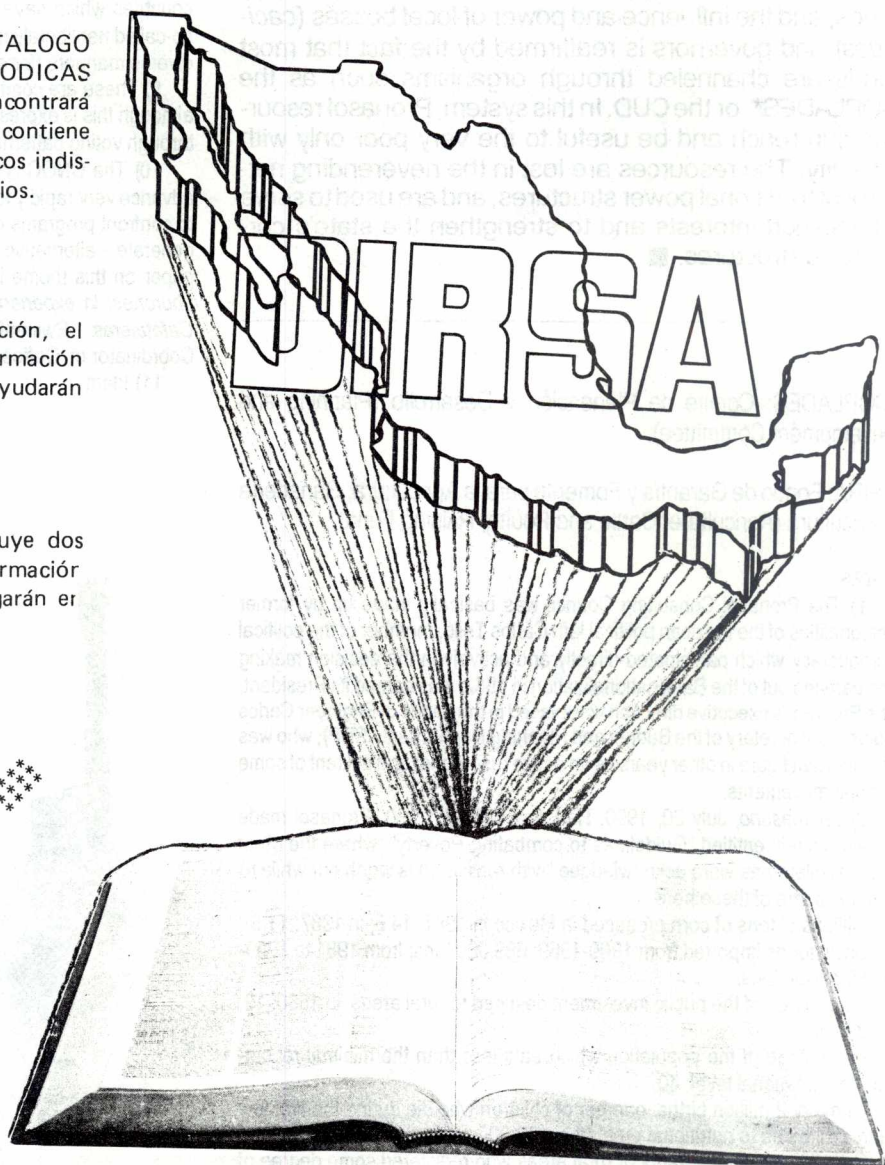
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En esta tercera edición de DIRSA: CATALOGO GENERAL DE PUBLICACIONES PERIODICAS MEXICANAS 1989 - 1990, usted encontrará una enorme riqueza de información, contiene 174 páginas repletas de datos bibliográficos indispensables para Investigadores y Bibliotecarios.

Además se ha añadido una nueva sección, el índice alfabético por estados y la información del último número editado, los cuales ayudarán a el Investigador en gran Medida.

NOTICIA: Esta edición, además le incluye dos actualizaciones cuatrimestrales con la información de recientes publicaciones, las cuales llegarán en los meses de Junio y Noviembre de 1990.

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DANIEL RUBIN**DE LA BORBOLLA,****PIONEER IN MEXICAN****ANTHROPOLOGY**

Juan Luis Campos

Cultural enterprises tend to be more difficult than economic ones, but usually they last longer. After the Revolution shook the Mexican nation there were many tasks to be undertaken. One of these was that of saving, studying and promoting the different cultural manifestations of the Mexican people. The science of anthropology had only glanced at the fertile soil of Mexico. There was much work to be done.

Daniel Fernando Rubín de la Borbolla, born in the city of Puebla in 1907, became a physical anthropologist in the United States and England. He has participated in numerous cultural enterprises, one of the most important being his archaeological explorations in Monte Albán, Oaxaca. He has worked for a policy where the indigenous peoples are the ones who protect their own cultures. Due to his interest in teaching, he founded the National School of Anthropology and History. As an active advocate of popular art both in Mexico as well as in other countries, he has worked on projects in museums and also wrote the book, *Arte Popular Mexicano, 1974 (Mexican Popular Art)* that will soon be re-edited. He was the principal promoter of the cultural Olympics which were held parallel to the Olympic Games of 1968 in Mexico. This interview gives us a glimpse of the tasks required of a man who tirelessly gives himself to work for the nation's cultural heritage.

INTERVIEW WITH DANIEL RUBIN DE LA BORBOLLA
You were a pioneer in Mexican anthropology. What were your first jobs?

When I returned to Mexico after studying physical anthropology in the United States and England at the end of the 1920's, I found that the position of the Head of the Department of Physical Anthropology of the National Museum was vacant. I was named head of the Department and was the youngest authority/researcher. There were many people working in the Museum for years, one of whom was Don Andrés Molina Enríquez, a renowned citizen from the Revolution. Luis Castillo had been director of the Museum for about 15 years and Alfonso Caso was head of the Department of Archaeology. Miguel Othón de Mendizabal was in charge of the Department of Ancient History, now known as Ethnohistory. Thus, I became part of this institution and soon became very good friends with Antonio Caso. He was thinking of working with Don Manuel Gamio, one of the most famous anthropologists of America and explorer of Teotihuacán.

At that point Alfonso Caso and I joined the project that was the exploration of the Ceremonial Center of Monte Alban, Oaxaca. When the first exploration was still being planned, Manuel Gamio was named Under-secretary of Education. Thus, with the economic and scientific support of Gamio, Alfonso Caso and I began the exploration of Monte Albán.

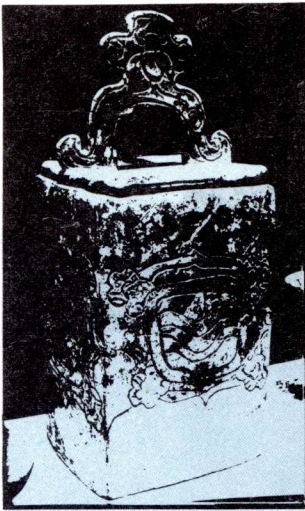
At that time two neighboring indigenous Zapotec villages, Xoxo and Atzompa had made an agreement with the State and Federal Governments to build a road from the valley of Oaxaca up to the top of the mountain where the archaeological site was located. Their only condition was that they be given tools, bricks, limestone and cement. With this equipment they built a narrow nine and a half kilometer (6 mile) road.

In order to begin the explorations, we chose the persons who best knew the area, both old and young people. This was towards the end of 1931. We made our first plan according to the number of people we were able to pay. At that point the work was one of cleaning the area of all the brush and weeds so that we could see the situation of the monuments.

Alfonso and I realized that we could not continue with the project if we did not have more economic support from the Government, since our work involved cleaning the entire central part of the great ceremonial zone. This zone began to appear as rubble and we had no budget to continue working on it. Trusting that Manuel Gamio of the Education



Daniel Rubín de la Borbolla. Family album photo.



Ministry would give us support, we decided that Alfonso Caso would be in charge of the exploration and restoration of the buildings and I would direct the explorations in the north cemetery which was the nearest to the archaeological zone. This required a small team of workers, together with a foreman and a manager who had had a great deal of experience working with Gamio in the exploration of Teotihuacán. So the work began before 1932.

Six tomb sites were discovered with stones and two of them had actual tombs of stones with covers, but these were empty. We could not tell if these two tombs had had things taken from them. The other four tomb sites were very small with skeletons and some clay objects. This told us that we were not in the center of the zone but that we were very near the burial area which was to be called the great cemetery.

But then something happened that none of us had expected. One day, another of our helpers, Juan Valenzuela, who had studied archaeology at the Department of Philosophy and at the National Museum, found an opening where the ground was sifting through in a patio. This indicated that it was probably a tomb. Seeing this, Juan Bazán (foreman of the workers), Valenzuela and I speculated that we were near a tomb, probably a large one, and so we started to look for an entrance in the patio.

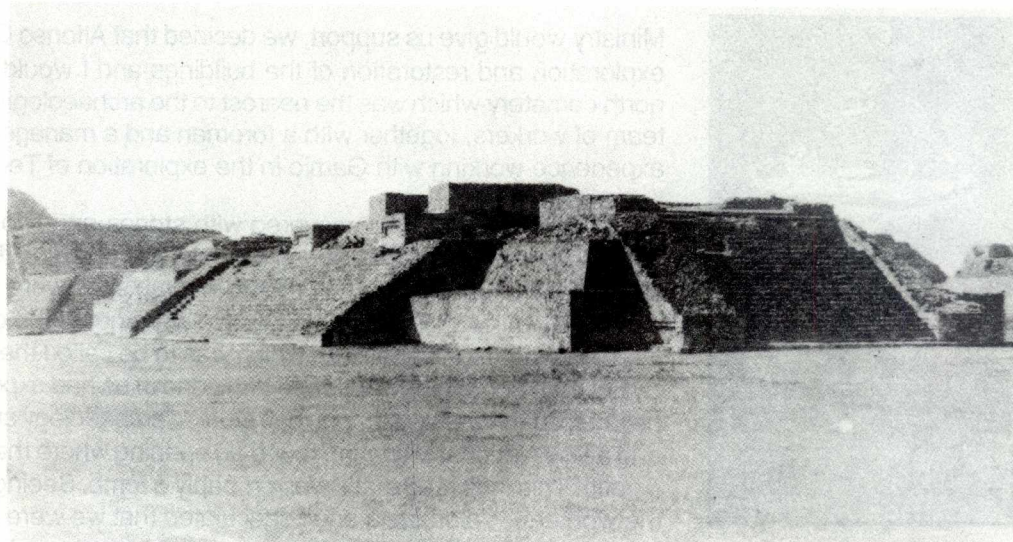
Two days later we found the entrance to the tomb and decided that nothing had been touched and that no objects had been taken out of the tomb. At the entrance there were three enormous clay urns of some goddesses, a very large tablet and another piece of tablet that was covering the entrance. Once we opened this we found the place where the dirt was filtering through and falling around the tomb where bones and objects were all mixed together. It seemed that someone had found the tomb and had taken all that was there in order to bury everything a second time. We found an object made of gold and other things that revealed that this was probably the burial place of some very important persons. At that time, Alfonso Caso returned from Mexico City, where he had gone to ask for a budget increase. We had an idea of what the tomb represented, though we did not know how many people were buried there. The situation told us that there was great richness and also great poverty.

Caso and I decided to tell the federal authorities about the news and we went to the telegraph office in Oaxaca. Apparently the head of this office and the telegraph workers got wind of what had been discovered and spoke with the journalists of the city. The next day the news was out in Mexico City as well as in Oaxaca: tomb number seven had been discovered with a large treasure that was comparable to that of Tutenkamen. Everyone began to tell stories that made the find more and more important and things started to get out of hand. We had to advise the Governor of the state who had not yet been told. This was a very hard incident since it was the governor who should have supposedly notified the Education Secretary. Here there was definitely a misunderstanding, probably not on our part, but he was very upset with the situation and let it be known. We had to ask for the help of the army because the village people started to tell stories that grew out of proportion, and everyone began to go up the mountain on foot or however they could to see the great treasure. What they found was nothing more than some people in a hole in the distance.

We worked very slowly because we took 10 square centimeters at a time and explored this area. Thus we finished working the width of the tomb, taking out the dirt with very fine paint brushes. In this way we were able to find the objects in their places and draw them in situ so we could later reconstruct all that had been found. We classified everything that was found by putting numbers on the objects and cleaning them a little to have an idea of what each object was. Since we found bones that were in a very altered state, destroyed by the change from the previous burial (we still don't know where this came from) and thrown there, the work was twice as complicated. If this had been the first burial, it would have been much easier, but since it was the second burial we were confronted with a much more difficult situation with all that had been thrown into the tomb. Our anxiety grew somewhat with the news that was being broadcast every day.

What was in the collection?

The collection consisted of the jewelry of great lords. There were some large pectorals with pearl beads, gold beads that were molded in wax, as well as turquoise and coral beads. There were necklaces with gold threads and beads and also bracelets. We found



Monte Albán, Oaxaca. Photo by Alejandra Novoa.

a figure of a deity molded in wax and another large pectoral of another god that is half gold and half silver. There was a total of some eight kilograms of raw gold in all, as well as other objects: jewels and very delicately carved bones that were like stories that told something which we could not decipher overnight.

In this period it was thought that the Mixtecs and the Zapotecs had finally united and had formed one culture. This was an hypothesis because there were not sufficient data to prove it but we thought that these bones would probably give us the key to the relation between the Mixtecs and the Zapotecs.

And is that what happened?

No, it was not like that. That writing was a Mixtec writing, the burial is undoubtedly a Mixtec one. All this was buried in Zapotec land. Why? We just don't know.

The newspapers started to tell all different kinds of stories and especially started to accuse us that they were not permitted access so that they could not see what we were hiding and everything that we took out of the tomb. This gave the Governor the opportunity to tell the Federal Government just what a complicated situation we had created with the authorities. This also made it easy for the Secretary of Education to come and investigate what was happening.

The Federal Government decided to protect the treasures from a Federal point of view which provoked the wrath of the Governor. With all the reason in the world, the Governor asked that the treasure of tomb number seven be shown to the people. Fortunately the Federal Government had restored an old and beautiful building in the center of the city of Oaxaca. This was to be the Regional Museum, created with the object of putting the collection there.

Alfonso continued the explorations and I was in charge of conditioning the first museum in the state of Oaxaca. This was the first archaeological museum which we called the Regional Museum of Oaxaca. I knew nothing about the care or running of museums nor did I have any idea on how to exhibit the pieces. I was able to obtain some glass cabinets that came from Mexico City and others that were lent to me by some Oaxacan businessmen. So, with the help of Mrs. Caso and that of Alfonso when he came back from Monte Albán in the afternoons, the exhibition was set up.

The Secretary of Education came together with the Governor and this provoked another incident. The Governor took for granted that this collection would permanently stay in Oaxaca and then he committed another error. He proclaimed a decree that his representatives approved, saying that the collection was property of the people and the State Government of Oaxaca. This started a clash among public officials. It was a dangerous clash because the collection was in the city of Oaxaca.

Finally, Caso and I together with a federal official decided to close the Museum temporarily, and I had to pack up the collection and take it to a train station outside the

city. I boarded a first class wagon that had been added to an ordinary train, and left with the collection. There was nothing else that we could do in light of the danger that the local authorities might discover what was going on. Before I knew it, I was in the wagon that had been put at my disposal under guard by soldiers from the army and the next day the train arrived at Mexico City.

The National Museum located right next to the National Palace had an enormous vaulted chamber where the gold and silver bars were kept when it was the Mint. The collection was deposited in this huge room and there was a declaration stating that the collection from tomb number seven had been assigned a special salon so that the whole world could admire it. Then the Governor of Oaxaca committed the foolishness of legally charging the Secretary of Education and the National Museum as usurpers of treasures that belonged to the people of Oaxaca.

The excavations continued under the care of Caso and Juan Bazán. I took charge of the installation of the objects from tomb seven in the Museum of Mexico. Alfonso's wife came and helped me, especially with the jewelry display. The collection was opened to the public of Mexico almost one month after it arrived in the City in 1932.

The collection remained there until President Lázaro Cárdenas visited Oaxaca in 1935 or 1936. The people directly asked him to return the jewels to Oaxaca. With a great deal of tact, Cardenas told the people: "Yes, this is a great treasure that has been studied and catalogued. I know this because I have visited the collection a couple of times. I will give the order that a selection be made and put back in the museum in Oaxaca along with the objects that have come out of other tombs of the same region." And once again I was in charge of setting up this museum.

I no longer felt that I was an archaeologist or an anthropologist. I felt like, well I don't know, like a curator because for a long time I had been doing things that were outside my field. But I had to do them because that was what was needed, and also because the Director of the Museum had had instructions from the Secretary of Education that I should do this work. So there I was.

Do you remember other cultural enterprises that you undertook?

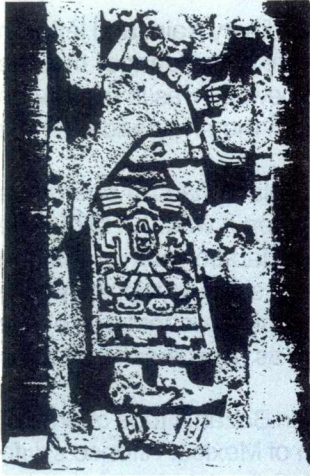
In 1941, I convinced the Ministry of Education that all the linguists of Mexico should be gotten together since there was the idea of a literacy campaign. Many indigenous peoples did not have alphabets for their languages and thus different linguists had created sounds for the distinct alphabets which not even the linguists understood. In other words there was real confusion. The idea was to have an alphabet that could take care of the phonetic problems of each language. Since there were 36 languages it was a successful event when the linguists arrived at a consensus and formed one alphabet after a week of clashes and fights. This was the first great success of anthropology.

You were able to get these people together?

I got the people together and was the president of the debating sessions. I wanted them to feel comfortable in fighting it out and I only intervened when there was a consensus about a sign that was the same in Spanish with only some type of special mark used above or below the symbol. That is how the common alphabet for all the indigenous people was formed. The objective then was to make the matrixes in linotype since millions of reading primers had to be produced for the literacy campaign of the indigenous peoples. It was a primer in their own language so that once it was learned and the people were familiar with the alphabet they could learn the Spanish language. This was the program created by the Ministry of Education. But the moulds had to be casted.

I had the opportunity of being invited to the Chicago Museum to give some conferences. I took advantage of this trip to visit the Morgenthaller Company, under commission of the Education Ministry. This business was the only one which made linotypes and the corresponding moulds or matrixes. I made a date with the company and the director told me: "Leave the drawings for us to study, this is a very special case. I can tell you right now that we don't have even half of the matrixes and that it will be necessary to make a special matrix for each one. This will cost money, but leave it with me and I will get back to you with an answer before you leave the country." The answer was that this collection of special matrixes would cost about 30,000 dollars. I did not have the authority to make a decision like this one. I thanked him and took back the drawings. I said to him: "Look,





Mexico (it came from the heart) is trying to teach reading and writing to a population that speaks more than 36 different languages besides Spanish. We are not a rich country and we cannot spend 30,000 dollars in matrices. Thank you for your project and I will hand it over to the Mexican Government with my recommendations. But I think that it will be very difficult for Mexico at this moment to embark on an adventure of 30,000 dollars. At least I cannot decide this."

I returned to Mexico, made out the report and handed it in. At the same time a letter arrived from the company in Chicago saying that since it was a company that in a certain sense was responsible for the progress of education in the world, through its linotypes, it had taken the special case of Mexico into consideration. Since Mexico had a very definite literacy program, the company decided that it would make a donation of 20,000 dollars to the project if the Mexican Government would commit itself to pay the other 10,000 dollars. The Government of course accepted the offer and the special alphabet was made for the primers of all the indigenous groups. This was true in all cases except, I think, in one language where the glottal sounds were of such a nature that it was impossible to obtain an exact sound that could be expressed by a letter. And that was how the literacy program started in 1940.

Didn't you also organize a congress of the indigenous peoples of the American continent at the same time?

More or less. In that year, General Cárdenas (the Mexican President) asked Alfonso Caso and myself to organize all the delegations of indigenous communities on the continent. The objective was to discuss common problems within the framework of each country's sovereignty and to look for possible solutions to poverty. It was also to view the situation of the indigenous population in each country and to try to look for a new way within the legal framework of each nation, so that these groups could live as human beings and not as second class citizens. This was a great responsibility for me because I was designated Public Relations Secretary in various countries. On the one hand I had the responsibility of assuring that genuine representatives would come as delegates from each country. Fortunately I was in charge of such important countries as Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Panama and two Central American countries -I think they were Nicaragua and Honduras. Other delegates, among them Miguel Othón de Mendizábal, were sent to Central and South American countries.

In 1938 Lázaro Cárdenas expropriated the oil industry. In protest England had withdrawn its ambassador and had broken diplomatic relations. The United States had recalled its ambassador but had not withdrawn its embassy nor closed it. Belgium was vacillating between closing its embassy and leaving a representative instead of an ambassador, and most other countries were doing the same. The Standard Oil Company was exerting heavy pressure and the situation was very difficult for Mexico. At this moment the organization of an Interamerican Indigenous Congress was a very daring venture because this aggravated the world situation and the political relations with Mexico even more. Despite all this the Congress was held in May, 1940. There was one fact that helped to alleviate this situation of very difficult political relations for all countries: at this time Roosevelt was the American president and one of his advisors was John Collier, a strong defender of the rights of North American indigenous peoples.

Collier had convinced his president that complete freedom should be given to the indigenous people so that they could govern themselves. No authority could intervene except the Federal Department of Indian Affairs. This fact had deep repercussions at the Congress.

Ramón Bonfil, an excellent teacher and a great pedagogue of extraordinary dimensions, had prepared an Interamerican Literacy Program in Indigenous Languages. I believe that this program has been one of the most important in the world in opening the doors of western civilization to the indigenous population. The program has done this without forcing the people and without pressuring them to forget their language. It proposes that the people continue to use their language and that they have an active participation in saving their own culture. This is the indigenous peoples' philosophy. ■

Enrique Vargas Anaya

Unemployed Mexicans create Multiple Survival Strategies

For many Mexican citizens, including women and children, survival seems to be based on the saying "Necessity is the mother of invention", as they go out every day to fight for life by selling objects, singing songs in the subway or by fire throwing. This is an expression of what seems to be a growing crisis that submits 51% of the national population to conditions of extreme poverty. Details of this daily fight for survival are given by Enrique Vargas, who also interviewed specialists on the theme in his report on the socio-economic panorama of today's Mexico. Economist José Antonio Rojas Nieto then gives a succinct analysis of the deterioration in workers' earnings over the last fourteen years.

A thin scrawny-looking woman enters a subway car. She is dressed in torn and ragged clothes, she carries a one year old baby in her arms. Finding her way through the people, she gives a horrible interpretation of a *bolero*. At her waist she has a cord to which her seven year old daughter is attached. Aida, the little girl, collects the small amounts of money given by passengers with evident indifference and boredom. The woman, together with her children, changes subway car in each station, and sings the same sad song, incomplete and incoherent. Every day she covers the same subway line, that which goes from Martín Carrera to El Rosario in Mexico City.

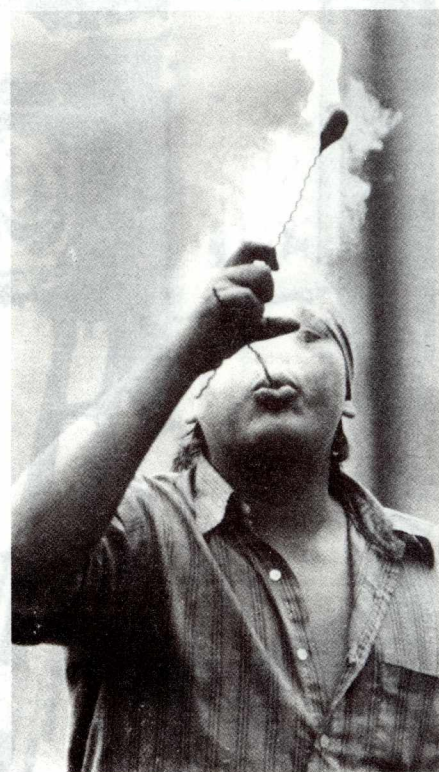
She refuses to speak to strangers. She mistrusts the reporter and pulls her daughter closer to her; finally she utters a few monosyllables and incomplete phrases, from which one can reconstruct a common story: she arrived in Mexico City in May this year.

She is a widow, has two children, and cannot find work. She lives near the Basilica of Guadalupe in the north of the city, in a small room that someone is lending her temporarily. She leads her daughter around on a string because she is afraid of losing her. The mother has heard about the abduction of children in Mexico and keeps a close eye on her children.

This small extract from the metropolis's day to day existence seems to fulfill the sentence of the most important researcher on the "underground economy", and author of the book *El otro sendero* (The Other Path), Hernando de Soto: "The only alternative for survival for the poor, lies in a marginal existence."

The fact that millions of Mexicans have been able to survive and resist the economic crisis which has hit the country over the last several years, implies that great sacrifices have been made in areas of well-being such as food, health, housing, education and clothing.

Their survival is also due to their inventiveness.



People risk their health to earn a living. Photo by Marco Antonio Cruz/Imagenlatina

Journalist

With regard to the sacrifices made, these are translated into alarming indicators of falls in living standards: 51% of the national population lives in conditions of extreme poverty; one of every five Mexicans does not satisfy 60% of his/her essential needs in food, education and housing. Meanwhile, only 5% of the population controls 90% of the national wealth.

The statistics also show that 70 of every thousand Mexicans born, die within five years, although in Chiapas and other states in the south-east, the mortality rate is 100 deaths in the first five years, for every thousand births. Fifteen of every 100 children are born under-weight, and more than 60% of all Mexicans suffer malnutrition.

These figures are given by three researchers of the National Autonomous University (UNAM), Lomelí Macías, Fausto Burgueño and Javier Delgadillo, in their study "Pronasol, nuevo maquillaje a la pobreza" (National Solidarity Program: new make-up for poverty).

There are people who consider that ingenuousness is a virtue of the Mexicans, while a summary visit through the streets of Mexico City is sufficient

to be able to observe the versatility of inventiveness of those who have no permanent job and who have to find a way to feed their families. During this visit, one will quickly find the key to the "social peace" within the economic crisis: dispersed throughout the city there are some 50,000 street vendors with more or less permanent stands, and an unknown but significant number of ambulant vendors, with more or less permanent stands, according to information given by the Federal District's Supply Coordination Office.

In some points of the city, the concentration of street vendors is alarming, and the high rates of unemployment and sub-employment more evident: the stairways, corridors, platforms and wagons of the subway are literally inundated with make-shift stands where men, women and children sell a great variety of objects, from the most simple to the most unusual – from a newspaper or a candy to the sophisticated radios and tape-recorders which are smuggled into Mexico as contraband.

During peak-hours, the noise of various musical amplifiers played at full volume by their vendors, com-

petes with the shouts of salespersons who desperately try to attract potential buyers.

Along the platforms of some stations, such as Pino Suárez in the center of the city, the obstruction caused by vendors is such that it threatens the very security of the travellers. Within the subway cars, sometimes a musician, a beggar and a salesman or woman, promoting whatever product, will coincide in the same wagon.

An estimated 2,000 ambulant sellers are said to work in Mexico's subway system, although legally they have no permission and are frequently removed by security police.

In some parts of the city, especially in the center, competition for control of the streets has often caused brawls. This phenomenon is so complex, and has advanced so rapidly, that the authorities have practically lost control of the situation.

Hernando Soto, in an interview given to the Mexican business magazine *Expansión* in September 1987, declared: "The informal economy is not a good thing. Essentially, it is anarchy. The good thing about the informal economy is that it proves the exist-



Street photographer. Photo by Angeles Torrejón/Imagenlatina



Preparing for the show ... on any street corner. Photo by Angeles Torrejón/Imagenlatina

ence of a quality thought to be reserved to the superior strata: the capacity to create a business..."

But not only that...

The informal economy "fulfills a strategic function as an informal shock-absorber for open unemployment which has been increasing in proportion to the (worsening of) the economic crisis", according to Dinah Rodríguez Chaurent, Felipe Torres and Juvencio Wing, authors of the book *La industria de frituras: empleo informal y modernidad* (The fried food industry: informal employment and modernity).

The authors state that "those who dedicate themselves to this kind of activity, are, in part, workers who were sacked from their former employment... The other part is made up by immigrants from rural areas who have come to the country's main urban areas with the hope of finding some economic activity which will allow them and their family to survive until they find a formal job".

A similar case to the picture given in the book, is that of Manuel Landeros. Every day, from 6am to 2pm, as if he were still following his old work schedule at the factory, he extends his

poor and shoddy stand of books and magazines on the ground outside the subway station Aquiles Serdán. There are only some 20 books and a few old magazines and pornographic miscellany. Landeros was a worker in the Mundet soft drinks factory for 20 years, but he was sacked at the beginning of the year, along with other workers, during staff cuts made by the company. He invested some of the money he received on his dismissal on buying these meager texts.

He told me that things are not going well, and that he is thinking of looking for another job. Some days he hardly sells anything. The good thing is, he says, that he only has to worry about himself and his wife. He still seems to have a good dosis of patience, and while this runs out, he lies down on the grass and reads, waiting for his clients.

With certain frequency, politicians and researchers, both from Mexico and abroad, have asked themselves why the Mexican poor have not taken to the streets to protest against the consequences of the economic crisis, or why have they not opted for violent expressions of popular discontent, such as the ransacking of shops seen in Venezuela, Peru and other Latin American and Caribbean nations.

One possible explanation is that given by Felipe Torres, sociology professor and researcher in the Economic Research Institute of the UNAM. He is also a specialist in the study of food production and distribution, and has written some 20 books on this theme, as well as dozens of articles and conferences. His opinion: "It is the family structure which has prevented the crisis from overflowing, because the family unites to confront adversity. In this way, family ties are strengthened. If someone is unemployed, the others help, even though the levels of consumption are reduced."

Besides, he says, the heterogeneity and complexity of the Mexican society has been another factor which has prevented the unification of social-political forces and objectives in the struggle for social well-being.

Another significant element considered by this researcher, is the political evolution of the government. The gradual relaxation of political control which began in 1978-79, during the government of José López Portillo, helped to relieve social tensions which were accumulated after the student movement of 1968 and the activities of guerrilla groups, especially the

Communist League September 23.

Thus the society slowly left the one-party system behind, and began to develop other political alternatives. Although, says Professor Torres, "this also served like a shop-window to cover up the misery". In other words, the popular discontent was institutionalized.

Another factor which Felipe Torres considers important in answering this question about the lack of social protests in Mexico, is the lack of sufficiently popular leaders or organizations which could canalize the discontent and give it coherent expression.

"Yet another element", says Professor Torres, "is biological: Mexican families have grown used to living in conditions of under-consumption, to the point that our protein intake is below the world level. The body gets used to this under-consumption and inhibits its necessities, and this is reflected in the levels of productivity".

He continues: "In the United States, for example, when there is a decrease in the intake of animal protein, the

people immediately begin to protest, but in Mexico, we lack buying power and we reduce our consumption. People buy food which is cheaper but less nutritive. At the same time, in other areas of social well-being, we can observe a great fall in living standards: in housing, health, recreation...".

Open unemployment in Mexico is around 16%, says Professor Torres, but the effects of this are absorbed to a certain extent by self-employment, prostitution, delinquency and begging.

Even those who have permanent jobs resort to additional commercial activities to augment their incomes, and spend part of their time in the sale of various products in their workplace, where it is common to see employees participating in raffles, group saving programs called "tandas", and all kinds of surprising mini-businesses. This is all due to the fact that the workers' buying power has fallen 60% since 1982.

There are of course, no statistical records on all these additional commercial activities, but they have a very

real presence in the workplace, says Professor Torres.

Other Mexicans resolve their economic problems, or seek to resolve them, by migration to the U.S., with all the risks that this involves. Others, familiarly known in Mexico as "mil usos" (a thousand uses), dedicate themselves to any and every activity which comes their way, even though it might damage their health.

A Governmental Program for the Defenseless

The Mexican government has opted for the path of social assistance in the face of the economic crisis and its accompanying social problems. Thus, it has established the National Solidarity Program (Pronasol), which aims to help some 15 million Mexicans who live in extreme poverty —although there are an estimated 48 million poor people in the country.

Some of the objectives of Pronasol are: the installation of communal kitchens in urban centers, school breakfasts, flexible credits for the pur-



Music box from the early 20th Century. Photo by Marco Antonio Cruz/Imagenlatina

chase of homes, the restoration of structures which have deteriorated or which were not completed, the rehabilitation of health centers, and other programs.

Felipe Torres says that this kind of social assistance aims to lessen the build-up of social pressures or to delay an imminent explosion of discontent. But he expressed his disagreement with these kinds of programs, because they do not resolve any of the underlying causes.

Latin America: An Erupting Volcano

The same problems observed in Mexico exist in other countries, and in many cases the situation is even more critical: thousands of children begging on the streets, thousands of street vendors, beggars and homeless all over the place.

In its most recent annual report (1990), the World Bank informs that Latin America was the only region in the developing world which suffered another fall in per capita income in 1989. The reduction in production per inhabitant from 1980-89, was 7.1% in Mexico.

The journalist Estela Calloni wrote a report where she warns of the effects of the economic stagnation in Latin America. In "The Violent Paths of Poverty", published in the weekly paper *El Día Latinoamericano* on September 17 this year, she points out that 80% of the population is trapped in the circle of poverty, while "a majority of this percentage stands on the threshold of unimaginable violence. Hunger oppresses 70% of the population...".

Calloni adds that there is no country in Latin America which has not had important strikes in the last few months. She says that Argentina, Peru, Venezuela and the Dominican Republic are the countries most under threat of possible social explosions.

What Perspective for Mexicans?

Professor Torres states that conditions in Mexico have not yet reached the level of open hunger, but he warns that in some parts of the country, new indexes of misery are being registered, which are more dramatic than in other parts of the world.

He recalls a popular saying, "Where one can eat, so can two" – the

equivalent to our "Put more water in the stew" when there are extra mouths to feed – but, says the university professor, this kind of reaction has its limit.

He points out that there are isolated outbursts of violence and protests, such as the recent demonstration named "the empty pots", organized by urban groups, who held a sit-in outside the National Palace to protest against rising prices.

Professor Torres is pessimistic about the situation: "There is an improvement in the economy, but this is not reflected in social development. The deterioration in incomes and buying power continues." ■

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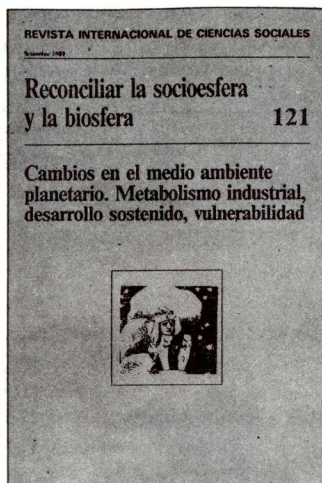
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NÚMEROS DE 1990

- Núm. 123 Actores de las políticas públicas
Núm. 124 El campesinado
Núm. 125 La imagen de las ciudades
Núm. 126 La familia

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José Antonio Rojas Nieto

Wages and Modernization

It is fairly obvious that our country is moving slowly and irreversibly towards a new economic configuration, linked to a new social and political formation.

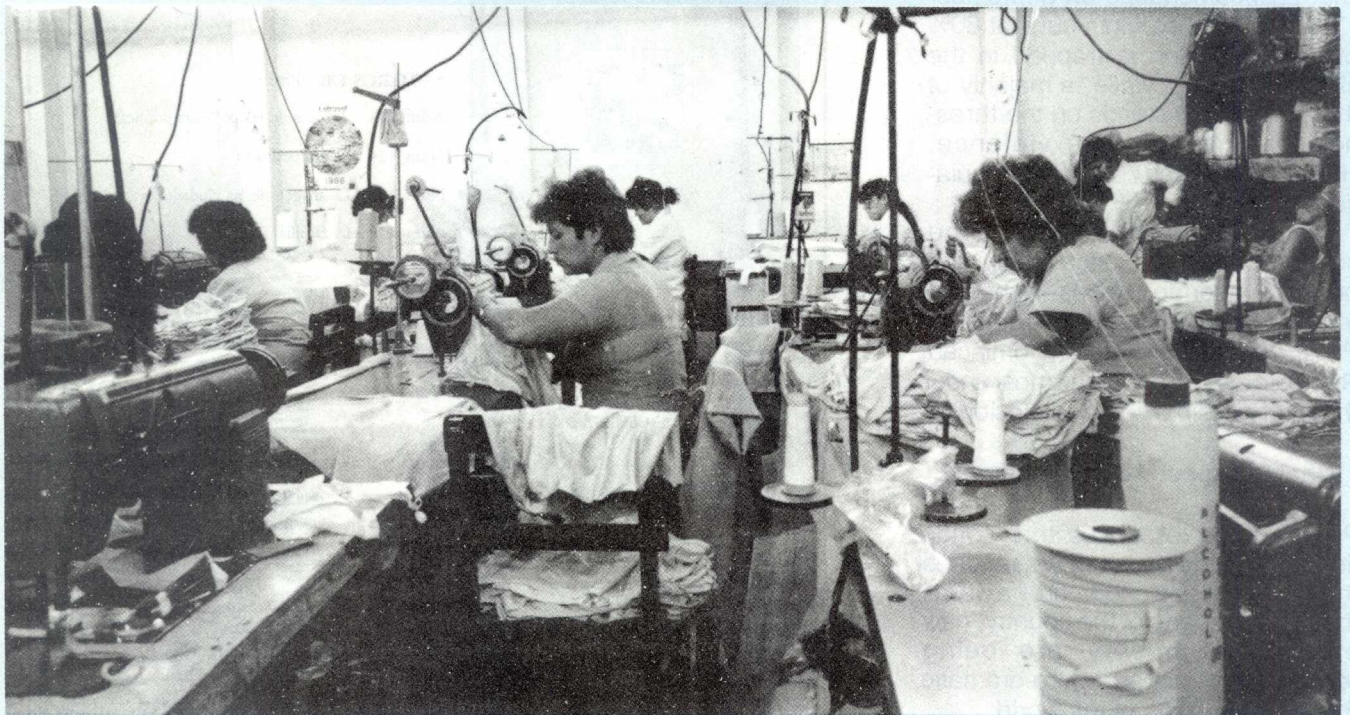
Mexico is undergoing a severe transition, a process that has included intense and growing deterioration of salaries and wages. Without a doubt this is true for the tendencies the wage structure has shown in our country in recent years. It is surprising to discover that even during the oil boom (1978-1981) Mexican wages had begun to show drastic regression. The "explosion" of the crisis in mid and late 1981 only accelerated a process which had begun five years before, after wages reached an historically high point in 1976. This high point was reached as a result of a general wage increase promoted at the end of Luis Echeverría's presidential term, although this increase would later turn out to be artificial, with no basis for support be-

cause of the regressive dynamic which social productiveness of labor had shown from 1971 on (and which worsened in 1974).

The so-called "Mexican miracle" was characterized by a sustained increase in wages (at least when evaluated in terms of the real tendencies of the minimum wage). This process should have been scrutinized during the 1972-1976 period because it caused a dramatic decrease in wage levels, only momentarily postponed by a short-lived recuperation of the economy during 1981 and by the demagogic increase fixed in 1982 by José López Portillo.

The historical behavior of real wages in our country has included a period of decrease and stagnation (1935-1963) followed by an increase supported by the elevation of social productiveness (1964-1971) and by a period of artificial increase (1972-1976). These stages were followed in turn by a rapid decrease in workers' incomes, resulting in fourteen years of real deterioration (1977-1990).

Professor in the Economics Faculty, UNAM.



Workers' earnings have fallen by 50% since 1980. Photo by Angeles Torrejón / Imagenlatina

It should not be surprising that this deterioration has co-existed with two different moments in the economic evolution of Mexico. Firstly, a moment of intensification and explosion of the economic structural crisis lasting from 1978 to 1981. A second moment of adjustment and economic reorganization followed, which includes the first signs of what have been called "new economic characteristics", but with the eruption of old phenomena related to the previous economic configuration which is gradually being replaced. This is a process which has lasted from 1982 to 1990.

This last period, officially referred to as "modernization", offers a disastrous overview of the wage situation. This leads us to think that an appropriate name for this period, at least for the moment, would be "savage modernization". We risk this label because from 1982 (when economic adjustment began) real wages have not stopped falling. The minimum wage and wages in the manufacturing industry as well as those in the in-bond (*maquila*) industry, have all experienced a constant decrease.

In the manufacturing industry, wage levels during 1989 were the lowest in the last fourteen years and equaled half the level of 1980 and 1981, and barely 43% of the wage level reached in 1976.

In the *maquila* industry, on the other hand, the lowest level in recent years was registered in 1983 (60% in terms of its equivalent in dollars), after which time it has shown a slight increase and last year showed a decrease of 45%, in comparison to the level reached in 1980. Nevertheless, evaluated in Mexican pesos, the highest rate of wage deterioration in the *maquila* industry was also registered in 1989, although the decrease is much less than that of the minimum wage or the manufacturing industry's wages.

Something similar has happened with two important economic indicators: the participation of the global wage mass in the national product, and the level of public spending on social programs. The global wage mass (that is, the sum total of wages paid to Mexican workers, which also includes high-level management salaries) and government spending related to social programs (education, health, housing, social security, recreation, culture) have undergone a decrease that has been constant and drastic.

As to the first indicator, after reaching just over 40% in 1976, during the last two years in the modernization period the participation of the global wage mass in the national product has been only slightly more than 25%. That is, after coming fairly close to half the national product, today Mexican workers receive only one fourth of this product, which itself barely equals the levels reached during the years of the oil boom.

All that can be said about the second economic indicator -social spending- is that the level reached today is only one half of public spending for social programs in 1982, and is barely 11% of total public spending. This is without a doubt one of the negative effects repeatedly pointed out in relation to paying the foreign debt and interests on it. While in 1978 the public budget only allotted 11.3% to paying the public debt (and in 1980 only 9.19%), in 1989 more than 55% of this budget was used to pay the foreign debt.

The government itself has admitted that this situation cannot be maintained and that raising wages and social spending is imperative. Nevertheless, for now the government has chosen the false path of social assistance through the National Solidarity Program, to lessen the worst effects of deterioration of the population's income. This is obviously a policy which will not be workable for more than two or three years. This policy should be replaced with a definitive increase in wages, be they minimum, manufacturing or *maquila* wages, as well as raising the so-called social wage.

Although it is true that a reorganization of the Mexican economy is urgent and that an adjustment program is unavoidable, I can find no explanation for the fact that the burden of these processes is laid exclusively on the shoulders of those most severely affected by the crisis, that is, salaried industrial and rural workers.

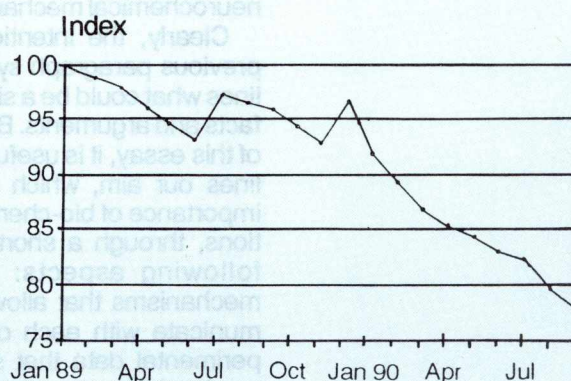
Therefore, the process of modernization that is underway today will only overcome its "savage" character when all social indicators begin to demonstrate a different tendency and the population overcomes the drastic deterioration in its standard of living which it has suffered for more than twelve years.

A reflection would then be necessary about the economic, social and political requirements for the reversal of social deterioration and the transformation of the process of savage modernization into a progressive, people's modernization. However, this reflection must be made on another occasion. ■

This article was first published in the magazine *Hojas* # 3, September 1990.

EVOLUTION OF THE REAL MINIMUM WAGE 1989 - 90

(January 1989=100)



Source: José Antonio Rojas Nieto, with information from the National Minimum Wage Commission.

Brain Chemistry and Mental Functions

Ricardo Tapia.

The effects of so-called psychotropic drugs, including all those that affect mental activity, have concerned, impassioned and worried humans for millenia. How could one not be interested in substances that, as they are ingested, inhaled or injected, produce alterations of consciousness, perception, even personality? However, it wasn't until the discovery – only about thirty years ago – that the communicating mechanism between neurons inside the brain is biochemical in nature, that an idea started to form –to date still imprecise and hypothetical – on how these drugs might act.

The reasoning is simple: if the neuron circuits and networks that constitute the brain (formed by about 100 billion neurons topographically organized in a specific manner), require a chemical mechanism in order to function, and if psychotropic drugs are, by definition, chemical substances, it seems possible that they act by interfering or modifying communication patterns between neurons. Thus, we can make a far-reaching conclusion. If what has been previously said is true, the mind therefore must function through neurochemical mechanisms.

Clearly, the intentionally provocative previous paragraph synthesizes in a few lines what could be a sizeable book, full of facts and arguments. But for the purposes of this essay, it is useful because it underlines our aim, which is to set forth the importance of bio-chemistry in brain functions, through a short exposition of the following aspects: a) the chemical mechanisms that allow neurons to communicate with each other; b) some experimental data that suggest how such mechanisms can participate in memory

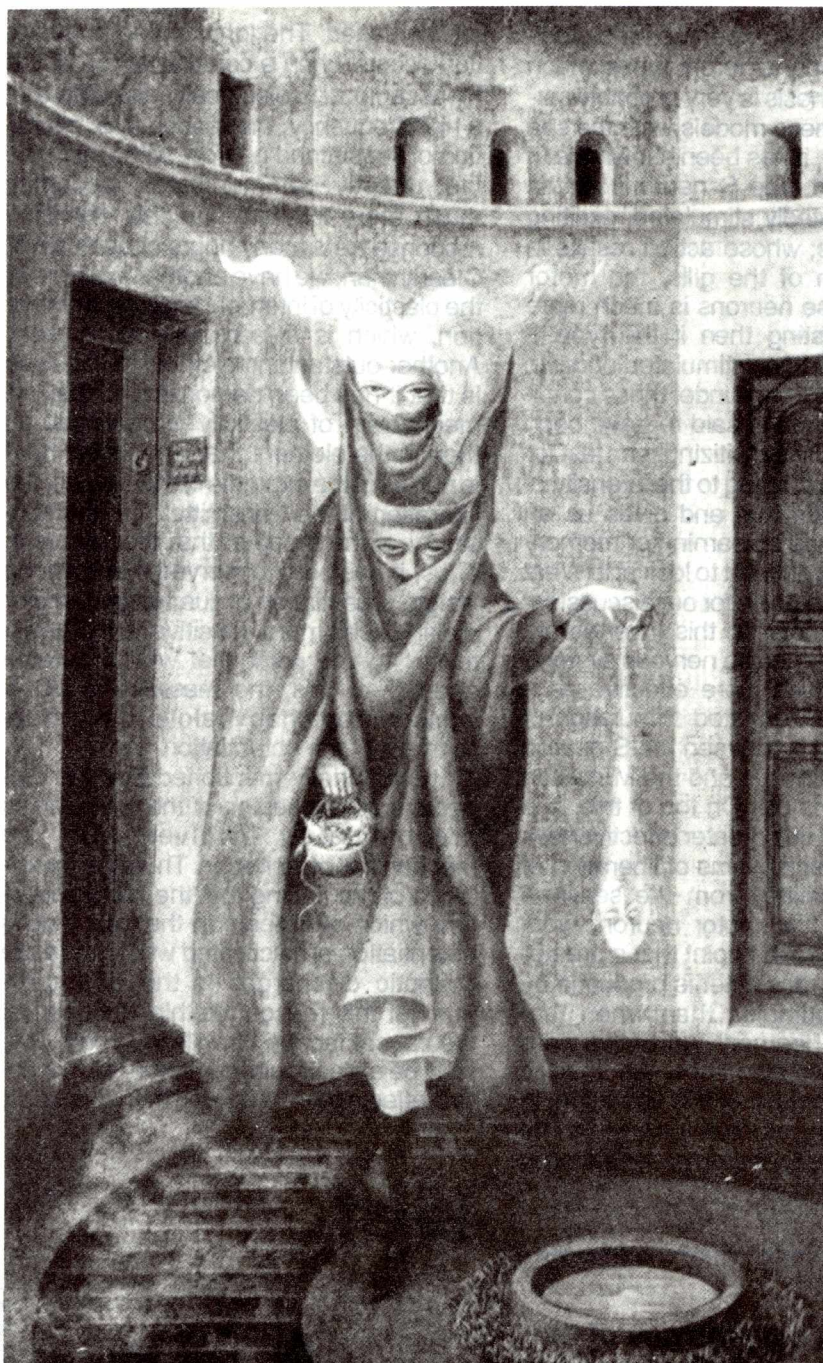
and learning processes; c) the neurochemical way certain commonly used drugs act; and d) a speculation, based on the above points, about how brain biochemistry might be the basis for mental functions.

Chemical Communication Between Neurons

The chemical language used by neurons to communicate essentially includes three elements: the emission of a message by a neuron, its reception by a second neuron and its transduction to a different state of excitation of the second neuron. The message is eminently chemical in nature, since it is a specific substance that the neuron synthesizes inside and releases towards the neuron it communicates with. This one, in turn, is able to receive the information through large molecules located on its membrane, and which have a region that projects towards the cell's exterior.

This part, which faces the emitting neuron, recognizes the messenger sent and accepts its joining it, due to the affinity or complementarity that exists between the chemical structures of the messenger and the acceptor. As a consequence of

Researcher, Institute of Cellular Physiology, UNAM.



Woman leaving the psychoanalyst, by Remedios Varo. Reproduction by Alejandra Novoa

A long lasting potentiation occurs when a certain neuron of the hippocampus is electrically stimulated at a high frequency

ication are, a neurotransmitter neuron (the messenger), a receiver one (in the membrane) and a transduction mechanism.

This biochemical mechanism demonstrates that interneuron communications have several interesting and important properties: 1) Communication is essentially unidirectional: one neuron emits a message and the other receives it, but not the other way. 2) As a result of the message's type of transduction (which depends on the chemical nature of the neurotransmitter and the receiver), the neuron can become excited or inhibited, that is, active or inactive, for short or comparatively longer periods. 3) Since the neuron has the capacity of neurotransmitting and receiving molecules, communication between neurons can become more or less efficient, that is, it is a malleable and a plastic communication. This last property is the one most obviously related to this essay's subject, given its consequences as regards one of the most evident and amazing properties of the nervous system: to modify itself as a result of previous experiences.

Plasticity in Communication Between Neurons and Learning

Let's consider a very simple hypothetical learning model: one neuron which we will call the motor or M upon whose action depends a specific conduct, for example, a quick movement of flight. We have another neuron (the sensitive one or S), that upon perceiving a certain signal from the environment excites the M neuron to generate this reaction of flight. Let's ask the following question of this system: given the plastic capacity of the communication between these two neurons, is it possible that its efficiency increase as a consequence of repetition of the signal from the environment, in such a way that the final response of escape happens more quickly? If the answer to this question is affirmative, we can conclude that the system has learned to respond better to the stimulus when this occurs more frequently.

this union, certain physical-chemical changes occur in other regions of the acceptor molecule and/or other large molecules that are embedded in the membrane and associated to the acceptor molecule. Finally, these changes determine the message's translation or transduction into a state of greater (or lesser, according to the type of interaction between the messenger and its acceptor), excitation of the whole neuron, which can last, from fractions of a second, to two or three minutes, depending on the type of transduction that takes place. Thus, the three elements of interneuron commun-

There are various experimental biological models of very different types which show this hypothesis is very probably correct. In one of these models, with the sea mollusk *Aplysia*, it has been shown that if a structure with type S neurons of the animal is repeatedly stimulated, exciting type M neurons, whose action results in the contraction of the gills, the motor response of these neurons is much more intense and lasting than if the type S neuron had only been stimulated once. In neuro-biological terms under these conditions the M neuron is said to have been "sensitized". This "sensitizing" can last for hours or days according to the intensity of the repetitive stimulus and gives us an excellent example of learning or memory whichever way you want to look at it. What is most interesting here for our discussion, is that this memory (in this invertebrate which has a very simple nervous system) has become much more effective as a consequence of repeated stimulation of the communication between the S neuron that feels the stimulus and the M neuron which moves the gill. On top of this, it is also known that this greater effectiveness is due to the mechanisms of liberation of the neurotransmitter from the sensitive neuron toward the motor neuron, work more efficiently to the point that a greater quantity of the transmitter is produced by the received stimulus than when that animal has not "learned". And if this were not sufficient, we also know the specific cause of the increase of this liberation, in terms of changes that occur in the molecules of the S neuron participating in this liberation.

We cannot imagine any of the mental functions referred to before -for example, the conscience- if the mechanism of memory did not exist

Another very interesting example of the increase in the efficiency of interneuronal communication as a consequence of repeated stimulation is the phenomenon known as "long lasting potentiation". This has been described in a brain structure of mammals known with the suggestive name of hippocampus. This structure carries out numerous important functions and is involved, among other things, in the production of epilepsy when its neurons

are damaged. The long lasting potentiation occurs when a certain neuron of the hippocampus is electrically stimulated at a high frequency, the response of excitation of the second neuron, with which the first directly communicates, becomes much more intense, and this amplified response lasts many hours or even days. Clearly then, we have another example of the plasticity of interneuronal communication, which is a learning phenomenon. Another outstanding element in this case is that it has been demonstrated that the mechanism of plasticity is chemical, although the element that is modified here is not, as in the example of the *Aplysia*, the liberation of the transmitter, but the sensitivity of the receptor that recognizes it. Thus, it has been observed that the long lasting potentiation is due to the receptor making itself more sensitive to the transmitter, to the point that with the same quantity of this, the message is better transduced than before the establishment of the potentiation.

It was briefly mentioned that the hippocampus is a region of the brain that is predominately involved with the mechanism of epilepsy. Thus the importance of the finding that the same receptors which participate in the long lasting potentiation are activated when there are epileptic discharges in the hippocampus. For this reason we think that one of the causal factors of epilepsy could possibly be a plastic phenomenon, with negative effects for the organism in this case,



Engraving by Arthur Boyd, 1870. Reproduction by Alejandra Novoa

Neurons in most regions of the brain release a transmitter, which interacts with its corresponding receptor and inhibits the excitability of these neurons

but similar in its molecular mechanism as being responsible for facilitating interneuronal communication.

The experimental examples we just described show without a doubt the participation of the brain's chemistry in the phenomena of plasticity of interneuronal communication. From this we can also

see its importance in the mechanisms of learning and memory. These processes have an undoubted relation with mental activity, since we cannot imagine any of the mental functions referred to before—for example, the conscience—if the mechanism of memory did not exist. However, it is clear that there is a difference between this and mental activity. What we have said up to now does not allow us to state that there is a direct relation between brain chemistry and the mind. However, there are other facts that allow us to look more closely at this problem.

Modifying Interneuronal Communication

One of the drugs most used today to diminish anxiety is valium. Millions of individuals all over the world take it almost constantly to feel more at ease and healthy with the continuous stress of city life at the end of this twentieth century. This drug belongs to the group of the benzodiazepinas, whose mechanism of action on the brain, that we know about with certain precision, is also related to interneuronal communication and with the receptor molecules of the neurotransmitters.

In order to communicate with other neurons, an elevated number of neurons in practically all regions of the brain release a transmitter, that while interacting with the corresponding receptor, produces a decrease in the excitability of these neurons. In other words it inhibits them. This inhibiting communication is so important that at this moment we recognize that many of the functions of the brain are correctly carried out thanks to the fact that the activity of millions of neurons is almost constantly decreased through such inhibition. Thus, it is not strange that the inhibiting neurotransmitter responsible for this has been the object of endless studies. Among the most important recent results of these studies is the understanding of the chemical structure of the receptor molecule which recognizes this transmitter, as well as the way it is found in the cavity of the neuronal membrane, and how the message is transferred so that the neuron is inhibited.

It is known that the receptor is a large and very complicated molecule with various places for chemical recognition that are oriented towards the exterior of the membrane of the neuron. One of these places recognizes the liberating transmitter by the neuron, so that when the message is transduced, the neuron is inhibited. But a different place recognizes, precisely, benzodiazepine, with the



Etching by Francisco Goya. Reproduction by Alejandra Novoa

peculiarity that the result of the union of this drug to that place is the modification of the receptor in making it more sensitive to the transmitter. The final consequence is simple and surprising at the same time: when valium is present, the transmitter inhibiting neuronal activity is more efficient than when it is absent and thus, the neurons that recognize it are inhibited to a greater degree and anxiety is diminished.

The receptor is a large and very complicated molecule with various places for chemical recognition that are oriented towards the exterior of the neuron

Neurons, Chemistry and Mental Activity

Does this mean that there are neurons which cause anxiety and that when they are inhibited, this anxiety is lessened? Unfortunately we cannot yet respond in an affirmative sense to this question, nor in the case of depression that is corrected with the use of antidepressive drugs which also act by modifying interneuronal communication. The reason for our ignorance in this sense is that, in contrast with what happens in the experimental studies of plasticity-learning mentioned above, in which the number of types of neurons involved is very small (two or three), the brain functions responsible for "calmness" or for "emotional equilibrium", surely depend on the integrated functioning of hundreds or thousands of neuronal circuits, located in different regions of the brain.

Clearly this situation becomes even more complex if we refer to other functions that could be considered more mental in an anthropomorphic sense: conscience, intelligence, understanding of abstract concepts, creativity, imagination, the will, reasoning or sensitivity. At the moment, obviously, we cannot talk about neurons, circuits or neuronal networks, brain regions or neurotransmitters specifically responsible for these functions. But at the same time we cannot deny that neurons, circuits and neurotransmit-

ters are the biological elements of mental activity.

To support the above affirmation let us go back to what we said in the introduction to this essay. Most psychotropic drugs, including those that produce hallucinations, alterations in perceptions, personality changes and symptoms similar to those of schizophrenia (such as paranoia and self-destruction), have a chemical structure similar to that of certain molecules which have been identified as neurotransmitters and that are capable of modifying interneuronal communication in some regions of the brain. We do not know, however, the manner in which these modifications are translated into the appearance of altered states of consciousness characteristic of those who are under the effect of such drugs.

This last sentence is an explicit acceptance of our total ignorance of the precise relation between brain biochemistry and mind. However, in recognizing our ignorance, we cannot escape the conclusion that the chemical phenomena responsible for interneuronal communication, participate in an important way in the mechanisms of mental functions. This is the only reasonable explanation for the amazing effects of psychotropic drugs. In the same way that epilepsy was for ages considered as a holy sickness, product of demon-like arts or as a divine punishment, and today no one with any culture believes in this type of explanation, so too it seems probable that future understanding will allow us to have a precise idea of the relation between brain chemistry and the mind.

Chemical phenomena responsible for interneuronal communication, are important participants in mental functions

Let's consider, for example, the case of visual perception of colors. Recent research has shown that, though certainly the different photo-receptor cells present in the retina distinguish the length of the light waves they receive, what really allows us to identify color is the processing of information done by the neurons of the visual cerebral cortex (which is found very far from the retina, in the occipital region of the brain, the area where the

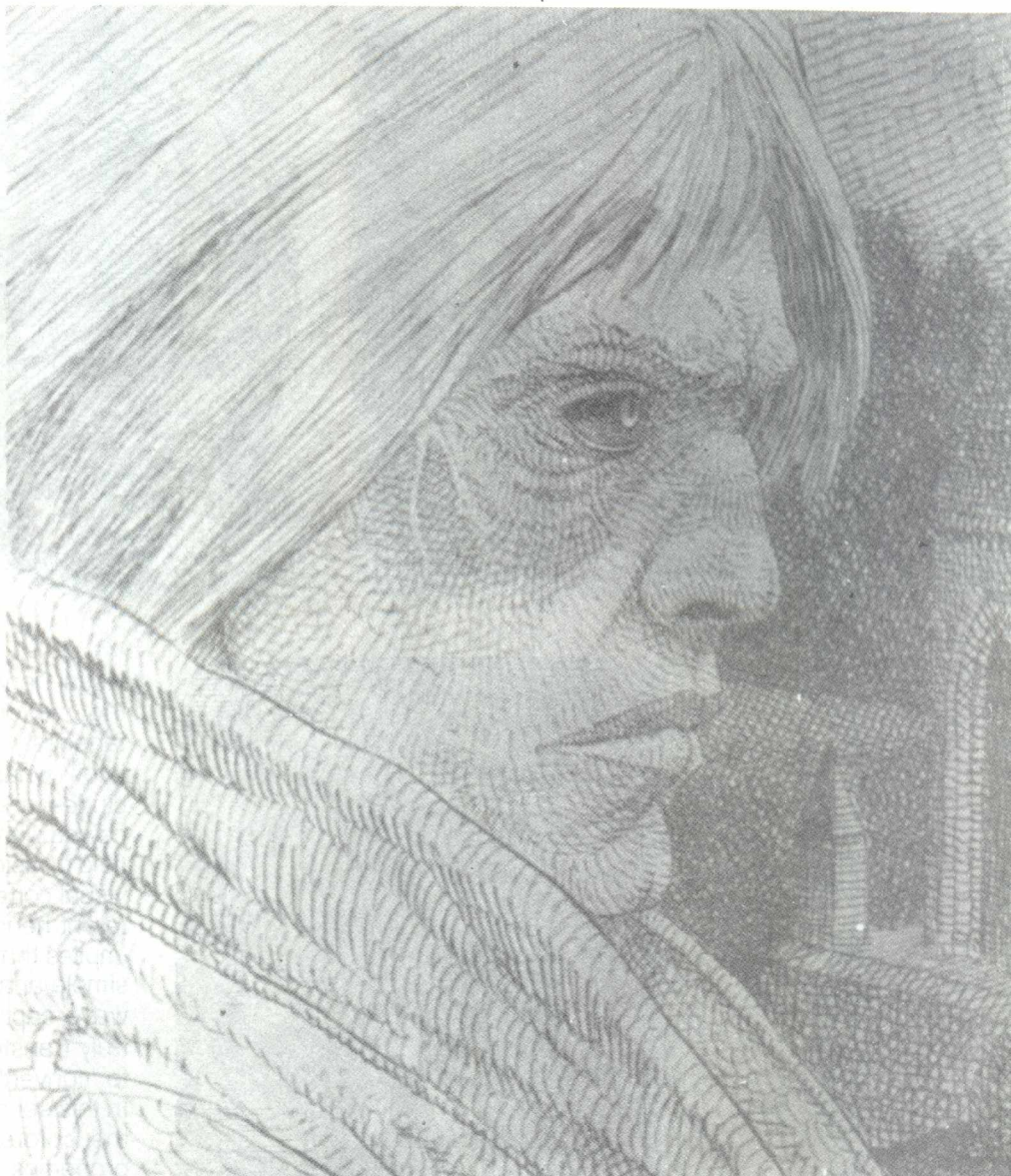


visual nervous tract ends). This processing, which occurs practically instantaneously—we do not have to "think" to know what color we are looking at—includes a comparison of the color perceived with the other colors present in the field of vision, and is done by the cerebral visual cortex through the activation of different neuronal groups. This mechanism implies that the brain does not carry out a simple analysis of the lengths of the light wave captured by the retina, but that it truly transforms the information received to "convert" it into the color we recognize. In this sense, the visual cortex re-creates the colors, according to the physical properties of the light emitted or reflected by the objects surrounding us.

We still don't know which neurotransmitters act in the process described above, but given that communication between neurons—in the visual tract as well as in any other neuronal circuit—uses the biochemical mechanisms mentioned before, it is clear that their participation is essential.

At this point we can speculate about how mental functions take place. Let us imagine that the extraordinary number of groups of neurons found in different regions of the brain, connected among themselves to form very complex circuits or networks—according to the genetic information which determines the multi-

It is clear that biochemical mechanisms are essential in communication between neurons



Drawing by Bilal. Reproduction by Alejandra Novoa

plication and differentiation of the nervous system— function analogically with the neuronal groups of the visual cortex, that upon processing the information coming to them from the retina, "create" the colors we perceive. Let's imagine for a moment that the information these groups and circuits are processing is not that which in a given moment is arriving from the outside world through the senses. It is, rather, information that has been stored in the form of short and long term memory through the phenomena of plasticity of neuronal communication from every-day experiences. The product of the unceasing processing would be mental activity. This of course would be changed when the functioning of interneuronal communication inside one or various circuits, is modified. Some examples of these modifications would be the action of psychotropic drugs, tranquilizers or anti-depressants, brain traumas, and neuronal death caused by lack of irrigation of

blood (cerebral embolism), by toxic substances or unknown causes in the case of Alzheimer's disease.

It is not surprising, given the complexity of the problem, that we are still far from knowing up to what point and in what way brain chemistry is responsible for mental functions. But let us recall the words of Thudichum, who in 1884 wrote the book *A Treatise on the Chemical Constitution of the Brain* "I believe it will be shown that the sicknesses of the brain and spinal medula are related to specific chemical

The biological problems most difficult to solve are those which have an almost infinite number of plausible solutions



The Lovers, by Remedios Varo. Reproduction by Alejandra Novoa

changes in the neurons... In synthesis, it is probable that through chemistry, many alterations of the brain and of the mind, unknown today, may be defined with exactness and be sensitive to a precise treatment, and what is now the object of an anxious empiricism may be changed into the proud practice of exact sciences."

I think that if Thudichum had lived one century later, he would have been very happy to see how much things have progressed in the direction he pointed out. In this context we can cite an interesting idea of Crick, the co-discoverer of the double helix structure of Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA). In his recent book, *What Mad Pursuit*, Crick writes about his interest in neurosciences, and in referring specifically to the study of the mechanisms of consciousness he says: "Curiously, in Biology, it sometimes seems that the basic problems which appear impossible to solve, are the ones that are most easily deciphered. This happens because there can be so few and even remotely possible solutions, that finally one inexorably finds the correct answer. The biological problems truly difficult to solve are those which have an almost infinite number of plausible solutions and one has to laboriously try to distinguish among them." Crick based this affirmation on his experience during the years he researched DNA, and though in my opinion he underestimated the complexity of the brain and its mental functions, I would certainly like him to be right. Time and our own human mind investigating itself will tell. ■

This article was first published by the magazine *Universidad de México*, #427, August 1990.

INDIAN LANGUAGES DURING THE COLONIAL PERIOD

Dora Pellicer

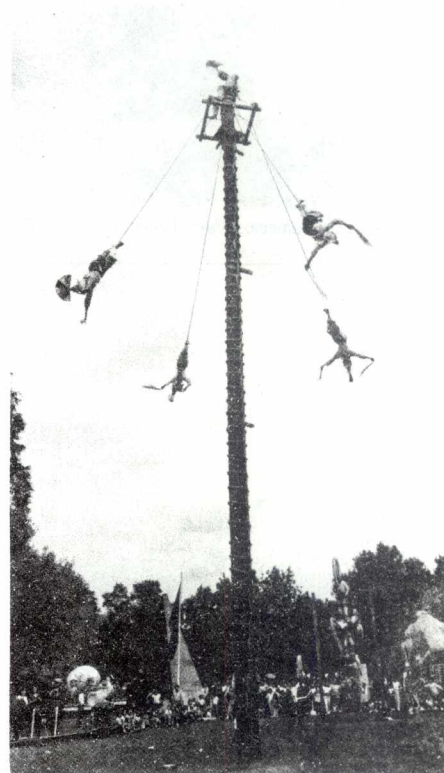
1992 will mark the commemoration of the fifth centenary of the Spanish Conquest of America. For some, this event must be called the "encounter of two worlds", for others, it was the beginning of the "fusion of two cultures". In a strict sense, both these ideas are true, but it cannot be forgotten that the Conquest was a process which resulted in the extinction or near-extinction of many Indian customs. Anthropologist Dora Pellicer examines the problem of the Mexican Indians' languages, which, especially in their written form, were substituted by Spanish following the Conquest. Finally, Omar Ocampo presents an account of recent governmental moves to protect the rights of Indian peoples.

Within today's debate regarding languages of prehispanic origin which, along with Spanish, make up the country's linguistic panorama, there appears to be an absence of reflection concerning the development of written Indian languages both prior to and after the Conquest. Ignoring this aspect has led to the mistaken notion that bilingual rural schools can be the only contemporary space reserved for written versions of our native tongues.

It seems that we forget, firstly, that the great civilizations of ancient Mesoamerica (Olmecs, Zapotecs, Mexicas, and Mayas) had already initiated, before the Christian era, a process of written language construction. Secondly, upon the arrival of the Spaniards, the local cultures had ideographical and phonetical systems capable of registering important aspects of Indian life in codexes which are still conserved. Thirdly, throughout the colonial period these codexes were

employed to assist in the transmission of Catholic dogma, as can be seen, for example, in the case of the Mazahua Catechism which was prepared in the 16th century and named in memory of Jacobo de Testera, a monk and missionary who was one of the first to take advantage of the existing codexes to further his task of evangelization. Finally, ever since the Conquest, the indigenous population was gradually dispossessed of the right to develop its own writing, which, on all but a very few occasions, was put to serve the ideological domination of the Mesoamerican peoples.

The first known examples of indigenous writing can be traced back to the number systems and hieroglyphs of the Olmec and Zapotec cultures, which were followed by the Teotihuacan graphic notation. The most advanced systems were doubtless those of the Maya and Nahuatl societies. Maya hieroglyphs, whose most ancient examples can be found on the stelae at Tikal in Guatemala, are still a challenge to their decipherers, and texts transcribed so far constitute but a very small fragment of the knowledge which this society came to develop, and which



Pre-colombian flying ritual still practised in Veracruz and Puebla. Photo by Marco Antonio Cruz / *imagenlatina*

Professor and researcher of the Superior Studies Division of the National Anthropology and History School.

was mentioned by brother Diego de Landa in his *Relación de las Cosas de Yucatán* (Relation of the Things of Yucatan):

"...the sciences taught [by the Maya priests] included the count of the years, months and days, festivals and ceremonies, the administration of their sacraments, fatal days and times, means of divination, remedies for their ills, their history, and reading and writing with its letters and characters [...] with figures which represented writing".

The Mayas' textual works were written in a number of languages which evinced an undeniable cultural unity. The Maya-Quiché culture's *Popol Vuh* is possibly the most studied example, along with the books of *Chilam-Balam*, written in the Mayan Yucatan after the Conquest.

The Nahuatl writing system turned out to be less cryptic for its researchers, and has provided abundant information regarding this civilization, which counted with *Tlacuilos*, the scribes of the empire, who were charged with providing a graphic account of the main happenings of the day. This written system, Georges Baudot has pointed out, if unable to register spoken language completely, allowed the writers to provide an account of events and ideas.

At the time of the Conquest, Maya and Nahuatl writing was no longer limited to inscriptions on wood or



Figure engraving from Monte Albán. Photo by Alejandra Novoa

stone, but rather had come to appear in forms and materials which were recognized by the Europeans as books. Due to this, Bernal Díaz del Castillo would be able to report in his *Historia Verdadera de la Nueva España* (True History of the New Spain), the discovery in the Aztecs' houses of "little books made of *amate*, the paper they made from the bark of trees, where they wrote the signs concerning the time and past events", whilst Diego de Landa, in the text mentioned above, noticed that

"...they wrote their books on a long page folded over which came to be enclosed between two boards which adorned the whole, and were written on one and another part in columns, according to the folds...".

Conquest and Destruction

Unfortunately these books, better known as codexes, were mostly destroyed or lost in the violence unleashed by the Conquest. Some of this destruction was caused by the Indians themselves, seeking either to preserve their past or to settle quarrels with Indian enemies; much was caused by the Spaniards, who saw in these codexes vestiges of infidel practices. None the less, specialists have conducted recent research on the preservation of sixteen codexes, product of the labors of prehispanic scribes.

It is important to keep in mind that written texts do not register the full rich-

ness of the cultured modalities employed in the oral transmission of Mesoamerican poetry, literature and oratory. The marked differentiation of social functions in the most advanced and stratified Indian societies had led to the conformation of linguistic forms with special prestige, to be employed during religious rituals as well as in civic and social ceremonies. In the Nahuatl world, mastery in the use of language was practised in the *Cuicacalli*, institutions of which Baudot tells us that they "covered the basic function of transmitting and elaborating the cultured tongue, or *Tecpillatolli*, an elegant tongue for lords and priests, clearly differentiated from the *Macehuatolli*, the language of the working people". These cultivated styles generated great admiration amongst those who learned Maya, Zapotec, and especially Nahuatl, due to the refinement of their rhetorical figures. These were referred to by the Franciscan priest Bernardino de Sahagún in his *Historia General de las Cosas de la Nueva España* (General History of the Things of New Spain) in the following terms:

"The prayers of the priests [who] use beautiful metaphors and forms of speech [...] This is the rhetoric of the Mexican people where there are many curious aspects concerning the beauties of their speech [...] In the answer made by an old principal, wise in the art of good speaking, answering on behalf of his people..."



Doors within doors, Monte Albán. Photo by Alejandra Novoa

Indeed, a great number of different cultural forms were developed by the lettered Indian classes, such as lyric and epic poetry and a historical narrative prose whose graphic transcription was, at least for the Maya and Nahuatl societies, an object of extreme care which demanded the attention of specialized scribes. The oral transmission of this literary activity was considered an aspect of the people's education, and in this respect was an element of cohesion and identity within Indian societies.

In their encounter with multiple indigenous groups, in their travels through the vast territory between upper California and Costa Rica, the Spaniards gradually came upon great diversity in terms of cultural forms, from the nomadic societies of the north and east to the powerful empires of the central high plateau and the southeast. All of them were linked to different languages whose exact number at that time is difficult to establish. Nonetheless, Mauricio Swadesh's 1958 classification postulated the presence of 143 different languages in the lands which Hernán Cortés was to baptize

with the name of New Spain. Each one posed a challenge to colonization, as they corresponded not only to different forms of communication, but also to different outlooks and world views, different ways and means of ordering beliefs and social behavior.

The priests, representatives and executors of the political and religious projects of the Spanish Crown, responded to the challenge of the complex Mesoamerican world with ethnographic curiosity and doctrinal zeal. Some priests, with the help of the cultured Indian classes, brought forth what history we do know about the prehispanic past, a history fatally filtered through the preconceptions and prejudices which underlaid the Europeans' interpretation of the Indians. The Conquest resulted in the imposition of the Christian creed, overcoming the challenge of cultural diversity. But the writing of Indian languages was of fundamental importance to the priests' labors, although it was an activity which paradoxically served disparate intentions. The chronicles, memoirs, and histories were a response to the Spanish Crown's need to be in-

formed about its new subjects, and the amazement and thirst for knowledge which the Amerindian's costumes, rites and traditions aroused. The sermons, confessionaries, doctrines, catechisms and prayers pursued the destruction of the beliefs and pagan liturgies which were omnipresent in the cultures so admired by certain priests.

The chronicles of the Indies, recovered along with a great deal of poetry and oral literature, are due to the work of nobles and Indian principals who, together with Franciscan, Dominican, Augustinian and Jesuit missionaries who arrived to the New Spain between 1523 and 1572, collected tales and codexes. These were transcribed into the Latin alphabet, which the Indian scribes picked up apparently without effort, according to observations of the priest Motolinia in his *Memoriales de las Cosas de la Nueva España* (Memoirs of the Things of New Spain): "...they quickly learned to write [...] In but a few days of their beginning to write they could do every task set by their teachers...".

The central part in this work of recovery and transcription was carried



Children participate in the flying ritual. Photo by Marco Antonio Cruz/Imagenlatina

out in the 16th and beginnings of the 17th centuries, a period which saw the work of *mestizo* scribes such as Hernando Alvarado Tezozomoc and Fernando de Alba Ixtlixochitl. Nonetheless, the historian José Joaquín Blanco reminds us that teaching the profuse relationships of the prehispanic world was prohibited, and in many cases, literature referring to them was destroyed, being considered heretical and subversive by peninsular censors. In these conditions, literature about the Conquest became gradually submerged by colonial religious writings which gave birth to hundreds of texts on or about Indian languages.

Religious Use of Indian Languages

Christian penetration of the Amerindian world of New Spain did not respond to the unity of language and religion instituted by Ferdinand the Catholic in his Law of the Indies of 1512. The process of evangelization in New Spain had, at least, in as much as language was concerned, a series of complex and haphazard determinative factors. Crown policy at the same time prohibited the use of native tongues (as was ordered by Charles III and Charles IV) but encouraged their use for religious conversions (as was the policy of Phillip II, Phillip III and Phillip IV); on the other hand, the Church did not maintain a unified and sustained linguistic policy of Castilianization. Rather, many parish priests found that their interests were favoured by learn-



ing Indian tongues, as this allowed them to maintain their balance of power against clerical newcomers, who, arriving from the Iberian peninsula, did not understand such languages. Because of this, evangelization was strictly tied to a lexical and grammatical knowledge of Indian languages, with the purpose of easing the evangelizing task. Texts known as "Arts and Vocabularies" were produced for priests, such as the *Arte del Idioma Otomí* (Art of the Otomi Language, in which can be found rules, conjugations, verbs, christian doctrine, prayers, confessionaries, administrative means, reprimands and weddings), published anonymously in 1755; or the *Arte Doctrinal y Formas de Aprender la Lengua Matlalzinga* (Doctrinal Art and Means to Learn the Matlalzinga Tongue) for the administration of the holy sacraments and all other things necessary to speak it in an ordinary manner), written by brother Miguel de Guevara in 1638.

Knowledge of Indian languages was followed by the production of works for the propagation of religious creeds; and it was these two currents which determined the new policy for writing in these languages which was to serve brother Vicente Villanueva in creating his *Misterios del Rosario en Verso Dramático Zapoteco* (Mysteries of the Rosary in Zapotec Dramatic Verse), and brother Francisco Torralba to produce his *Sermones de dominicas y santos* (Sermons of dominicans and saints to preach to the indians every day in clear and elegant Maya or Yucatecan tongue); there was also the priest Nájera Yanguas, with his *Doctrina y enseñanza en lengua Mazahua* (Doctrine and teaching in Mazahua tongue of many useful things for ministers of the doctrine and for those who naturally speak Mazahua), and dozens more.

According to the exhaustive bibliography produced by Irma Contreras García in 1935, the colonial period witnessed the production of 51 Arts of the Nahuatl tongue and 152 texts for evangelization in this language; 17 studies on Maya and Yucatecan and 11 religious works in this tongue; 17 Arts and Vocabularies and 22 texts for evangelization in Zapotec; 10 sermons and catechisms in Mixtec, as well as 6 studies about this language; 17 grammatical and lexical studies accompanied by 13 doctrines in Otomí, and other writings of the day in 43 further languages. All this confirms the observation made by the 19th century



philologist brother Manuel Crisóstomo Nájera: "Not a tongue is spoken in the territory known as New Spain that does not possess its grammar, a more or less extensive dictionary, and its catechism, even if these have not been published".

This great number of prints and manuscripts contributed to the greater diffusion of the precepts of the church, which meant that Indian languages acquired a new importance, without gaining, however, a status of equality with Latin or Spanish. In fact, the religious structures which took over regulation of the writing of Mesoamerican languages distanced themselves totally from the cultural repertoire of Indian oral tradition. Once the church had settled into New Spain, and affirmed its functions within the regime of the Spanish viceroys, the appreciation and respect that some of the first missionaries displayed towards Indian customs and their creators diminished notably. In their preface to the *Compendio del Arte de la Lengua Mexicana* (Compendium of the Art of the Mexican Tongue), the writers, Jesuit priests Horacio Carocho and Ignacio Paredes, stated that their intention was to "...cultivate and instruct the Mexican language to those who, following the calling from God, wish to use it in the glorious and apostolic task of ministering to the ignorant, squalid and extremely needy Indians...".

This leaves us in no doubt that by the 18th century the clergy no longer professed an interest, and much less an admiration, for the cultures of the Indians who, isolated and exploited under the viceroy's governments, were seen as little more than an object for religious conversion.

Luis Fernando Lara, in an article which appeared in 1983, has stated that the conquerors not only imposed a new language, but also a new conception of the world. I dare to add another imposition, that of religious writing, which introduced profound changes in the social functions and contents of the Indians' mother tongues. Words, metaphors and other figures of speech were given new meanings and were forcefully employed in the service of translations of Our Fathers, Salve Reginas and other Christian rituals. In this way, the first *Cartilla* of the 16th century, attributed to Pedro de Gante, pretended to alphabetize with teachings of prayers in Latin, Spanish and Nahuatl: *Izcatqui Ycuepa Yn Pater Noster*, which means Our Father in the Mexican Tongue.

Expropriated from their cultural contexts, these idioms were ruled over by the norms of the ecclesiastic officers. Thus, brother Juan Bautista, in the preface to his *Sermonario en Lengua Mexicana* (Sermonary in the Mexican Tongue), thanked the help and advice provided by the Indian nobles of the College of Santiago Tlatelolco, although he also made it clear that it was his criteria which would provide the definite decisions as to how the Indian languages were to transmit Christian precepts: "...Esteban Bravo, natural from Tezcoco, [...] helped me with this work. He spoke such good Latin, and translated anything from Romance or Latin into the Mexican tongue with such wealth and multitude of figures that many admired him, and some even payed him well, although I was not convinced by such an abundance of copy,

and have edited whatever seemed superfluous in the things of his language".

The transcription of Indian languages into the Latin alphabet also had to submit to the criteria that the peninsular and criollo priests set for spelling and pronunciation: "This tongue is to be written in the letters of the Spanish alphabet, although seven letters are missing, namely b, d, f, g, r, s and j..."

This is the first line from the *Compendio del Arte de la Lengua Mexicana* (Compendium of the Art of the Mexican Tongue) mentioned above, whose authors also established many rules for writing this language: "...There are in this tongue five vowels, a, e, i, o, u; but the o is sometimes so closed, obscure, that it seems more like a y; but

it does not cease to be an o. Therefore, I determine not to write *Teutl* but *Teotl* (God) or not to write *ichpuchtli* but *ichpochtili* (maiden)".

Finally, the fact that only a small minority of the Indians learned to read, and an even smaller minority to write (these skills were considered separate at the time, and were taught separately), contributed to alienate and distance the Indian language speakers from the decisions taken as to how to write their languages. This came about because, except for the few schools for Indians which operated in the 16th century (catalogued by Gómez Cañedo in a publication in 1982), the reign of the viceroys was characterized by its complete negligence of education, a situa-





tion which was denounced in an extensive Pastoral from the Archbishop Lorenzana y Buitron towards the end of the 18th century. By this time, in the whole country, there existed only 10 schools officially destined for the Indians' education. Consequently, the vast majority of them simply became recipients of religious policies translated into their languages. Their submission and lack of alphabetization prevented them from participating creatively in the process of writing their own languages, because they were given no opportunity to do so.

Anchored in the expectations of colonialism, the task of the Church, far from contributing to the enrichment of Mesoamerican languages, forced them to translate the imperial ideology of Catholicism. The priests' linguistic labors pivoted on the need to evangelize, fatally linked to the need to destroy the thoughts and world views of the Indians. This situation allowed the Spaniards to appropriate the native languages and to impose a new form of writing, alien to the Indians' historical and cultural contexts and concepts. In these conditions, the introduction of an alphabet was used to exorcise the past and to dispossess the Indians from the right to write their own mother tongues. ■

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CONSTITUTIONAL STEPS TO RECOGNIZE INDIAN PEOPLES

Omar Ocampo

Within two years we will celebrate the 500th centenary of the "encounter of two worlds", as some like to call the Conquest of America by Spain.

The countries of the American continent have begun to make changes in their policies with respect to the indigenous races. These races still conserve part of their idiosyncrasy, and their integration into the rest of *mestizo* society confronts obstacles that range from discrimination to loss of their lands and ways of living.

In Guatemala, the Seventh Iberian-American Conference of the National Commissions for the 500th Anniversary was held towards the end of July this year. At this conference, all the national delegations accepted a document called "The Presence and Significance of the Indigenous Peoples in America." The ten recommendations of this document were unanimously adopted:

1. To further the renewal of legal and constitutional precepts that guarantee the recognition and application of indigenous rights with the participation of the interested parties.

2. To respect the indigenous groups and their natural habitat since they guarantee ecological equilibrium in the face of destruction of natural resources.

3. To form educational policies that permit the development of indigenous languages, recognizing historical processes, traditions, values and knowledge of the Indian races as the basis of bilingual, bicultural education.

4. To incorporate in the programs of the National Commissions, projects that value and underline the significance of the Indian peoples in the past and in the present. This should be done so that the contribution of Indian peoples to the formation and development of the pluriethnic and multicultural reality of the world, may be recuperated.

5. To invite the participation of representatives of Indian peoples in the National Commissions.

6. To support the creation of a *Corpus Americano* of languages, traditions, histories, myths, constructions and scientific and technical knowledge of the indigenous peoples.

7. To promote the importance of public indigenous organizations and the effective participation of representatives of the indigenous peoples in these groups.

8. To increase the actions and connections among different agencies of cooperation (inter-governmental, governmental and non-



Women play an important part in the struggle for Indian rights. Photo by Angeles Torrejón/Imagenlatina

governmental) to favor the use and channeling of resources towards priority programs and needs of the indigenous peoples.

9. That the problems and needs of indigenous border peoples and those located in other national territories as refugees, be attended to in the light of the doctrine of human rights.

10. That this document be complemented by annexes elaborated by each National Commission which will present reports about the progress of these previous recommendations in future Conferences.

In Mexico, the government of Carlos Salinas has shown interest in this aspect since last year. On April 7, 1989, he formed the National Commission of Justice for the Indian Peoples of Mexico within the National Indigenous Institute (*Instituto Nacional Indigenista* - INI). This Commission worked three months on a preliminary project for public discussion.

This reform "pretends to broaden the spaces for the participation of indigenous peoples through constitutional recognition of their cultural and historical rights".

The document continues with the recognition that our country is "pluri-ethnic and multicultural...", by stating that the presence of 56 ethnic groups of different sizes and with different languages "enriches our country culturally and signifies an important contribution to the sovereign solution of national problems".

One of the elements based on the proposal for constitutional reform is related to the idea that the laws of each state must be made more flexible in regard to the "legal practices and customs of the indigenous peoples".

The following reform would be added to Article 4 of the Constitution:

"The Mexican nation has a plural ethnic composition sustained basically by the presence of its indigenous peoples. The constitutions of the states and the laws and regulations of the federation and of the states and municipalities will establish the norms, measures and procedures that protect, preserve and

promote the development of languages, cultures, uses, customs and specific forms of social organization of the indigenous communities."

The law will establish procedures that assure effective access to the State's jurisdiction for indigenous people. In federal and local trials "where an indigenous person is present, his or her lawful practices and customs will be taken into consideration during the trial and in the final resolution of the matter".

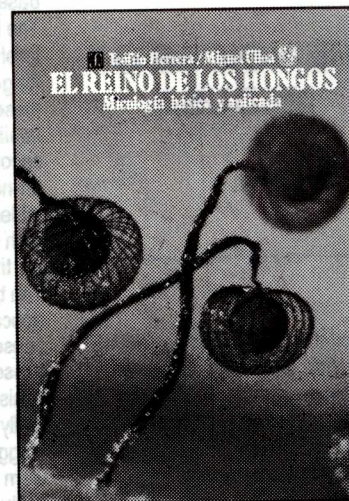
From September 30 to October 2 last year, 96 indigenous organizations, academic institutions and non-governmental human rights organizations took part in the First International Forum on Human Rights of the Indigenous Peoples, in Matías Romero in the state of Oaxaca.

During the debate in the forum, it was decided that the content of the proposed reform to Article 4 was to be rejected since it did not resolve the needs of the Indian peoples, "and only tried to cover the problems with nice words". The debates covered various points in relating to amendments to the Constitution: recognition of indigenous languages and discussion of the theme of titles to land holdings, one of the principal problems that the indigenous communities confront. In reference to this last point, Manuel Fuentes from the National Federation of Democratic Lawyers stated that "collective property ownership should have priority over individual property ownership, and the protection for large landholders (*latifundistas*) should be eliminated. There should also be a redefinition of the *ejido* in its most integral sense, giving a legal personality to *ejidos* and communities. Excessive government intervention in indigenous communities and *ejidos* should be avoided". Jorge Fernández from the Law Department of the Autonomous Metropolitan University warned that "in many cases it is better not to legislate in order to safeguard the right of customs, and not have an official recognition of the State that would imply its intervention in the indigenous communities". ■

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Teófilo Herrera y
Miguel Ulloa

EL REINO DE LOS HONGOS



Micología básica y aplicada

Texto didáctico de micología que explora, describe y clasifica uno de los terrenos más fascinantes de la biología

Otros títulos:

R. Gordon Wasson
EL CAMINO A ELEUSIS
Una solución al enigma de los misterios

Kenneth Manley Smith
BIOLOGÍA DE LOS VIRUS

Jean-Claude Burdin y Émile de Lavergne
LAS BACTERIAS

Carlos Vázquez Yanes
CÓMO VIVEN LAS PLANTAS



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BOOKS

THE VOICES OF
MEDUSA

Antonio Saborit

The last thing that could be said of these short stories is that they are flat or unimaginative: their creation has a lot to do with the singularity of a genius who looks for surprise in the plot. Emilio Pacheco gives us his very own version of the Great Unknown Dimension, that twilight zone which, apart from Carlos Fuentes' *Aura*, has been visited by other titles of Mexican contemporary narrative, dubbed into his own language and projected in the midst of a presumptuous artefact of bulbs, woods and chromatic pieces of the 50's.

The Blood of Medusa consists of various stories inspired by some fantastic vein of Pacheco between 1956 and 1984. "The Dead Enemy", which relates the story of a writer from the desk of his private secretary, and "Walk on the Lake", stand apart from the general theme of this collection, in the first place, due to their deliberate tone of minor comedy, and, secondly, because the short stories of this volume belong to the realm of the fantastic and the extraordinary. A new and creative Perseus, the narrator of these stories, dedicated himself to hunting the reflection of Medusa in a television screen, which apparently was the only shield within reach.

The plot of most of these stories revolves around their characters. A policeman tortures to death one of the few people who had treated him well, and finally commits suicide by throwing him-

self out the window, when he confuses the escort of a girl's school with the noise of his feared, imminent lynching. The heretic refuses to be executed by blows and calmly takes his place at the stake of San Diego, in the Alameda, where he was condemned by the Holy Inquisition. A touch of magic at the right moment results in the inquisitor being burned, while the heretic is saved when the flames are beginning to do their work.

In the style of the best narrative poems, these short stories are based on their delicate story line. The lonely Gutiérrez decides to finish up with the rats of his home for good and for all; he fights these rats for the ownership of the family treasure (furniture of the second empire, Phillipine screens, art-nouveau shelves and dressing tables, books from the 17th and 18th centuries); finally he falls into the trap set by his adversaries. The threat of a nuclear apocalypse and the fear that this causes him, leads a man to shut himself up in the perpetual night of his refuge, from which he eventually emerges, grey haired and staggering, his body and clothes worn and torn, to enter a lunatic asylum on a radiant, weaponless, peaceful planet. History is a fiction that short stories try to document. Thus, Lincoln attends the first night of The Death of Abraham Lincoln, in the Ford Theater in Washington, his last public appearance before retiring forever to a plantation in Virginia. Or again, John Warnock Hinckley Jr. offers his member of desire to the actress Jody Foster while he orders the details of an assassination attempt against Ronald Reagan.

The degree of personal obsession in each of these short stories is characteristic of Pacheco's work. A good part of his poetry, as well as his stories and journalistic prose, are based on the certainty of a kind of disaster of which nobody doubted until recently. Perhaps the probabilities, if not the general script, have changed somewhat. Today the conviction that this disaster will occur, would probably find its origins in the world of political lampoons, of comix, low-budget movies and television series which sadden their viewers with paradoxical fantasies of extermination, all fathered by the western boom of the 50's and the Cold War.

The Blood of Medusa is a bibliographic curiosity for more than

one reason. One of these is the origin of the material united for the first time in this volume, from the **Cuadernos del Unicornio** (Unicorn Exercise Books) published by Juan José Arreola in the 1950's, up to recent work published in the weekly magazine **Proceso**. "Never did such a brief book occupy involuntarily so many years", says Pacheco in the introduction. Another element which underlines the bibliographic importance of this volume is the will with which Pacheco created his own theater of memory; however, there are few texts as nostalgic as the one where Pacheco relates the origin of the material printed in **The Blood of Medusa**. Concise, austere, free from all melodrama, and in a tone very similar to that of "The Dead Enemy", the author puts forth his idea of narrative as an incessant collaboration between the living and the dead: "The author does not pronounce his own words, he just gives his own version of what he was told. It is not only himself who speaks: simultaneously, his predecessors express themselves". This leaves us in the terrain of the final and

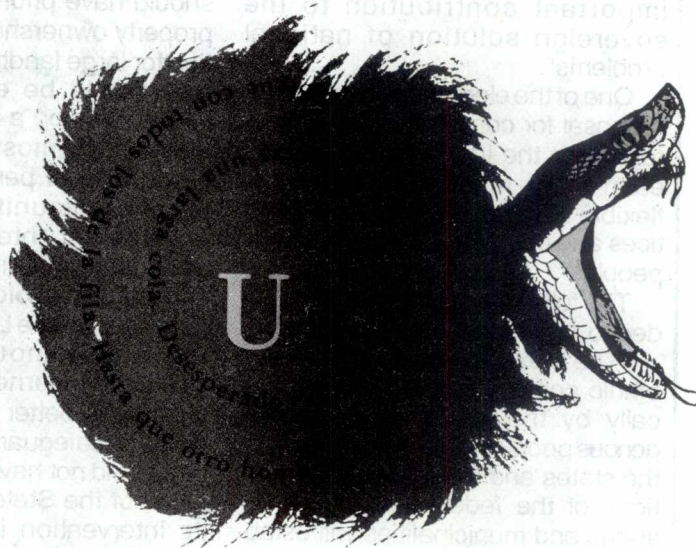
best element of this work: the parody.

Pacheco's way of making parodies in these short stories, does not venture along the path of re-interpretation, rather, his parodies advance along another route, that of recuperation, especially in the notorious case of "Gulliver in the land of the Lilliputians" or that of "The Catastrophe" which, according to Pacheco, is both an offence and a homage to the great Portuguese writer Eça de Queiroz.

The Blood of Medusa is thus an assembly of voices and times, convoked by Pacheco's will and his liking for making new creations over a given text. The influence of Jorge Luis Borges is more than notorious in "Incipit Comedia", where the conveniently grave tone of the narrative voice makes an interrogation about Dante's final destiny. A couple of these short stories recall another two from the repertoire of North American writer John Cheever: I refer to one which relates the story of a television set that only receives programs from the future, in the first place, and then to that of a

José Emilio
Pacheco*La sangre de Medusa*

Era



mysterious island in the middle of the ocean. In a story written two or three years before his death, Cheever imagined an unlucky island where forgotten senile celebrities of the most remote past of his century, conversed and played cards; in an earlier story he invented a radio set which would reproduce the conversations of neighbors. Pacheco speculates: "Perhaps all past and future images float in space, beyond time: only a slight imperfection is necessary for them to appear in the receiver."

Other stories such as "Metamorphosis", "Problems of Hell" and "Within an Emerald", share their author's affection for the writers Julio Torri and Juan José Arreola. This is not an exaggeration: for years Pacheco has cultivated the arduous simplicity of this kind of fiction. His space is urban although it approaches the realm of unpredictable mythology, as is the case of the miserable Pygmalion who can no longer bear his Galatea, and would prefer to have her restored to her natural stone. It also has an atmosphere such as that of a cruel do-gooder who relates the vicissitudes of hope, or rather of the hopeless, in hell. Or it is the strictly imagined space of that person who was able to regard the perfect living miniature of a naked woman inside an emerald.

In the same vein of literary recreation, there is a surprising story. Pacheco dared describe it in his prologue as the most beautiful story of our narrative of imagination. The story of "The Mulatta from Córdoba" has been told many times over the centuries, frequently subject to the narrator's most peculiar interpretations. Pacheco's version, entitled "Over the Waves", reminds us of the time when Heriberto Frías attempted to create a well written story for his mulatta in the pages of the *Imparcial*, and it takes an effort to imagine a new twist to the story.

The emotional center of **The Blood of Medusa** should not be sought in the constant collaboration among authors. Rather, their numerous voices belong to the exercise of literature as the only never ending story.

José Emilio Pacheco: **La Sangre de Medusa y otros cuentos marginales**. Ediciones Era, 1990.

POPULAR MOVEMENTS IN LATIN AMERICA

Jorge Luis Sierra Guzmán

This is a book that, beginning with its title and through the regional collaborations of its researchers, suggests the appearance of new social subjects with their own characteristics, different from those involved in the struggles of traditional trade union or peasant movements.

Seen as social sectors which undergo domination and exploitation, popular movements can be those of the poor inhabitants of cities who demand housing and services, movements at the municipal level, black rebellions in the subjected countries of the Caribbean, student struggles, or the feminist movement.

Los movimientos populares en América Latina, a joint edition by the United Nations University and the publishing house Siglo XXI, brings together 15 essays by Latin American social scientists who have experienced the useless and constantly mechanical application of European or U.S. theoretical models to the study of such complex and diverse realities as the Latin American ones. This is why the book attempts to find the way -and succeeds- to transcend the superficiality of research oriented along positivistic lines.

This work is part of a large research project: Perspectives on Latin America, started by the United Nations University and supported in our country by the National University of Mexico and the Latin America School of Social Science (FLACSO), as well as by other regional study centers, such as the Latin American Council on Social Sciences and the Latin American Sociology Association. This is a group of researchers of high academic level committed to the democratic and critical perspectives expressed by Latin American popular movements.

This commitment -which puts the researchers on the side of the people, in confrontation with the

social forces that dominate and exploit them- places them outside the supposed neutrality of positivism. On the other hand, it does not hinder the necessary rigor and objectivity in the study of the origin and development of popular movements. "In this sense -one of the book's coordinators states- this book is strictly objective and at the same time deeply committed to the task of recovering the collective memory of popular movements, and, consequently, of contributing to its development and strength."

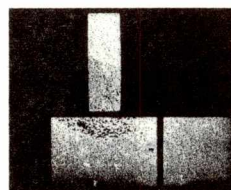
The 15 essays gathered in this work represent an original contribution to the theoretical discussion, and a detailed analysis of relations between popular movements and the State. Popular movements, emerging from the discontent of civil society, have put forth economic and political reivindications vis à vis governments that have abandoned their paternalistic and populist at-

titudes, and have adopted authoritarian stances. With special conditions in each country, and in each process of national unity, popular movements have crystallized into a movement that has an alternative political project, when it is not in power, or an official one, when it comes to power.

The book studies -always from regional or national perspectives- the dynamics of popular movements, their social composition, their own ways to build democracy, their relations with political parties, their conceptions of the national question, their participation in the peace processes that have taken place in Central America, and other current issues.

Los movimientos populares en América Latina was coordinated by Daniel Camacho and Rafael Menjivar. Siglo XXI Editores and United Nations University. Biblioteca América Latina: actualidad y perspectivas. México, 1989.

Biblioteca América Latina: actualidad y perspectivas



Daniel Camacho ■ Rafael Menjivar
(coordinadores)

Los movimientos populares en América Latina

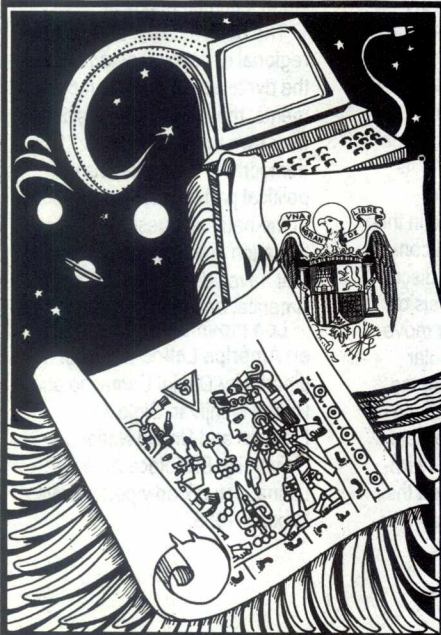
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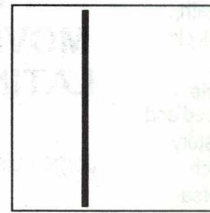
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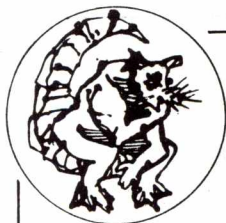
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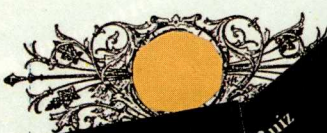
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