

# voices of MEXICO

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

## • ECOLOGICAL

DESOLATION ~ FOREIGN DEBT AND

DEMOCRACY ~ MEXICAN WORKERS'

STRUGGLES ~ CRACKDOWN ON DRUG

TRAFFICKING ~ ALCOHOLISM

IN MEXICO.

NOSTALGIA  
FOR  
EL INDIO



Number 11  
ISSN 0186-9418  
\$ 4.00 U.S.  
4,000 pesos m/n  
Precio pacto 3,880

**UN ESPACIO PARA LA RECREACION CULTURAL**



**DEL 6 AL 19 DE NOVIEMBRE**

**MUSEO UNIVERSITARIO DE CIENCIAS Y ARTES  
CIUDAD UNIVERSITARIA**

**UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL AUTONOMA DE MEXICO  
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Registro en trámite

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October - November - December, 1989 Number 11

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Due to a lamentable error *Voices* No. 11 was dated June - July - August; that issue should have corresponded to the months July - August - September.

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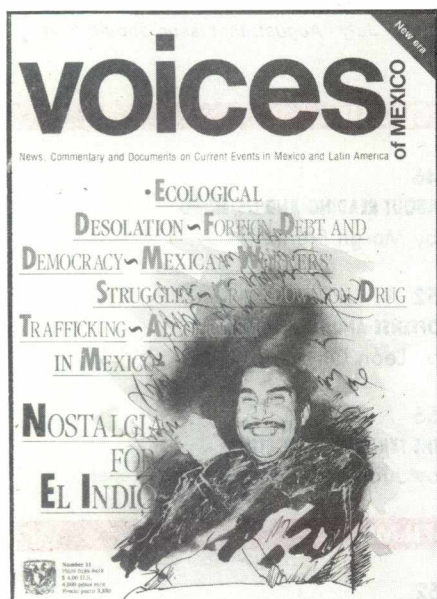
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# THIS ISSUE



Cover: Anael García Domínguez

In this issue of *Voices* we deal once more with the essential problems affecting us as a nation: economic solvency, sovereignty and the difficult transition towards a more participative and democratic society — themes discussed constantly and almost obsessively by Mexicans in recent years, and about which the last word has not yet been said.

These analyses - which constitute real knots in the Mexican social texture, are complemented by two articles on the dramas of ecological deterioration and the increasing rate of alcoholism in Mexico. These are public health problems which are demanding prompt and far reaching solutions.

In the cultural section there is an important essay on the relationship between reading and listening, referring to the ancient classical period and to the Middle Ages - a topic that has not been much studied by specialists up to the present.

We complete the section with a philosophical essay on the motives behind intolerance, with regard to the Satanic Verses written by Salman Rushdie (which, by the way, might be useful in confronting the many conflicts that Mexico and the United States, as neighbors, have to face), and with two homages to figures of prime importance in Mexican culture: the poet Salvador Novo and the film maker Emilio *El Indio* Fernández.

**Mariclaire Acosta**

Homero Aridjis

# ECOLOGICAL DESOLATION

**Author of 20 books of poetry, Homero Aridjis founded the "Group of 100" artists and intellectuals in 1985, in an effort to wage battle against Mexico City's worsening pollution problems. Two years later, he accepted the United Nations Environmental Global 500 award on behalf of the Group. He is also the editor, with Fernando Césarmen, of an upcoming anthology of poetry, essays and artwork by the Group of 100 entitled, *Urban Ecocide: A Chronicle of Mexico City*.**

I grew up in a village where there were no elephants, tigers, lions or dolphins but the knowledge of their existence nourished my childhood imagination. When a traveling circus came to town, I was fascinated by the elephants, so much so that I suffered when I learned that they were being killed in Africa and India. How strange it is; we respect the masterpieces in the Louvre or the Metropolitan Museum of Art but we don't respect the masterpieces of nature.

The herds of mammoths and mastodons that once roamed Mesoamerica surely grazed near my village. More recently, however, it has been the seasonal home for millions of monarch butterflies. During the winters of my childhood, the sky would be aflame with red, orange, yellow and black as the butterflies swarmed through the village in search of water. The monarchs would light in the fir trees on a hill near my home and completely transform the landscape. I waited for the butterflies as if their arrival marked the beginning of a prolonged fiesta; as I might look forward to the visit of a favorite relative.

During the fourteen years I lived abroad, working in the diplomatic service and teaching, I made a point of returning every winter to my village, and each year I was able to observe the thinning of the woods as the trees were cut down for firewood. As their resting place was increasingly threatened, the butterflies became fewer and fewer. The images that had fed my childhood were being destroyed and I felt that it was my own childhood that was being killed, that my memory of a natural beauty that had once overwhelmed me was being ravaged.

The possibility of my village becoming a wasteland, a silent country without wind in the trees or animal sounds or bird songs, makes me feel desperate. Such disrespect for nature humiliates me as a human being; it makes me feel like a stranger in the place of my birth.

If a woman who inspires great poetry dies, something of our own humanity dies with her. It is the same with the environment; inspiration for poets, painters and composers has always come from nature. Humans don't seem to grasp a quintessential concept: What is destructive to the environment is ultimately destructive to ourselves.

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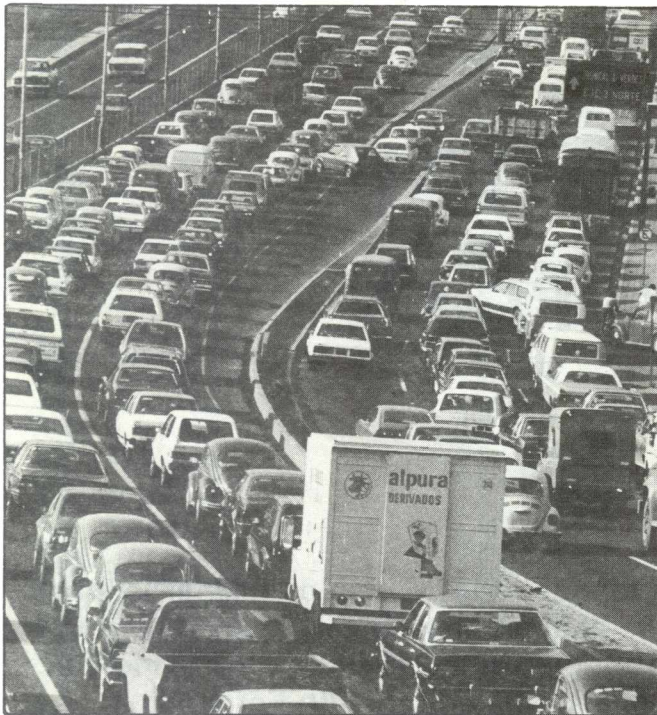
**Ecological destruction is a social crime and it is almost always a lie that the leveling of a forest or the building of a dam will bring economic benefit to the local people**

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I realize that if people are hungry, it's hard for them to worry about the preservation of natural resources. The problem is that the abuses of natural resources and the abuses of people are intertwined: Those who abuse nature also abuse people. Ecological destruction is a social crime and it is almost always a lie that the leveling of a forest or the building of a dam will bring economic benefit to the local people. What good is economic well-being when the ecosystem has been undone, the land has become uninhabitable and the people living on it have become pariahs?

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Poet, President of the Group of 100.



Automobiles are responsible for 80 percent of pollution in Mexico City. Photo by Herón Alemán/Imagenlatina

Our planet is finite, our resources limited. Perhaps it is because I am a poet and have a mystic side that I feel the Earth is a living organism and that we —humans, plants, animals— are its creations. When the Earth moves, as it did in the 1985 Mexico City earthquake, we understand that it is alive and we are forced to acknowledge our dependence upon it.

The clichéd notion of Mother Earth is true; it is millenarian wisdom. We must admit this and live within the boundaries of the relationship because there is no life separate from it. The task of poets, and of holy men, is to tell this planet's stories and to articulate an ecological cosmology that does not separate nature from humanity. One of the most important stories to tell is that of Mexico City.

### The Compromised Land

Before the arrival of the Europeans, Mexico was home to many advanced civilizations. Twenty-three thousand years ago, nomadic tribes hunted in the valley that now supports Mexico City. Today, it is among the first places on the planet to face imminent ecological collapse.

Here, the natural seasons have lost their names.

**How long will we be able to survive our daily ration of carbon dioxide, sulfur, fecal dust, ozone, noise, gastro-intestinal illnesses, eye ailments, respiratory problems and skin infections?**

We no longer speak of “winter, spring, summer, fall”. It is now “thermal inversion season”, “dust storm season”, the “season of acid rain”, and the “ozone season”. We are even beginning to name illnesses after our pollution problems. I was recently in a government office and a clerk, who sounded like he had a very bad cold, told me he was suffering from “inversión térmica” —thermal inversion sick-

**The strategy of the Group of 100 is to stop the immediate destruction of the environment. For example, we stopped the construction of four electric dams on the Usumacinta River between Guatemala and Mexico**

ness. Complicated scientific terms have now become common currency.

Life itself —animal, plant and human— is in grave danger. Our city is a modern-day laboratory and we are guinea pigs who are helping the world discover that lead and other components in gasoline provoke cerebral lesions when absorbed into the blood stream; that atmospheric poisoning causes birds to fall out of the sky; that the contaminated air breathed by pregnant women sends toxic levels of lead into the forming brains of the unborn.

Mexico City began on a few islands in the middle of Lake Texcoco. The Aztecs, who were looking for the Promised Land, arrived there and saw a predestined sign —an eagle perched on a cactus with a writhing snake in its beak. Now, that sign is immortalized on our national flag but we live in the ruins, in an arid city, and the golden eagle is in danger of extinction. The lakes have been sucked dry, the rivers turned into underground sewers, and we have to pump water, 40 cubic meters per second, from farther and farther away. Ironically, the city whose economy and transportation systems depended on water is now going to die for the lack of it.

Ecological deterioration not only affects air and water, it also leads to aesthetic degradation. When the Spanish conquistadors arrived in the 16th century they were fascinated by the beauty of the valley, the volcanos, the lakes, and the clarity of the air and the light.

The Aztecs whom the Spanish encountered were called Children of the Sun. Today, we can't even see the sun, and the children that are being born, brain damaged in the womb by lead poisoning, are now being called the Generation of Idiots. In their drawings, kindergarten pupils color the sky gray.

We know the volcanos are out there but we see them only rarely, and if we do see them, we have to worry because it's a sign of severe thermal inversion. When the pollution sinks low one has a sharply etched view of the volcanos but breathing, particularly for the elderly and the young, can be deadly.

## THE LOST FOREST

With the destruction of 130,000 hectares of jungle in the state of Quintana Roo due to the recent forest fire (the worst in the history of the country), the ecological balance of jungle areas is close to being destroyed. According to a letter sent to the President of the Republic by the Group of 100 (composed of Mexican intellectuals, artists and writers), 100,000 acres of jungle in Chiapas and 250,000 acres of jungle in Guerrero, Michoacán, Colima and Jalisco are lost each year.

In the report "The State of Nature", the Group of 100 said that "the principal factors in the devastation of the country's ecosystems are the uncontrolled logging of forests and jungles, the extensive conversion of more than 220 million acres to pastureland (at least 37 million acres were tropical jungle, temperate forests or natural deserts 20 years ago), and the practice of slash-and-burn (which turns deforested land into pastureland, completing the circle of ecological imbalance). To the previous plagues, one must add the clear-cutting carried out constantly by official development and colonization projects. We must also mention the criminal forest fires that sweep through Mexico's forests each year just before the rainy season begins — fires that quickly reach epidemic proportions (last year alone, more than 320,000 acres of forests were burned and there were days on which some part of almost every woodland in Mexico was in flames). These fires happen without any public official being able to prevent them, put them out or punish the arsonists."

Mexican jungles are disappearing more rapidly all the time. Now it takes one year to destroy an area which previously was destroyed in 50 years. At this rate, for example, the Lacandon Jungle in the state of Chiapas on the border with Guatemala is in danger of disap-

pearing in the next five or ten years. Even though there are government decrees to protect this jungle and mark the areas of ecological reserves, the area has been affected by oil well drilling, the construction of hydro-electric dams, logging companies, the use of single-crop agriculture, extensive cattle grazing and overpopulation.

Wildlife is also being exterminated. The natural habitats of such species as the jaguar, ocelot, margay cat, puma, tapir, otter, and the spider monkey are progressively disappearing. The absence of the natural habitat makes the survival of fauna impossible. The golden eagle —the national symbol— is virtually extinct in Mexico. The Group of 100 considers that the affected species are victims of uncontrolled hunting, destruction of habitat, pollution and illegal trafficking. Other species are close to disappearing: the harpy eagle (the largest bird of prey in the world) and the imperial woodpecker of the north (the world's largest woodpecker) as well as the quetzal, the horned guan and the great curasow. The plight of Mexico's parrots, macaws and toucans is also critical.

The biological diversity of Mexico, considered to be among the five richest in the world, is at stake. The group of 100 proposes the creation of a government entity which would be responsible for the protection of strategic environmental areas, the prohibition of illegal human settlements in forest and tropical jungles, and the modification of the Agrarian Reform Law to establish correct use of land.

"Mexico," says the letter, "is on the brink of ecological disaster. Mr. President, do not let this happen. The government as well as citizens must participate in the conservation and defense of our natural resources, because of our love for Mexico."

Our city has become an amoeba that has run amok and is undermining its own sustenance. It is eating its host and destroying everything within reach.

In the psychological stages of cancer the first is denial, the second is a kind of vague awareness, and the third is an acute awareness that calls for radical treatment. We need emergency treatment, but no one moves. The government tries to cure the cancer with aspirins and cosmetic surgery. The officials, with their grandiose propositions and promises, often have neither the moral, technical, or economic capacity to deal with the problem.

My play, *Spectacle of the Year 2000*, dramatizes the overwhelming population burden and the incredible strain on city resources at the end of the millennium. In many ways, however, the future has arrived. Already the largest urban area in the world, the city's growth shows no signs of abating. One thousand people a day pour into the valley looking for work because the rural economy has been sacrificed in favor of urban industrial development. People must move in human packages, creating human traffic jams. If one rides the metro during rush hour, in a city that is trying to move 20 million people from point A to point B every day, one can appreciate what it is like to be part of a human package; one will feel the future.

There is a lot of rhetoric that the economic crisis,

the foreign debt and unemployment are the principle obstacles to an effective struggle against environmental damage. But there is always money for widening or narrowing sidewalks, for painting dividing lines on the streets, for congressional campaigns, and for endless forums and repetitive speeches on pollution.

The environmental pollution problem reflects the pollution of the political system and it will not be solved unless we effect political changes. There must be more democracy, more plurality of political parties and respect for the citizen. The government is not accustomed to listening to the people. Since officials' careers are not affected by elections and their positions do not depend on electoral deci-

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**The possibility of my village becoming a wasteland, a silent country without wind in the trees or animal sounds or bird songs, makes me feel desperate. Such disrespect for nature humiliates me as a human being; it makes me feel like a stranger in the place of my birth**

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sions, they have no need to respond to the people. Once a politician enters the system, he is virtually guaranteed lifetime employment, unless he somehow violates the internal code of the system itself. The government has the authority to control ecological deterioration through laws, regulations and strict enforcement, but it has done relatively little thus far.

In fact, the worst polluter is the government because many of the major offenders — the refineries, thermo-electric facilities and fertilizer plants, for example — are state-owned. The public buses are another glaring source of pollution and the fact that nothing has been done to maintain them is an insult to the population. How long will we be able to survive our daily ration of carbon dioxide, sulfur, fecal dust, ozone, noise, gastro-intestinal illnesses, eye ailments, respiratory problems and skin infections?

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**Humans don't seem to grasp a quintessential concept: what is destructive to the environment is ultimately destructive to ourselves**

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Perhaps the greatest problem, however, is that we still have our daily lives, even under the deadly weight of pollution. Children still attend school, through they come home with headaches and nausea. We still go to work, though the transportation system can't possibly keep up with population growth. Our sense of time, of the seasons and of the future has been completely warped by pollution, but the vast majority of people carry on as if nothing had changed.

Certainly, the government has a responsibility to preserve the environment but so do the citizens. Yet, our people have been both passive and apathetic. In many ways, the citizens are to blame for the political, economic and environmental crisis because, until recently, they did not question the actions of the politicians. Pollution is the great equalizer. We all breathe the same air, there are equal amounts of contaminants for all of us.

**Custodians of Future Generations**

In a country where politicians often lack credibility, it is up to the artists and intellectuals to take an ethical stance on important issues. Since their constituency is transcendent, they are frequently at odds with immediate interests and can act as custodians for future generations.

In March 1985, I formed a group of artists and intellectuals, which came to be known as the Group of 100, and worked to get the lead content in gasoline reduced. One year later, the new, reduced-lead gasolines were introduced with great fan-fare. But



Industries such as these still function in Mexico City. Photo by Herón Alemán/Imagenlatina

the day after the new gas went on the market we had a severe ozone problem in the valley. Pemex, the national oil and gas company, had merely substituted the lead components with other toxins. So, we won but we lost.

The strategy of the Group of 100 is to stop the immediate destruction of the environment. For example, we stopped the construction of four electric dams on the Usumacinta River between Guatemala and Mexico. The proposed project would have flooded 500 square miles of jungle, including the largest remaining tropical rain forest in North America, destroyed two of the most historically important archaeological sites of the Mayan civilization, and delivered the coup de grace to the remnants of the Lacandon Indian culture. We also forced the government to halt distribution in Mexico of 7,000 tons of powdered milk that had been contaminated by nuclear radiation at Chernobyl. We discovered the government's purchase and denounced it publicly so that the officials were forced to send the milk back.

As in times of war, each day we hear of new casualties. We are losing the jaguar, the ocelot, the puma, the tapir, the spider monkey, the black bear, the pronghorn antelope, the bighorn sheep, the marlin, parrots, macaws, and toucans. In fact, it is difficult to name a species whose survival is not threatened. Not even rattlesnakes, tarantulas and scorpions escape human plunder. Anything that moves and brings a buck is exported from Mexico to willing buyers in the United States.

So, we have losses and we also have small victories. Sometimes it's not what one can do but what one can stop that matters the most. The struggle is so important. It is the struggle for life itself. □

(This article was originally published in The Spring 1989 issue of NEW PERSPECTIVES QUARTERLY)



Luis Díaz Müller

# FOREIGN DEBT AND DEMOCRACY

Historically, in Latin America, democracy has been a project for the future rather than a real political option. In this sense, the present essay will present two sets of problems. First of all, it will deal with the effects of the foreign debt on democratic processes in South America (Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay), and secondly it will deal with the debt as a negative factor in the development of our countries, and will propose the alternative of Latin American integration as an ideal response force toward this general situation.

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**The very concept of the debt has changed, and now there is an idea of shared responsibility between debtors and creditors, and the recognition that the foreign debt structurally affects certain vital human rights such as the standard of living, self determination and sovereignty**

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The political character of the debt has been accepted for quite a while now. Its representation as a phenomenon of the inequalities in the international financial structure has come to be commonplace; for example, the concept itself has changed, progressing from the idea of a monolithic character of the banks to the idea of a shared responsibility between debtors and creditors, and at the same time, to the theme of the growth of underdeveloped countries in order to face payment commitments. Lately, "de facto moratoria" have been proposed, as well as the possibility of convoking a multilate-

ral forum and the approval of a Code of Conduct on Foreign Debt.

Certain legal trends have proposed the illegality and illegitimacy of the debt, as well as its violation of International Law, and the principal of illicit enrichment<sup>1</sup>, in order to arrive at the affirmation that the foreign debt structurally affects certain vital human rights (standard of living, self determination, and sovereignty)<sup>2</sup>.

One proposition resulting from this essay consists of the celebration of an International Reunion on the Debt (United Nations) and the approval of a code of conduct destined to set the criteria, norms, and requirements of the commitments (freely consented to?) in relation to foreign debt. The absence of research on the social conditions and the historical viability of Latin American democracy influences the analysis of the behavior of political systems in relation to the debt problem.<sup>3</sup>

The negative equation or dialectic between debt and democratic transition notes the following two initial factors: 1) the influence of the debt in processes of transition towards democracy and 2) the debt as a factor of Latin American integration.

## The Debt in Relation to Democratic Transition Processes

Democracy, in general terms, consists of majority government, with respect for dissent, free elections (free, universal, and secret suffrage), and the operation of human rights. This is the most widely accepted formula, that of democracy as a community way of life.

We are referring to liberal democracy. In support of this concept, Norberto Bobbio notes that democracy consists of "a set of procedural rules for collective decision-making in which the broadest participation of those concerned is planned for and propitiated".<sup>4</sup> In the Latin American case, as has been mentioned, democracy has been a project, a hope<sup>5</sup>, more than a verifiable political and social space.

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Researcher in the Juridical Research Institute, UNAM.

In the case of transition regimes as in Argentina, Brazil or Uruguay, we are in the presence of "rupture situations" of the military models without a fundamental break in the political system. It means a transition from an agreed-upon break with the authoritarian-bureaucratic states: "Given two mutually exclusive concepts, war or consensus, the agreed-upon break points to the building of a collective will. My proposition is to rescue politics as a deliberate creation of the future. Now, doesn't the agreement indicate the idea of consensus?"<sup>6</sup>

### The processes of transition towards democracy involve the recuperation of social unity from the atomization of society provoked by authoritarianism

In our opinion, consensus is expressed in relation to an alternative national popular and democratic project. The problem consists of how to reconstitute democratic legitimacy: a certain idea of democratic participation in the transition governments of South America. In other words, we are not thinking only about the "crisis of reason"<sup>7</sup> discussed by Cardoso, but instead, fundamentally, in a change of regime rather than in the political system.

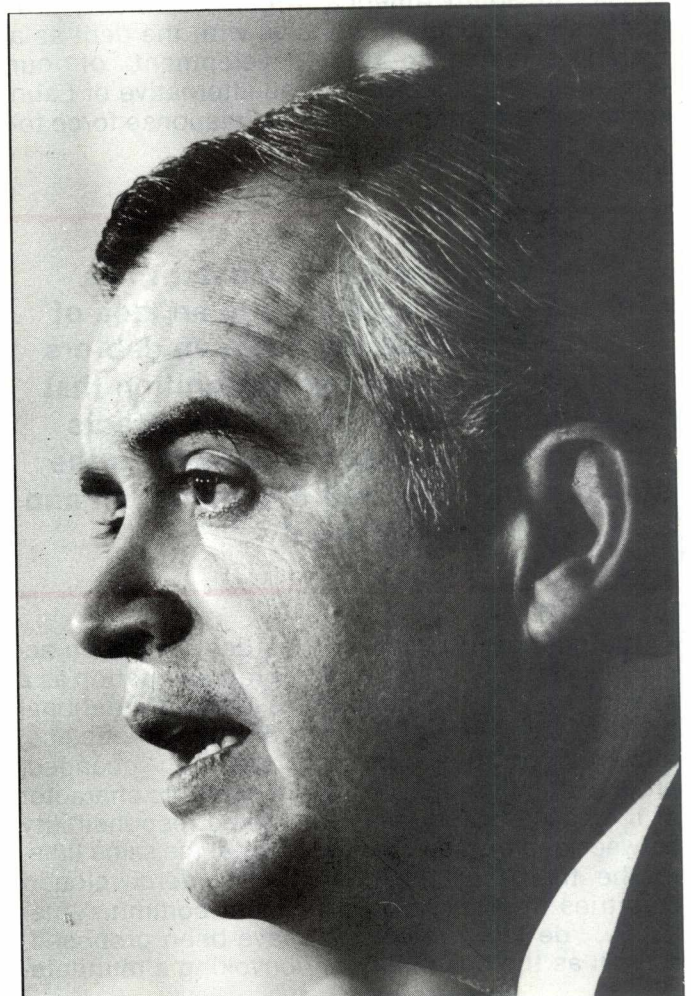
This necessarily leads us to the theme of democratic socialism, which exercises a formidable fascination on Latin American political thought. What is more, certain historical categories are recuperated, as these do not belong exclusively to capitalism but rather, are patrimony of humanity in its totality: equality, democracy, and freedom. We begin to enter a new stage in Latin American thought which takes up what is "democratic" from previous experiences (the oligarchic, populist, developmental, bureaucratic-authoritarian stage) into a kind of "open dialectic" (non-contradictory); a union between modernity (development) and democracy is produced in relation to the new social pact which is the result of the hegemony of the majority, national-popular, and democratic project.

Transition processes re-orient the discussion towards new or forgotten themes: the recuperation of social unity versus the atomization provoked by authoritarianism, the re-appearance of liberal slogans; democracy as a new form of social relation, the critique of authoritarian thought, the union of socialism and liberty. Some begin to speak of "post-Marxism" or of socialism as an extension of democracy.

The old idea of A. Pinto regarding the lack of synchrony between political and economic development is strengthened again in relation to the foreign debt. The process of indebtedness is inscribed in the logic of the unbalanced development in our countries: on one hand the search for political democracy, and the economic underdevelopment with indebtedness, on the other.

These two aspects of the transition processes show the unstable, unequal, and weak character of the South American "new democracies". The limiting point of the relation between economic crisis and political system in transition is expressed in the theme of the (eternal) foreign debt: this structural, historical heterogeneity re-formulates and argues the epistemological bases of the state. The thesis of structural heterogeneity of our countries, the rural-urban dichotomy, should be linked to the relationship certainly existing between economic crisis and the (relative) stability of the regimes in transition.

Thus, the polemic in relation to the exhaustion of industrialization by the substitution of imports (I.S.I. formula), brings to the discussion the degree of influence of certain economic phenomena (such as the foreign debt) on the maintenance of political systems<sup>8</sup>. We are in agreement with A. Hirschman, in the sense that Guillermo O'Donnell's proposition should be broadened and extended, regarding the supposed correspondence between "exhaustion" of industrialization through substitution, with the emergence of authoritarian regimes, making it attain a political level (the state), and not only as a partial economic explanation.



Mexican Treasurer Pedro Aspe, responsible for the renegotiation of the country's foreign debt. Photo by Angeles Torrejón/Imagenlatina



Social groups demand resolution of their demands for basic necessities. Photo by Angles Torrejón/Imagenlatina

This proposal, the exhaustion of the substitution-authoritarianism, can be valid as a global explanation regarding the failure of the populist pact of the 30's; but, it is not sufficient to explain the emergence of the current authoritarianism, with its doctrine of National Security.

We would like to transfer this same proposal to the debt crisis. Certainly, the exhaustion of the deepening of import substitutions can suppose the appearance of authoritarian regimes, by producing the weakening of the intermediate and capital investments; but, it would not have a general explanatory value in the sense that the debt crisis necessarily involves a definitive crisis of the legitimacy of democratic processes.

In other words, the debt crisis could provoke a deterioration in the stability and legitimacy of the democratic regime, but it is not a sufficient cause

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**Political demands are later displaced by demands for social rights. The society, awakening from its long lethargy, exerts pressures for the return to the welfare state, without which the re-establishment of policies of re-distribution of wealth and industrialization in Latin America would not appear possible**

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of this situation. The effect of rupture situations in the transition, points to a return to the authoritarian model before a revolutionary opposition, understood as a fundamental break in the political system. The unilateral declaration of the moratoria in Brazil (suspension of payments for 90 days), the popular mobilization and the bank strike, in that same country, provoke a set of problems that place in jeopardy the permanence and success of the transition to democracy.

#### High Social Cost of the Debt

An important place in this discussion is occupied by civil society. Once resolved a first phase of political petitions, the economic demands are transformed into almost irresistible pressures for the political system (strikes, salary increases, employment), which separate the state from civil society. Political scientists have spoken of a "reinforcement" of the civil society in order to avoid or prevent future authoritarian attempts and/or to strengthen and support the transition processes. While not in the script, what has occurred is the understandable flood of citizens' demands in relation to postponed goals and hopes: standard of living, housing and employment.

After a time, pressures are displaced from political reclamations (elections, Constitution) towards demands for social rights. The society, recuperated from its long lethargy, demands the return of the benefactor state, without which the return to policies of redistribution of wealth and industrializa-

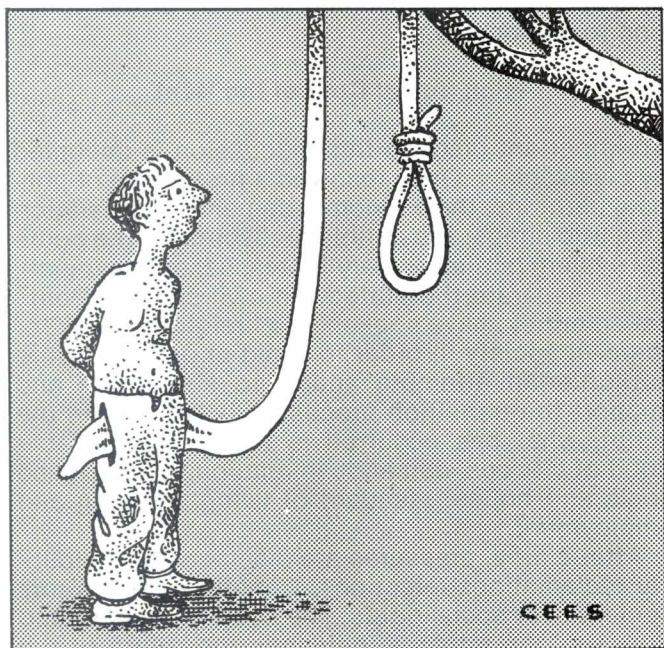
tion in Latin America would not appear to be possible.

Within this context, the theme of the debt appears as an external demand on the domestic system, which cannot be fulfilled in economic, political and social terms. On the economic plane, it is due to the immense cost implied in relation to the gross internal product, to payment capacity, to the weakening of economic and political sovereignty, and to the options of an autonomous development policy<sup>9</sup>; the payment of the debt means an immense bloodletting which assaults the bases of a national development policy.

On the political level, the debt brakes the possibilities of self-determination and seriously affects the stability of democratic processes. On the social level, as we have mentioned before, the debt affects the standard of living of the people (article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights), self-determination (article 1 of the Civil and Political Rights Pact and the Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights Pact of 1966), and political and economic sovereignty (United Nations Organization Letter on Rights and Economic Duties of States)<sup>10</sup>.

#### Affected Sovereignty

There is also a legal point of view on the debt problem in transition regimes. We would like to add to what has been said on the issue<sup>11</sup> in terms of the idea that certain state responsibilities exist which are "sensu internationale": in this way, the state's exclusive right to decide its political economy is recognized, for example, in deciding its customs tariffs and its regime of private property. Also, as proposed by Professor Rousseau, there are certain economic responsibilities exclusive to the



state, according to International Law, among which are the internal economic regime and the formulation of external economic policy<sup>12</sup>.

This leads us to propose that the foreign debt becomes a fundamental element of internal legal-economic order, and is a matter of state sovereignty<sup>13</sup>. Economic sovereignty means analyzing the intervention of the state (planning, well being), and the proper direction of economic nationalism<sup>14</sup>.

The approval of the Letter of Rights and Economic Duties of States (Res. 3281, General Assembly, December 12, 1974) reaffirmed this principle as a norm in international economic relations. The road of transition is blocked by the absence of sovereignty, or by the state's impossibility to decide its economic policies for itself without the influences of third parties.

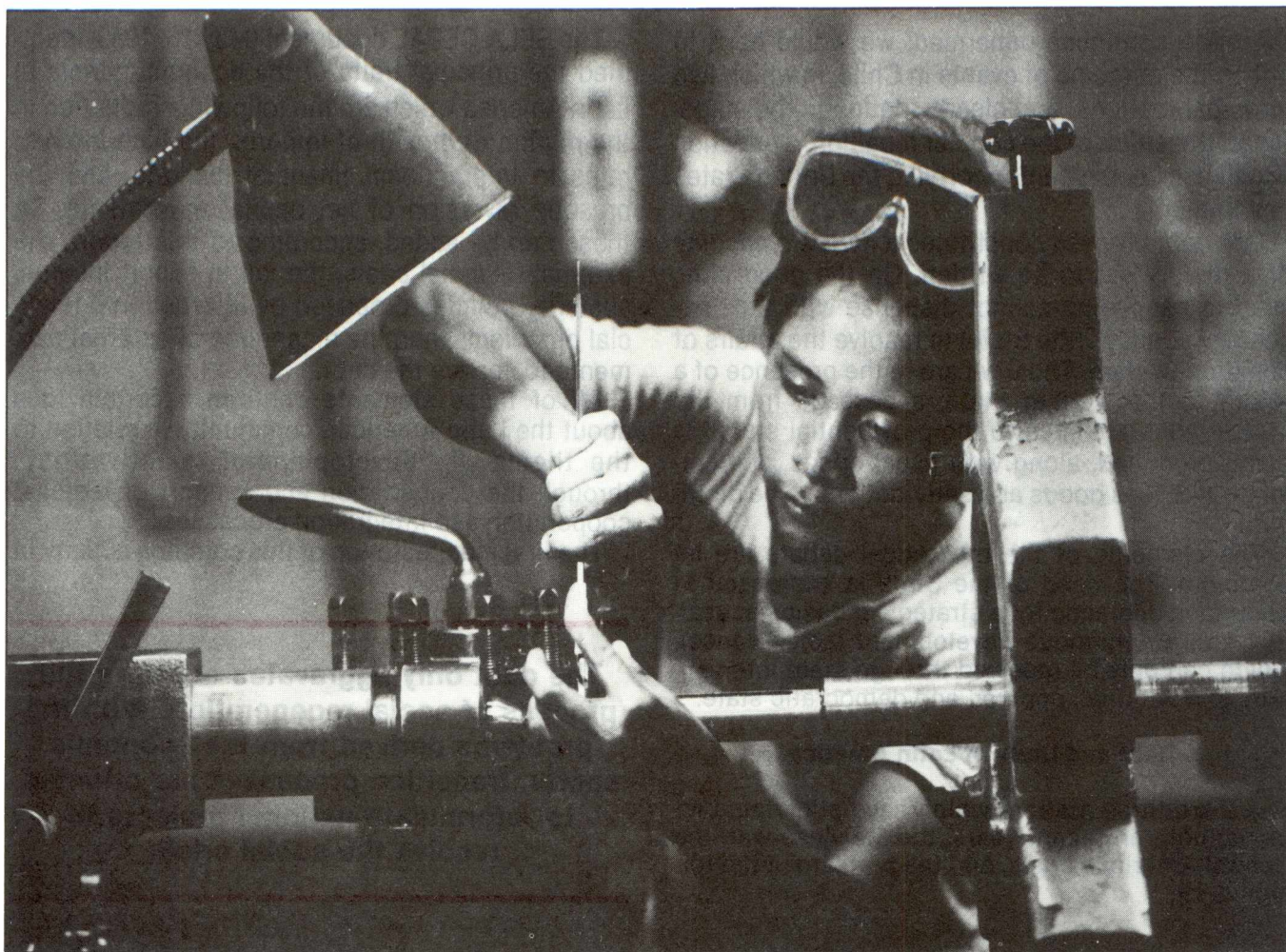
**The payment of the debt means an immense blood-letting which assaults the bases of any national development policy.**

**The processes of transition face their first challenge in relation to human rights, such as the judgement and punishment of the military and others involved in crimes and violations of human rights during the military regimes**

The heavy weight of the foreign debt lessens the viability of the democratic project. "From 1978 to 1982 the debt of the Latin American countries more than doubled, from 150,000 to 318,000 million dollars, coming principally from the commercial banks"<sup>15</sup>, and certain elements of regional agreement have begun to take shape in the management of the debt.

The rupture of the authoritarian models, as expressed by Juan Linz, are "agreed-upon breaks", such as in the case of Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay, or else appear through popular rebellion such as in Nicaragua. Specifically we can note the following: 1) through the rise of a new governmental coalition, which includes and absorbs certain sectors of the populace, a project with some results in Brazil; 2) the other alternative consists of a polarization process which increases until it causes the fall of the authoritarian government. The domestic leadership has, at the time, two following options: a) to return power to the "apolitical" authorities such as the Supreme Court in order to call elections; b) to call majority organizations to power.<sup>16</sup>

The processes of transition face their first challenge in relation to human rights, such as the judgement and punishment of the military and others involved in crimes and violations of human rights. In this way, the transition is seen to be complicated by the need to exercise justice before putting its own political project in operation.



Industrial development is indispensable for Latin America's political stability. Photo by Marco Antonio Cruz/Imagenlatina

On the other hand, the theme of political democracy becomes a central point in the processes of transition, following the failure of the bureaucratic-authoritarian model to organize state and politics. The exhaustion of authoritarianism, a transition begun from inside or outside the military institution, represented an attempt at redemocratization which has not been accompanied by a project of economic democracy, at least not in its first stage.

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**Perhaps the most important phenomenon that we observe in transition processes is the re-appearance of political parties and social movements on the political scene**

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Instead it means returning, as in the old days, to the operation of the scorned liberal democracy: "Authoritarian capitalism was incapable of insuring the viability of the political model and between the foreign debt, unemployment, recession, the destruction of the productive plant, the incapability of state action, wars in some cases, the resurrection of civil society, and the transition to the new democracy; it was transformed into a call to administer a crisis and propose a solution which would "save the furniture of dominance"<sup>17</sup>. The

crisis of authoritarianism did not bring with it, as Graciarena notes, "a state crisis" which implies a change in the underlying forces of the system<sup>18</sup>. Perhaps the most important phenomenon that we observe in the transition processes is the re-appearance of political parties and social movements on the political scene.

#### **The Reformulation of National Projects**

The civil society, previously fragmented, has recovered its capacity for action and creation. Political parties, students' organizations, human rights groups, and trade unions, again begin to represent collective interests. It is polemical to affirm that, in many cases, the political parties have been surpassed by a more or less anarchic force of the social movements (residents, consumers, students), but it is still a fact that proves the dormant vitality of the civil society.

Thus, with the problems derived from the economic sector, the transition processes are oriented to reformulate national projects to resolve the social crisis; this means the organization of a new social pact (of a new contract, as Norberto Bobbio would say), in which the problem of social reconstruction is addressed, without substantial changes to the internal political system.

The theme of the debt only aggravates or slows the process of social regeneration. Nevertheless, in these experiments in South America, the idea of

the state continues unharmed; we would have to bet on the outcome of events in Chile, in which two principal options are clearly defined, the negotiated transition or the popular rebellion, a question which has been recently worrying the United States government.

The debt process constitutes a *deus ex machina* of a history yet to be written. On the good side, what is happening cannot dispense with the "necessary agency" (the State) to resolve the affairs of common welfare. Thus, we are in the presence of a return to the welfare State; a passage from the state-night watchman to the providential state<sup>19</sup> is being produced, along with fiscal crises, and certainly with less goods and satisfactions to be distributed.

The elements of the theoretical debate are incomplete. The need of the State is expressed in continued demands for a strategy of basic necessities and autonomous development (self-reliance), which can only be resolved through state intervention, in a national, popular, and democratic state.

**Debt and Unity in Latin America**

There are three matters which have stimulated regional unity in recent years: the Malvinas war, the Central American crisis, and the problem of the foreign debt.

The SELA-CEPAL document (May 16, 1983) identified the principal traits of the economic crisis in Latin America which are the following: reduction in the rhythm of growth of imports, the high interest rates in international financial markets, and the brusque reversion of net capital movement<sup>20</sup>. To these can be added, according to this report, the external financial crisis, the fall in export income, austerity policies proposed by international financial organisms, and the magnitude of external payments to service the debt.

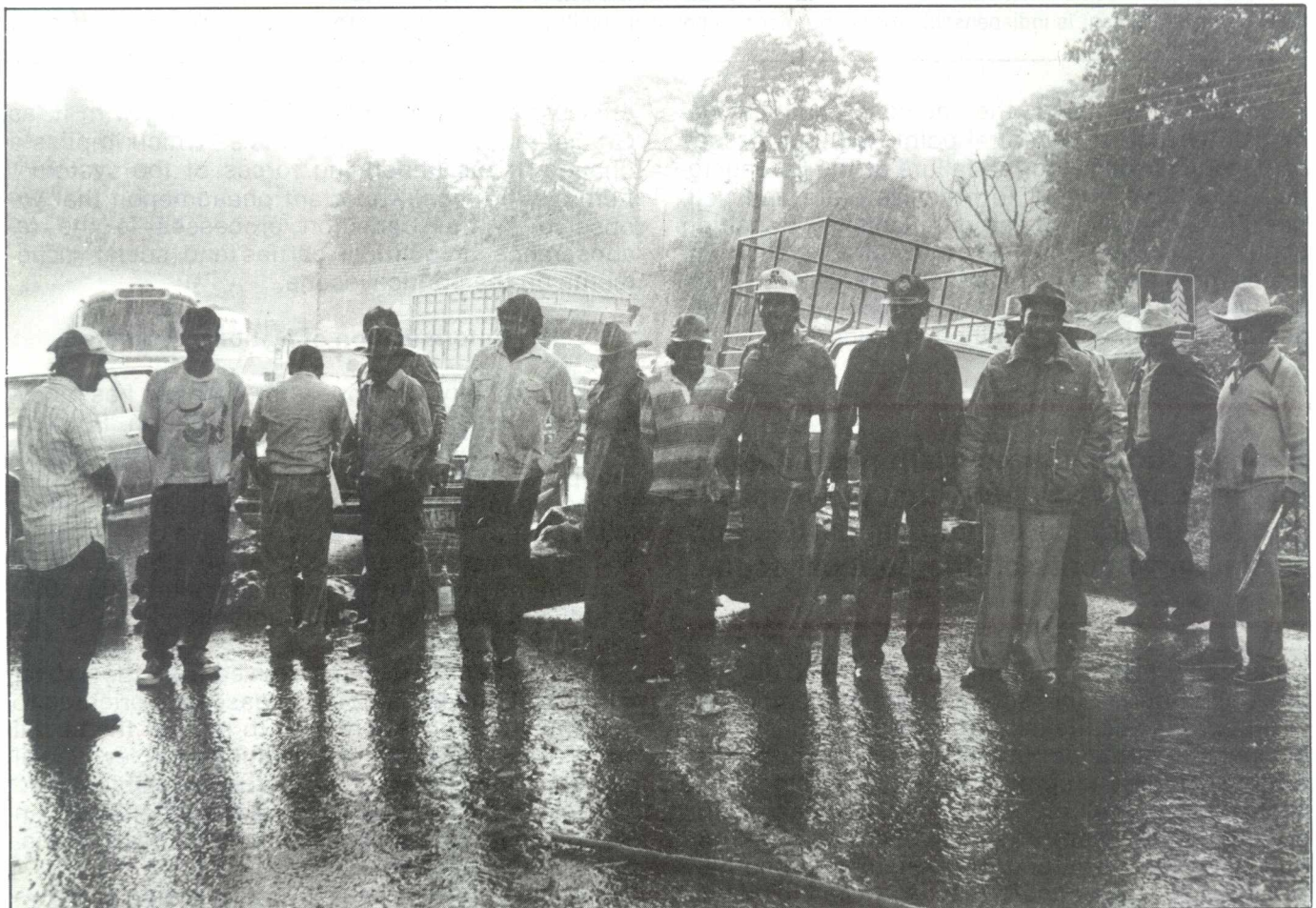
All of these elements conform a certain idea about the Latin American community in relation to the theme of "developmental re-activation", through the concertation and support of regional cooperation and integration processes.

The first manifestation of this common activity in

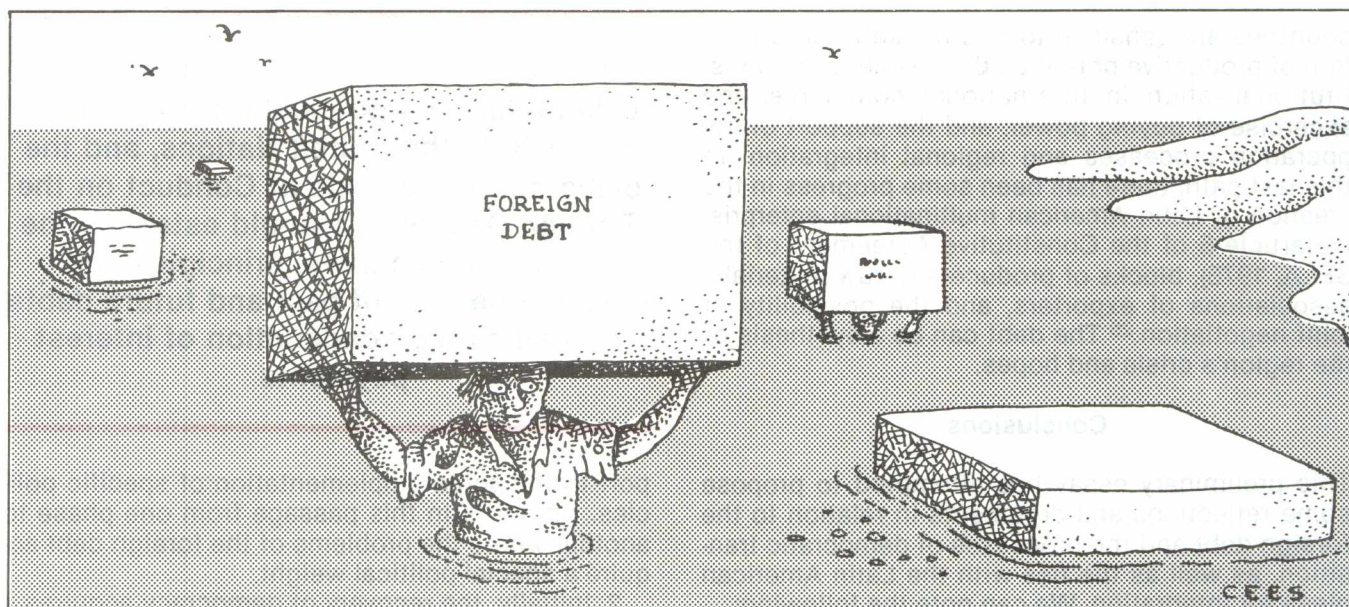
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**The debt only aggravates or slows the process of social regeneration. With the problems derived from the economic sector, transition processes are oriented to reformulate national projects to resolve the social crisis**

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Workers block a highway to support their demands - in spite of the downpour. Photo by Angeles Torrejón/Imagenlatina



the face of the debt was the combined declaration of the heads of state of Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico, on May 19, 1984. To this declaration was added a note from these countries and from the presidents of Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela, addressed to the seven principal industrialized nations of the West, in which the following was set forth: "It is necessary to have a constructive dialogue between debtor and creditor countries in order to identify the concrete measures which would lighten the load of the foreign debt, taking into account the interests of all involved parties".<sup>21</sup>

In the "Economic Declaration of London", certain criteria were softened: the decision of the industrialized nations to increase the flow of capital to developing nations was announced, and the idea of extending the payment period of the debts contracted with the private bank was accepted.

The Latin American reply was given in Cartagena from June 21 to 22 of 1984,<sup>22</sup> as a joint perspective towards regional debt negotiation. The chancellors and ministers of Revenue met on several later occasions which were at the following places: Mar de Plata (September 1984); Santo Domingo (February 1985); Montevideo (December 1985 and April 1986); thus opening the way for the idea of "payment with growth".

The Latin American criteria regarding the debt approved in these meetings highlighted the regional tendency to give priority to growth before payments, while recognizing the existence of international obligation ("pacta sunt servanda"): 1) the shared responsibility between debtors and creditors; the clause "rebus sic stantibus" (modification of the circumstances) was implicitly recognized; 2) the possibility of a political dialogue between creditors and debtors through direct participation; and 3) a case-by-case treatment yet within a collective framework, establishing general criteria for re-negotiation and financing.

These ideas mean that there can be a collective treatment of the debt problem. "It is interesting to note the asymmetry in the creditors' argument regarding the impossibility of an understanding with debtors in virtue of the singularity of each national case. Nevertheless, the recipe for adjustment is the same for all. The inconsistency of the argument used in the concrete plan of debt negotiation is truly astounding"<sup>23</sup>. This collective option is reinforced by the propositions of Cartagena regarding interest reduction, (interests have reached the highest levels in history), such as the following: the search for new measures in restructuring the negotiations, such as interest rates which reflect real costs, the maintenance of a minimum of intermediary margins, and consideration of the debtors' economic recuperative capacity; the modification of bank legislation in debtor countries to increase payment periods more in line with economic realities; the limiting of the service on the debt, such as in Peru, to 10% of its export income, which has been a general criterion adopted by the Consensus of Cartagena.

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**There are three matters which have stimulated regional unity in recent years: the Malvinas war, the Central American crisis and the problem of the foreign debt**

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The search for negotiating power appears as a reply to the hegemony of the centers, in the perspective of a more self-reliant development (not autarchic) or of self-centered development at a regional level.<sup>24</sup> The elements of this regional power include the following: the utilization of the regional market as a negotiating mechanism (some central

countries are sensitive to this market), the utilization of productive potential, the search for new institutionalization in international commerce, the exercise of buying power, and the support of cooperation processes and regional integration. In this last path, there has been some progress in the creation of Latin American multinational enterprises (article 5 of the Constitutive Agreement of the SELA, 1975), blocks of producers of raw materials, associations of exporters, and the possibility of joint negotiation.<sup>25</sup> The debt can be a synthesis of the region's crisis and hopes.

### Conclusions

This preliminary essay has attempted to propose some reflections and arguments in relation to the foreign debt and the processes of democratic transition, as well as the ties with the Latin American plans for integration. We can note the following:

1. Throughout this essay, we can observe that two phases in the processes of transition can be distinguished<sup>26</sup>: a) the decision phase in which the fundamental guidelines of the political regime (Constitution, elections, political economy, etc.) are approved; and b) the habituation phase which deals with the problems of consolidation of the democratic order (competitive policy, universities, foreign debt). In other words, there is a shift from sup-

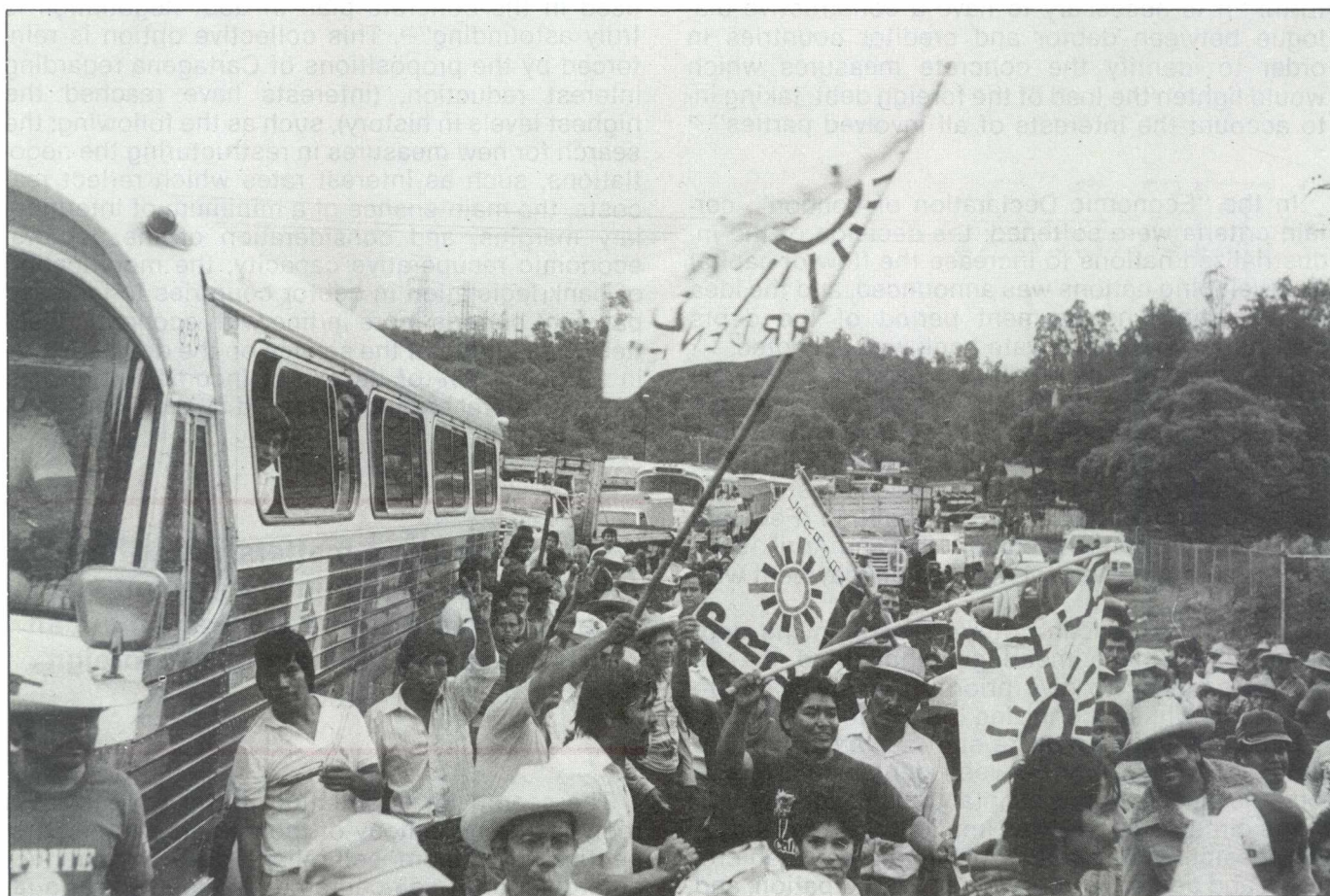
**This essay makes two proposals: the celebration of a political meeting on the debt within the United Nations, and the elaboration of a Code of Conduct on the Foreign Debt which would establish the norms, procedures, principles and payment periods of past and future debts as well as the condonation of interest payments**

port to the actual implementation of specific policies. And, it is in this passage from one phase to another where the problems of the foreign debt acquire a special political weight.

2. Initially, the recovery of democracy acquires a character which is almost exclusively political. Later, economic and social recovery begins (salaries, employment) within the regional and international framework which is notably adverse.

3. Latin American pronouncements and profiles on the theme of the foreign debt (the Declaration of Montevideo, the Consensus of Cartagena) prove the need for a common attitude.

4. The transition regimes studied derive from an



Members of the Democratic Revolution Party close a highway in Michoacán, protesting state election results in July, 1989. Photo by Angeles Torrejón/Imagenlatina



## FOREIGN DEBT AND ITS INFLUENCE ON THE INTERNAL ECONOMY

Today it is common to hear that the foreign debt is affecting the standard of living of Mexicans at all levels.

The payments towards the service of the debt have signified that the internal economy is conditioned to compliance with international commitments in detriment to national growth and development.

In 1982, Mexico paid 16.5 billion dollars in debt service payments; in 1984, 14.1 billion; in 1985, 12.8 billion; in 1986, 13.1 billion; in 1987, 11.9 billion; and in 1988, 8.9 billion. In total, from 1981 to 1988 Mexico paid 76,616,300,000 dollars of interest on the debt (70.9% of its debt service payment) and 33,773,100,000 dollars for amortization (29.1% of the debt payment).

The interest payments on the debt, in proportion to the total expenditure of the public sector, grew from 12.5% in 1988 compared to 1981. This signified a slowdown in the production of goods with respect to the population growth. From 1981 to 1988, due to the continuous money-saving policies in public finances, through budget cuts, sale and liquidation of state-owned institutions, public investment was reduced by 58.6%.

This was also due to the shrinking of the internal market and the lack of financial and fiscal stimuli.

Due to the increasing absorption of resources by the public sector to pay for the deficit and the debt, the financing of the national productive sector decreased by 28.9% from 1981 to 1988.

On the other hand the reduction in the use of productive capacity, the stagnation of national supply and demand, the shrinking of investment and budget cuts have caused a 60% decrease in the generation of new jobs. The young economically active population has not been integrated into the work market. With this, under-employment has increased by almost 20% due to the lack of available jobs. An example of this is the manufacturing industry: in 1982 this sector employed 25 million people and in 1988 it only employed 24 million people. In this case not even the number of jobs that existed in 1981 could be maintained, much less could more jobs be generated for the new working population.

The fall of oil prices at the end of 1981, the restriction on foreign credits and the increase of international interest rates further worsened the economic situation of the country. At the beginning of 1982 Mexico had to renegotiate the debt in order to overcome the crisis. The previous year Mexico had contracted short-term bank credits due to the difficulty of obtaining medium- and long-term loans. This caused the debt of the public and private sectors to reach 24.2 billion dollars in 1981. From this point on international creditors doubted that Mexico would be able to fulfill its economic commitments and opted for a total restriction of credits.

At the end of 1982 the debt came to 87 billion dollars. The crisis was heightened with the increase of imports and the decrease of exports due to the world economic crisis, particularly in the oil sector. The result was a deficit of 12,554,300,000 pesos in the current account, inflation of almost 100% and a fall of 0.5% in national production.

We can see how the debt has affected the country and also what the debt commitments represent for the nation's internal economy. Mexico has not been able to democratically adopt an economic policy that signifies a real national growth and development according to the needs of the country. Rather, it is subject to the restrictions of creditors who have imposed an economic policy that reflects foreign interests rather than internal ones. (OMAR OCAMPO).

"agreed-upon break" with the previous authoritarianism, proposing a change in the society and in the political regime, without reaching a "state crisis" or a system crisis.

5. The foreign debt becomes the limiting point between two polar options: a) the possibility of return to a new authoritarian situation; and b) the passage from largely political demands (change of regime, liberty, elections, "grand themes"), to the phase of distribution of economic and social satisfactions.

6. The idea of a gap between political development and economic lag, such as in the case of Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, is seen as particularly influenced by the debt theme as a mechanism which affects human rights, in particular, political and economic sovereignty and self-reliance.

7. There are some principles in International Law which are contradictory in the case of the foreign debt, in particular, the application of the clause "rebus sic stantibus" and the principle of illicit enrichment.

8. Two propositions are offered as conclusions to this essay. The first involves the celebration of a political meeting on the debt within the United Nations. The second involves the elaboration of a Code of Conduct on Foreign Debt which would establish the norms, procedures, principles, and payment periods of past and future debts as well as the condonation of interest payments.

It would be necessary to discuss the nature of the Code and its obligatory enforcement, due to the lack of obligation associated with anterior codes such as in the case of transnational companies, technology transfers, food and pollution. Norms and principles would be defined within applicable International Law; the mechanism or judicial or extrajudicial body which would determine actual and future controversies; and the theme of the interest and capital payments as well as other relevant themes would be debated.

9. The debt has retrieved the idea of Latin American unity. Never before has regional integration been more necessary.

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> On legal discussion of the debt, see: Anatole Kaletsky, *The cost of default*, Priority Publications, New York, 1985; Gonzalo Biggs, *Aspectos legales de la deuda pública latinoamericana: La relación con los bancos comerciales*. Revista de la CEPAL. Santiago No. 29, abril, 1985; Miguel A. Martínez, *Algunas consideraciones jurídico-políticas acerca de la alternativa del no pago de la deuda externa de América Latina y el Caribe*, Instituto Superior de Relaciones Internacionales, La Habana, Cuba, 1986; Luis Díaz Müller, *Derecho al Desarrollo y Derechos Humanos*, Instituto Interamericano de Derechos Humanos, San José, Costa Rica, 1986; and others.

<sup>2</sup> On the theme of debt and human rights, there is little bibliography, but see the following: Günter Frankenberg and Ralf Knieper, *Problemas jurídicos del sobreendeudamiento de los países en desarrollo. Relevancia actual de la doctrina de las deudas odiosas*. In *Derecho*, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Lima (Perú), No. 38, diciembre, 1984; Luis Díaz Müller, *Deuda y Derechos Humanos*, Revista Universidad de México, agosto, 1986.

<sup>3</sup> M.A. Garetón. *Democracia, transición política y alternativa*

socialista en el capitalismo autoritario del Cono Sur. In *Los caminos de la democracia en América Latina*. Madrid, Fundación Pablo Iglesias. 1984.

<sup>4</sup> Norberto Bobbio. *El futuro de la democracia*. Fondo de Cultura Económica. México. 1986.

<sup>5</sup> Enzo Faletto. *El estado y lo nacional-popular*. Santiago. Working paper. FLACSO. 1976.

<sup>6</sup> Norberto Bobbio. op. cit., pp. 34.

<sup>7</sup> Fernando H. Cardoso. *El desarrollo en el banquillo*. Mexico. ILET. 1980.

<sup>8</sup> Albert O. Hirschman. *El paso al autoritarismo en América Latina y búsqueda de sus determinantes económicos*. In David Collier, compiler. *El nuevo autoritarismo en América Latina*. Mexico. Fondo de Cultura Económica. 1986.

<sup>9</sup> Internal effort, for the CEPAL, is based on the following elements: promotion of internal savings, increase in public savings, control of inflation, integrated development and functional equity. Nacional Financiera. *El Mercado de Valores*. Año XLVII, No. 6, febrero 9 de 1987.

<sup>10</sup> There has been a recuperation of the idea of sovereignty, especially economically, in International Law: Enrique Pecourt García. "La dimensión económica de la soberanía estatal: Sus perspectivas actuales y su repercusión en el derecho internacional contemporáneo." Madrid. Revista Española de Derecho Internacional. Vol. XXI, No. 3, 1963; Aldo Ferrer. *Una propuesta para pagar la deuda y defender la soberanía*. México, Comercio Exterior. Vol. 36, No. 11, noviembre 1986, pp. 978-983; Luis Díaz Müller. *Obstáculos al Nuevo Orden Internacional*. Río de Janeiro. Comité Jurídico Interamericano. Agosto, 1987.

<sup>11</sup> Luis Díaz Müller. *Deuda Externa y Derecho Internacional*. México, Instituto de Investigaciones Jurídicas, U.N.A.M. 1986.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Rousseau. *L'indépendance de L'Etat dans L'ordre international*. The Hague. Recueil des Cours, Vol. 73, 1948-II, pp. 237-246.

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion in which the "anachronism" of the concept of National Sovereignty is proposed, see Wolfgang Friedman. *The Changing Structure of International Law*. New York. Columbia University Press. 1964, pp. 31-44 (chapter 3).

<sup>14</sup> On the discussion of economic nationalism and the intervention of the state in Latin America, see Luis Díaz Müller. *El Derecho Económico y la Integración de América Latina*. Bogotá. Editorial Temis. 1987.

<sup>15</sup> Jesús Silva-Herzog F. *Evolución y perspectivas del problema de la deuda latinoamericana*. Revista Comercio Exterior. Mexico. Documentos. Vol. 36, No. 2, febrero, 1986.

<sup>16</sup> See *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*, edited by Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan. Baltimore and London. John Hopkins University Press. 1977.

<sup>17</sup> Manuel A. Garretón. *Democracia, transición política y alternativa socialista en el capitalismo autoritario del Cono Sur*. Op. cit., pp. 275.

<sup>18</sup> Fernando H. Cardoso. *La Sociedad y el Estado*. Madrid. Pensamiento Iberoamericano No. 5. a). enero-junio 1984.

<sup>19</sup> Pierre Rosenvalloes. *La crise de L'Etat-providence*. Paris. Editions du Sevil. 1981.

<sup>20</sup> Carlos Alzamora (SELA) and Enrique Iglesias (CEPAL). *Bases para una respuesta de América Latina a la crisis económica internacional*. Mexico, CIDE. *Economía de América Latina*. Primer semestre. 1984.

<sup>21</sup> Jorge E. Navarrete. *El manejo de la deuda latinoamericana: Políticas y consecuencias*. Mexico. Vol. 37, No. 1, enero 1987, p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela participated, as well as Bolivia, Chile, the Dominican Republic and Uruguay.

<sup>23</sup> Aldo Ferrer. *Una propuesta para pagar la deuda y defender la soberanía*. Comercio Exterior, Vol. 36, No. 11, Mexico, noviembre 1986, pp. 978-983.

<sup>24</sup> Documento CEPAL-UNCTAD-SELA. *El proteccionismo de los países industrializados: Estrategias regionales de negociación y defensa*. Trimestre Económico. Vol. LIV (1), Mexico. Enero-marzo 1987, No. 213.

<sup>25</sup> Luis Díaz Müller. *El SELA y las empresas multinacionales latinoamericanas*. Mexico. UNAM, 1987. Second edition.

<sup>26</sup> Carlos Huneeus. *La transición a la democracia en España: Implicaciones para América Latina*. North Carolina — Latin American Studies. University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. 1983.



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Jorge Luis Sierra  
Guzmán

# TRADE UNION STRUCTURES LIMIT WORKERS' MOVEMENT

The Mexican labor movement has not emerged unscathed from the economic crisis experienced by our country since 1982. During recent years, salaries, and, in general, the living conditions of the workers have suffered a vertical decline. Unions and labor federations are in a clearly weak period, with reduced capacity to confront industry and the state.

In 1982 Mexico faced the following problems: 100% inflation, an economic deficit in government finances, weakening of productive activity, a high foreign debt, and the highest open unemployment of recent years. These circumstances constituted a discouraging panorama for the workers, which was sustained and aggravated during the following six years: dismissals, wage contraction, disproportionate price increases, shutdowns of employment sources, loss of collective contracts, and the disappearance of unions.

In contrast to other Latin American countries where industrialization has come late and where the working class is smaller than the peasant population, Mexican workers have built solid organizations at many levels of industry and in the services. It includes industrial unions, workers' organizations called *frentes* and *centrales*, each encompassing thousands of workers and employees. These organizations of the workers' struggle have played leading roles in important chapters of our history such as the expropriation of the petroleum industry in 1938, the creation of social security institutions, and the modernization of numerous industries, including the telephone and aeronautical companies.

Nevertheless, this strength has been diluted not only by economic forces but also by government policies. In these years of crisis, salaries have been diminished by factors such as price increases, reductions in contractual benefits, fixed government-

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**During the last six years, 40 collective contracts have disappeared in all kinds of industries and services**

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al limits to wage increases, and the salary freeze agreed upon in the "social solidarity" pacts.

This crisis period, which seems to have no clearly defined end, and in which the workers are at the bottom of the economy, is characterized by labor protest. The policies of austerity and the salary ceilings imposed by the government as belt tightening measures in the face of the foreign debt and its resulting obligations have been questioned by almost all Mexican unions. Despite this, the response of businessmen and the government has been rigid.

The first great defeat of the labor movement in these crisis years occurred between May and June of 1983. The Nuclear Industry Workers Union (SUTIN) went on strike on May 30 against the National Nuclear Industry Institute. The salary demands were accompanied by proposals for national independence in this type of energy and its use in the country's development. Despite the labor movement's support, the strike was declared nonexistent by labor authorities. At this time, the tactics of shutdown were begun and along with this, the disappearance of established unions: Uramex, a state agency, closed its doors and dismissed all its workers in accordance with the favorable verdict handed down by the Board of Conciliation and Arbitration.

The SUTIN was not to be the only union pushed into virtual disappearance. During the last six years, 40 collective contracts have disappeared in the cinematographic, sugar, electrodomestic, metallurgical, automobile, and aeronautical transport industries. The most well-known cases have been the Monterrey Foundry (10,000 workers dismissed in 1986), the Renault and Ford Motor Com-

## WORKERS' RIGHTS

José Dávalos, director of the National Autonomous University's Law School, has drawn attention to the fact that workers are losing well established labor rights as a result of the grave economic crisis. During an interview with the Mexico City daily newspaper *unomásuno*, Dr. Dávalos said there is a world wide tendency for employees, in the name of a mistakenly labelled "concertation" or "conciliation", to renounce to rights won in past battles with employers and which now protect them by law.

"This new kind of negotiation at the highest level, which is affecting workers all over the world, implies the limitation and abandonment of some victories won by workers, and frankly contradicts the principles of the permanence of labor rights and the right to work as a minimal social guarantee for workers", he said.

Dr. Dávalos warned that the suppression of advantages and rights already established as a result of past labor victories, such as the right to strike, stability in employment and the minimum wage, place the peace and security of the nation in useless risk. "This is a good moment", he added, "to restructure trade unions, to transform the paralysed union leaderships and their traditional way of doing things. The field of employment is one which has received the strongest blows of the crisis."

The statements made by the Director of the UNAM Law School take on special importance at this moment, when modifications to the Federal Labor Law are about to be debated in the Congress, which is to decide, from the legal point of view, the future of relations between workers and their employers.



The strike by the Mexican Electricians' Union was declared non-existent in 1987. Photo by Marco Antonio Cruz/Imagenlatina

panies, as well as the shutdown of the state-owned company Aeroméxico which left a total of 10,000 unemployed stewards, stewardesses, technicians and pilots in 1988.

### A bad example

On May 10, 1986, the state-owned companies Monterrey Foundry and Flat Steel, located in the state of Nuevo León, followed the example of Uramex. Despite high production records during the previous two years, which, in the case of the foundry supplied 25% of national steel production, it was decided to close the doors in the face of upcoming workers' strikes. Sections 67 (Monterrey Foundry) and 68 (Flat Steel) of the National Mining Metallurgical Union, affected by unilateral suspension of work relations, protested what they called an illegal shutdown and a violation of the Mexican Constitu-

tion. "The disappearance of the Monterrey Foundry," explained the dismissed workers, "is an attack on sovereignty since there is a return to private industry in response to measures imposed by the International Monetary Fund, thus destroying union organizations and collective contracts, and thrusting thousands of foundry and related workers into poverty."

From 1985 to 1987, various companies disappeared, including Harper Wyman, a components manufacturer for stoves and stationary gas tanks; Acros, an appliances manufacturer; Land Transportation Services of the Mexico City Airport; 1,200 textile shops in Tlaxcala; Isabel, a tin factory; Renault of Mexico; Packers and Freezers of Matamoros; Mexican Autobuses; Kindy, a textile company; Moctezuma beer distributor; Informex, an information agency; Motors and Automotive Adaptations; Ecatepec Steel; Jacket and Raincoat Company, and the Continental Company, also in the clothing industry.

It must be clarified that a large part of the management shutdowns have not adhered to the legislation in that bankruptcy was not declared; besides, after the shutdown, many companies re-opened their doors with new personnel who did not have a collective contract and who were put to work in standard conditions. Such was the case in the governmental decision to close Aeroméxico in 1988. After

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**In contrast to other Latin American countries where industrialization has come late, Mexican workers have built solid organizations**

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Is this hell? Photo by Marco Antonio Cruz/Imagenlatina

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### **Despite high production records during the previous two years, Monterrey Foundry and Flat Steel closed their doors in the face of upcoming workers' strikes**

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the disappearance of the National Union of Mexican Aircraft Technicians and Workers (with more than 7000 dismissed), as well as the severance of 3000 stewards, stewardesses and pilots, the government created the company *Aerovías de México*, with new personnel, without a recognized union organization nor the advantages of previous collective contracts. The disappearance of Aeroméxico was considered a serious attack on the right to strike.

Other labor-management incidents have occurred where the right to strike was seriously affected. The strike of 36,000 workers of the Electricians' Union interrupted the supply of electrical energy to the Federal District and to the states of Hidalgo, Mexico, Morelos, and Puebla on February 27, 1987, and five days later was declared non-existent. Strikers demanded an emergency salary increase and maintained that the government should end its austerity policy, declare a moratorium on the foreign debt, de-freeze salaries and end repression against the labor movement. The Labor Ministry, the Energy, Mines and State-owned Industry Ministry and the Light Company avoided any

dialogue with the workers, brought in new personnel, and finally achieved a declaration that the strike did not exist, since, according to the authorities, the request for an emergency increase was not the cause of the imbalance among the production factors.

Manuel Fuentes, union legal advisor, explained at the time that "the authorities even bypassed determinations handed down by the Supreme Court of Justice in which workers were supported in their right to strike. The authorities, in similar cases, have proclaimed strikes non-existent. But this time, they had to end this strike by any means. The electricians' movement demonstrated that strikes continue to be a myth".

The Telephone Union went on strike April 9 for an emergency salary increase. The telephone company was immediately requisitioned and the authorities obliged the workers to return to work upon threat of dismissal. This was the eighth occasion that the Mexican telephone company had suffered a government seizure in order to end strikes.

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**The labor tribunes promote the registration of official unions and deny the same to independent ones**

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# TEACHERS' UNION

Mexican teachers, members of the National Union of Education Workers, (SNTE), held a nation-wide strike this year in demand of salary rises and democratization of their trade union affairs. More than half a million teachers from pre-school, primary and secondary schools, and from teacher training institutes such as the National Pedagogical University, as well as other non-teaching staff, suspended their labor between April 17 and May 10. Although they only won a 10% wage rise and an increase of 15% in other economic benefits, the teachers' movement established the bases for democratizing various sections of the SNTE, in Mexico City, and in the states of Oaxaca, Chiapas, Michoacán, Guerrero, Baja California Norte, Zacatecas, Nuevo León, Jalisco, Puebla and Yucatán.

The teachers' discontent began to be expressed in February 1989, during the local sectional congresses held prior to the 15th National Congress of the SNTE. Many teachers did not accept the manner of electing union representatives, and described this system as "fraudulent and imposed from above". Nobody expected that this discontent would reach the proportions of a national teacher's movement, which was supported by students and parents.

In spite of the demands for democracy expressed mainly in Mexico City, Oaxaca and Chiapas, the National Congress of the SNTE was held on February 16 in Chetumal, Quintana Roo, without any representatives of the internal opposition groups. The national leadership, dominated since 1972 by the group known as Revolutionary Vanguard, refused to dialogue with the dissident teachers. Meanwhile, salary demands were not resolved either, as the Education Department insisted that the Mexican government was unable to offer more than a 10 percent salary rise.

The teachers then resorted to other tactics: huge demonstrations, 48-hour strikes, a permanent sit-in outside the offices of the Education Department, interviews with public officials, forums and debates on education and trade union politics, as well as assemblies in schools and local union groups. Mexico had not known such a huge teachers' movement since the end of the 1950's.

The SNTE was formed in 1943 and is considered to be the largest trade union in all of Latin America, as it has more than a million members. The union has always had strong internal conflicts: from 1949 to 1972, the SNTE was controlled by the leader Jesús Robles Martínez, who dominated the union during 23 years, although he was not always in the formal post of General Secretary. He was accused of committing fraud with union funds, of sponsoring armed gangsters and of illicit accumulation of wealth. In 1960, Robles defeated an internal opposition movement led by the teacher Othón Salazar, and which demanded democracy in union affairs. This movement began in 1956 and was finally destroyed in 1960 through the use of public force, dismissals and imprisonment.

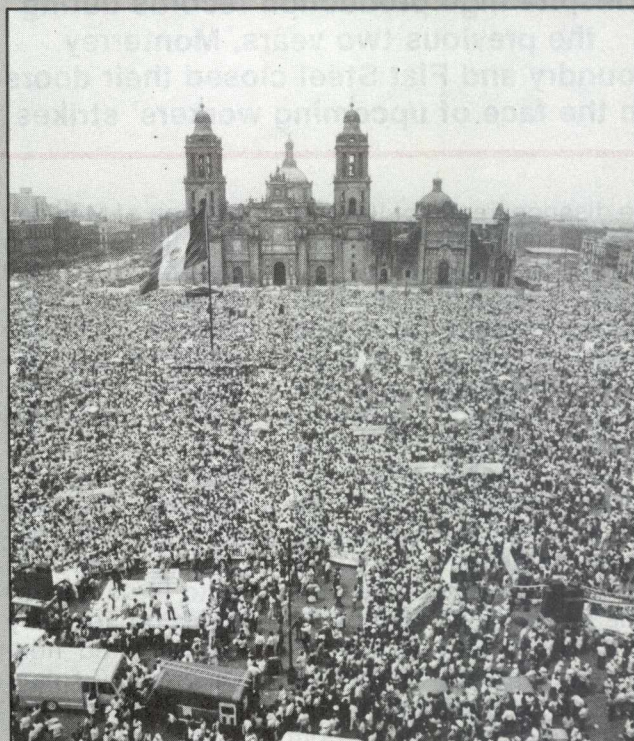
In 1972, Carlos Jonguitud Barrios led a violent take-over of the SNTE offices, and with his pistol in hand, promised order and efficiency in the union, and destroyed the power of Robles Martínez.

Jonguitud's group, the Revolutionary Vanguard, later initiated one of the union's most critical periods, when more

than 100 teachers were murdered. The leaders of the Vanguard rapidly assumed important political posts —Jonguitud himself was President of the Labor Congress, director of the Institute for Social Services and Security for State Employees (ISSSTE), Governor of the state of San Luis Potosí, and is today a Senator. He was the all powerful leader of the teachers' union over the last 17 years.

On April 24, 1989, a week after the national strike began, Jonguitud Barrios resigned from the SNTE under pressures from the half a million teachers who demanded his destitution. The Revolutionary Vanguard also disappeared as such. It was then that dialogue —something which had not existed in the trade union since 1949— began to take place and to determine union life. Elba Esther Gordillo, appointed new General Secretary of the union by government recommendation, began conversations with the striking teachers, members of the National Co-ordinator of Education Workers (CNTE).

The CNTE was recognized by the executive committee elected democratically in the Oaxaca section. It has also achieved the repudiation of former union leaders in Mexico City and in the states of Chiapas, Michoacán, Guerrero, and Nuevo León, and the naming of executive committees responsible for the preparation of extraordinary Congresses which will hold democratic elections to choose new union representatives. The teachers' movement has extended, and teachers' efforts to improve their working conditions and to democratize their union, continue in another 14 states of the Republic.



Education workers in the Mexico City Zócalo, demanding salary increases and trade union democracy. April, 1989. Photo by Angeles Torrejón/Imagenlatina

### Weak Labor Unity

The defeat of the electricians' and telephonists' strikes in 1987 constituted the unequivocal demonstration that the labor movement was incapable of maintaining unity in critical moments. The unions of state-owned companies sought to make a 23% raise in the minimum wage applicable to contractual wages. The Labor Congress, a majority organization grouping 33 national labor unions and confederations, affiliated to the governing Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), had decided to back the strike simultaneously in all state-owned companies in demand of a 23% increase. Nevertheless, it did not do so. The electrician and telephonist unions began a solitary struggle while the pilots, stewards and stewardesses, the railroad workers, the oil workers, the miners and metal workers negotiated separately for smaller rises.

For the first time in many years, leaders of the Labor Congress, including Salvador Ramos, Francisco Chena and César Rodríguez, admitted to the presence of bungling labor leaders and to division, dispersion, and low capacity for response, all of which place the Labor Congress in a weak position before the government. The official labor movement not only was shown to be incapable in the defeat of strikes for salary increases, but also permitted price hikes in gasoline, domestic gas, white

### The *frentes* and *centrales* of workers have played leading roles in important chapters of our history, such as the expropriation of the petroleum industry in 1938

bread, and milk that further lowered the workers' standard of living in 1987.

The second wing of the labor movement, labelled as independent unionism, numerically less but with a greater fighting potential, is weakly falling back. Since the disappearance of the Democratic Trend of the Electricians Union in 1976, its attempts to unify have been ephemeral. Affected by dispersion, independent unionism has sought to unify through organisms such as the National Front for Popular Action (FNAP of the 1970's), the National Union Coordinator (Cosina, now extinct), the Board of Union Reconciliation (practically dissolved in 1987) and recently, the National Front for Organization of Masses (FNOM, short-lived in 1988).

Independent unionism, impelled by the still recent 1968 student movement, had a great apogee during the 1970's. Its proposals for union democracy, defense of workers' living conditions and for national sovereignty and economic independ-



Striking workers of Altos Hornos in Monclova, Coahuila, in a general assembly, April, 1989. Photo by Marco A. Cruz/Imagenlatina

ence, were heard by an important number of small company unions and others on the national scene. Thus, in the states of Mexico, Jalisco, Morelos, Nuevo León, Guanajuato, Michoacán, Veracruz, Guerrero, Sinaloa, Oaxaca, and in the Federal District, and to a lesser degree in other states, democratic unions multiplied, opposed to official unionism and government intervention in their internal affairs.

**Violation of Workers' Rights**

Though tardy, the businessmen's reply during the following decade was sharp and non-negotiable: democratic workers and teachers were murdered in the states of Mexico, Oaxaca, Chiapas, and Tlaxcala; dismissals and black lists, shutdowns and transfers of companies to new areas, harassment of workers, bribing of labor authorities, and contracting of goon squads from the official unions. These events, in violation of legal order and damaging the right to free organization, were permitted by the deficiencies in labor justice. The labor tribunals, dispersed and without homogeneity in their decisions, promoted the registration of official unions and denied the same to independent ones, thus retarding the resolution of conflicts and prejudicing judgments on strikes.

**From 1985 to 1987 various gas, transportation, textile, beer and clothing companies closed down**

The lack of dialogue between the official unions and the government as well as the virtual disappearance of the units of independent unionism would make people think that the Mexican labor movement was on the path to extinction. However, the workers' discontent has found new modes of expression. The workers, as citizens, disqualified the official party (PRI) candidates for worker leadership positions during the past federal elections in 1988, thus demonstrating that the credibility of the official labor movement had disappeared. On the other hand, the workers, in the face of an independent unionism that is almost a mirage, have decided to seek democracy in their unions. Musicians, employees of the Mexican Institute of Social Security and diverse Ministries of State, teachers, dock workers, truckers, oil workers, university workers, and the workers in the state owned companies oppose the old practices of union corruption, demand democracy, and seek to raise living conditions.

It is difficult to extinguish a labor movement with such a long history as the Mexican one. Industrial modernization in the country is unthinkable without respect for the point of view of the workers and their unions. To forget this is to ignore the fact that the life of the labor movement reflects the life of the entire country. □

*Novedades*

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Revista Mexicana de Política Exterior is a quarterly publication edited by the Mexican Foreign Service Institute (attached to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), that provides written evidence of the outstanding facts



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**SUSCRIPCIONES**

**Yearly:** Mexico. 10 000 pesos. U.S. Canadá. Central America. South America. US25. Rest of the world US34.

**Please contact:** Fideicomiso para la edición, publicación, distribución y venta de obras en Materia de Relaciones Internacionales de México. Ricardo Flores Magón No. 1. Ex-Convento de Tlatelolco 06995 México, D.F. Phone: 782-40-23 and 782-33-41.



Sergio de la Peña

# MEXICO AND THE U.S. SEARCH FOR ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

The recently held 7th North American-Mexican meeting in Mexico City, attended by an unusually large number of officials from both countries, highlights the new character of relations between Mexico and the United States. In fact, they set a new trend which threatens to break through numerous obstacles and affect sensitive aspects of Mexican tradition, culture, and values. The reason for this is that the long awaited question of economic integration between both nations has been confronted.

Of course, the hope to integrate with other nations is not new in Mexico. In fact, this is the second time that world historical conditions have encouraged the country to join efforts with other countries to form a larger economic space aimed at surpassing technological limitations in the marketplace and improving the capacity to accumulate and to organize. To ignore the present call would be to suffer a failure with a destiny pointing towards marginality and further lag for generations yet to come. To answer the call, would be a harder path but we would finally be on the road to development.

## An Unsuccessful Integration

This is the second opportunity, and possibly the last, for integration. Mexico attempted it for the first time three decades ago when the heat of the initial successes in the European Common Market prompted similar rehearsals in other world regions. For ethnic, cultural, and geopolitical reasons, the natural choice was for integration with Latin America. Thus, the Latin American Free Trade Association (ALALC) was born amidst great hopes to promote the work of reducing tariffs to free trade within the region.

Great plans and efforts were made for the organization of the Latin American common market. Nevertheless, soon it became evident that the produc-

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**Great plans and efforts were made for the organization of the Latin American common market. Nevertheless, it soon became evident that the productive base, the social structure and politics in the region, would not allow for integration**

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tive base, the social structure and politics of the countries in the region would not allow for integration. The formation of an economic community bristled with technical and economic difficulties that impeded the solution of the principal problems that had arisen.

In effect, the national structures of production were not favorable in broadening regional trade in view of the limited variety of industrial products and the similarity of agricultural and mineral exports. Also, all the integrating countries doubted the efficiencies of the safeguards that would compensate for the inevitable imbalances in their respective commercial accounting, and they resented the sacrifice of their fiscal income.

Severe limitations in transport, operational finances, business management and public administration became evident in each country and throughout the region. All of this impeded taking full advantage of opportunities for broadening and diversifying exports, the basis of the integration.

Also, political opposition arose from traditional power groups in the face of the threat of being displaced. For the majority of the governments, it was impossible to think of subjecting aspects of their political economy to agreement with other nations. They were not prepared to assume the requirements of foresight, planning, and discipline demanded by the process of integration.

As almost none of the obstacles were removed, the process of formation of a Latin American common market, as well as subregional attempts in the

Caribbean, Andean and Central American areas, soon began to show signs of stagnation. By the end of the sixties, it was evident that the project had fizzled.

This did not cause great worry in the region in general nor in Mexico in particular because the seventies boom began, prompted by price rises in raw materials and the abundance of cheap credit in the world. Mexico increased its foreign indebtedness from 1973 onwards on the basis of oil exploitation perspectives which made price increases feasible. That was sensible until 1980 in relation to a set indebtedness capacity based on the value of oil and the then available low interest rates. This had a great apogee from 1978 to 1981.

After that came the crisis of the 80's with the fall in prices for raw materials, the increase in interest

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**The European success and the new requirements of the modern day market place, explain the resurgence of world interest in integration during recent years, by countries so traditionally jealous of their customary isolation such as England, the United States and Japan**

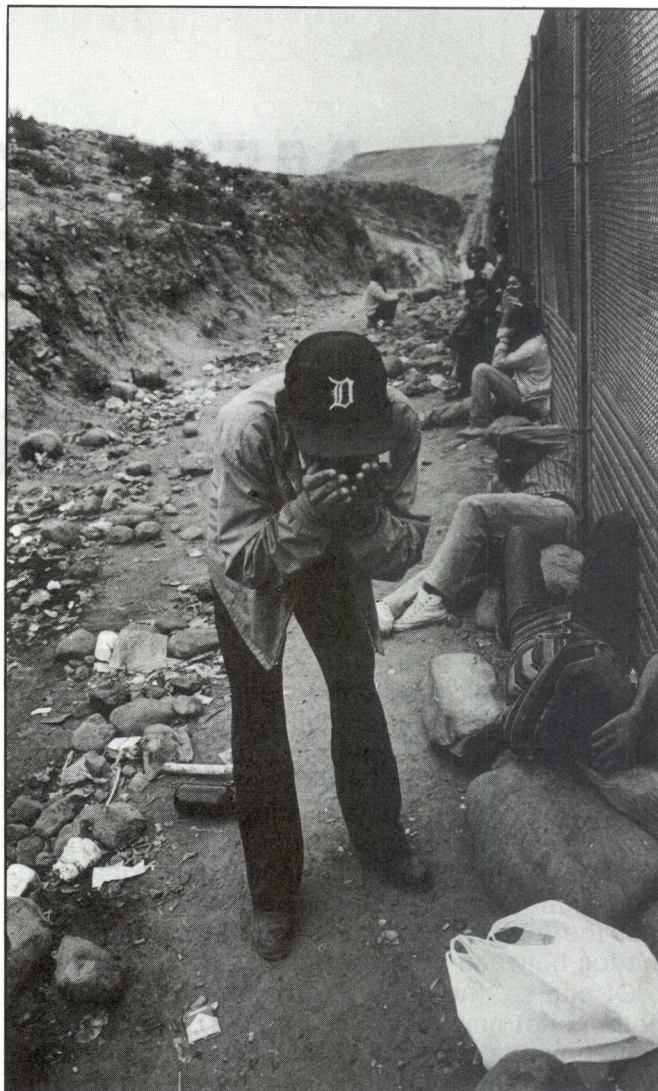
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rates, and the impossible payment of the foreign debt. To all of this can be added the thoughtless indebtedness that took place between 1981 and 1982. At the end of this last year, service on the debt was suspended and the external sources of financing were closed.

On the other hand, the need to make the Mexican economy competitive had become evident. From 1983, all attention was directed to facing such problems and lightening the weight of the foreign debt, but interest in Latin American integration was lost.

**The European Experience**

In contrast, during those two decades in the European Common Market, new levels of integration were achieved and at the beginning of the 80's a re-conversion of the industrial plant took place as well as a recuperation of prominence in scientific research and world technological development. From the first agreements on tariffs and common norms for free trade, there was a move towards freer circulation of workers and capital, and the first steps were taken towards integration in the political sphere. One result of this latter integration was the formation of the European Parliament whose existence highlights an integration which is not limited to the economic sphere. Recently there was an agreement to begin a process which would culminate in the use of a common currency, the formation of a central common bank, and the unification of mone-



Undocumented Mexicans wait till evening to begin their expedition across the border. Photo by Herón Alemán/Imagenlatina

tary policies. This is a logical move in integration which undermines the traditional ideas of national sovereignty that postulate the need for a national currency and full autonomy in its use.

In any case, the levels of well-being in Europe are now among the highest in the world and it has re-constituted itself as a primary world area. Meanwhile, over the past two decades the world has changed, scientific and technological advances have led to grand transformations in the productive and organizational processes with computerization and robotization. New research areas have opened up, such as genetic engineering. These changes require a constant transformation of the productive plant, an elevated scientific and technological development, and a dynamic of accumulation which surpasses anything imaginable up until now.

It is clear that there is no country in the world which can face by itself such efforts of accumulation and development with the developmental guidelines possible up to the 60's. This means that, except for countries with special characteristics such as Switzerland, Monaco, or San Marino, the rest must face the dilemma of integration or marginality.

The European success, its challenge, and the new requirements of accumulation and market dimensions explain the resurgence of world interest in integration during recent years, by countries so traditionally jealous of their customary isolation such as England, the United States and Japan. The bipolar world has become a 4-pole world, quite complex in view of the geopolitical and geo-economic interests and conditions which open great spaces for unification and economic integration.

In effect, Japan and the four Asian tigers, the Philippines, South Korea, Thailand, and Singapore, hope to integrate with China and India in an unusual agreement between socialist and capitalist economies. Europe is preparing for full internal integration, to eliminate protectionist barriers for trade with the rest of the world, and to establish integrating ties with socialist countries. The socialist block debates the transformation of its economies and social and political conditions, within the framework of the trade agreements and cooperation of the CAME-COMECON (Mutual Aid Council), while the United States establishes integrating links with Canada.

## AGREEMENT ON MIGRATION

**Made at the 7th meeting of the Mexico-United States Binational Commission.**

Attentive to the inherent complexity of the theme of migration, the deliberations and decisions were characterized by a spirit of mutual understanding.

Both delegations decided to continue exchanging information regarding the application of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (Simpson-Rodino) of 1986 as well as the programs which could eventually be developed to facilitate documented worker flows.

The parties expressed their satisfaction with the exchange of diplomatic notes which enhances a framework for addressing the problems of protection of nationals and migration. Additional procedures were established which, among other things, address the following matters: (a) the dissemination of information on the Mexican legal framework concerning migratory workers and the strengthening of cooperation on specific labor matters of interest to both governments; (b) the maintenance and sharing of information about accidents to Mexicans; (c) the discussion of existing conditions in both countries concerning the arrest, detention and imprisonment of aliens; (d) the establishment of a system of consultations and exchange of information on acts of violence or abuse of authority against the nationals of each country; and (e) the encouragement of cooperation in the struggle against the trafficking of humans and false documentation, the migration of undocumented third-country nationals, and the exchange of timely information on criminal immigration activities.

The sides expressed their concern about the increase in undocumented migration from Latin American and other continents using Mexico in order to transit to the United States as well as about criminal groups which traffic in human beings and falsify migratory documents. They recommended exploring possible forms of cooperation to repatriate nationals from other countries and created working group "C" for the analysis and treatment of this theme.

What happens to the Third World within this magnificent world project? It is left by the wayside. Or not quite, because there will always be interest in its raw materials and cheap labor as well as its markets, no matter how small. Without doubt there will be renewed attempts at internal integration. Within the perspectives of integration among poor countries, it is probable that they will continue to form isolated ties or integrate as a group with one of the four economic blocks, be it the Africans with the Europeans, the Japanese with other Asians, or the Latin Americans with the United States.

### Options for Integration in Mexico

Recently and in the face of the urgency of the call for world development, in Mexico there are options which, at best, leave behind the old project of Latin American integration and set new eyes on the Pacific Basin. At worst, Mexico will not attend the call and will opt to maintain isolation and not pertain to any political block or economic zone, such as President Salinas said recently, nor make a call for a new Latin American integration.

The options for integration are not many. One is the Pacific Basin, whose Asiatic side promises



A worker in the in-bond industry on Mexico's northern border. Photo by Herón Alemán/Imagenlatina

**The Mexican option for integration in order to form a feasible economic space consists of its joining the United States and Canada to form a North American Common Market**

mainly Japanese investments and the trading of manufactured goods for raw materials. That will probably occur with or without transoceanic integration. On the American side of the Pacific, there is the Latin American coast which has virtually nothing to offer the Mexican economy. That leaves as a virtual single recourse, the relations with the United States, for which the Pacific Basin is not the best door.

This conclusion highlights the obvious for Mexico despite its being an irritant for the nationalist culture. The Mexican option for integration in order to form a feasible economic space consists of its joining the United States and Canada to form a North American common market. In fact, a third border economy already exists between Mexico and the United States despite its lack of order, asymmetry and its disadvantages.

It is true that we are moving towards a North American integration. But this could happen spontaneously and without order, with the worst consequences for Mexico, or it could happen gradually, in a planned and negotiated manner. It is clear that the appropriate way for it to happen demands a clear definition of the objectives and the economic, cultural, political and other safeguards for now and the future. First, the "what, where, when and how" has to be negotiated and decided. It is necessary to determine the requirements for each stage in the process, starting from the question of sovereignty, degrees of autonomy, and the reserves of interdependence, as well as the forms of fiscal, commercial and monetary integration, of labor, of social security, and of labor protection. All of this should only be established with the acceptance of the entire nation because it commits its future and breaks with its past.

**The integration will be a difficult process demanding grand efforts as well as economic, organizational and internal ideological adjustments, but the results will also be grand**

It will be a difficult process demanding grand efforts in negotiations as well as economic, organizational, and internal ideological adjustments, but the result will also be grand. It would be easy at this moment to err again in a project of integration, and to let pass the historical opportunity due to indecision and lack of long range policies. The challenge exists and history is waiting. □

Guillermo Sheridan

**UN CORAZÓN ADICTO:  
LA VIDA DE  
RAMÓN LÓPEZ  
VELARDE**



En este libro el autor decidió evadir los usos comunes al escribir una *vida* antes que una biografía, pues "la biografía aspira a la objetividad documentada, a tomar aliento tanto de la caligrafía como de la radiografía; la vida acepta de entrada que escribir una biografía es imposible y prefiere crear, como quería Marcel Schwob, desde el caos de rasgos humanos que deja tras de sí, como una estela, toda existencia".

Jacqueline Buswell

# CRACKDOWN ON DRUG TRAFFICKING

Often seen as a problem of producers rather than consumers, drug trafficking seems to be facing as never before a hard-hitting campaign against important elements of this intricate mechanism. The Mexican Government has not only imprisoned three drug lords —Caro Quintero, Fonseca and Felix Gallardo— but has gone even further. It has exposed part of the operational network of the drug traffickers: the collusion of the police at all levels.

This effort has been seen in a positive light by the United States Government, which has expressed an interest that it continue. Today, Washington, besides being worried about the political consequences of the situation is also concerned about consumption in its own territory, which is the other side of the coin.

The Mexican government, in a crackdown on drug trafficking this year, has arrested many drug runners and corrupt officials who gave traffickers protection in return for large sums of money.

Yet until recently it seemed that those arrested were using their ill-gotten fortunes to live as kings within the Mexican prisons, and even had telephones installed there, and were apparently running their business from inside.

Corruption inside the prisons is now also being brought under control, with those who collaborated being investigated, and important drug runners such as Rafael Caro Quintero and Ernesto Fonseca, and others such as Gilberto Ontiveros ("El Greñas"), have had their luxurious prison

apartments (complete with stereos, videos and saunas) dismantled and their visiting hours controlled.

Leading police officials during past administrations have also been arrested and charged with offences relating to the multi million dollar drug business. For example, Rafael Chao López, ex-

Comandante of the now extinct Federal Security police (DFS) for the north-eastern zone, who was arrested at the end of June, allegedly confessed that his fortune (millions of dollars and many real estate investments) was made by drug trafficking and by providing protection to other drug traffickers.

The Attorney General's department has announced that Chao López allegedly declared that during his employment in Tamaulipas he had to pay ten million pesos monthly to the former head of the DFS, José Antonio Zorrilla Pérez, who has also been arrested and who faces several serious charges, including the intellectual authorship of the murder of journalist Manuel Buendía in 1984, illegal possession of fire arms, abuse of his position of authority and undue use of public services. For example, Zorrilla Pérez allegedly provided police

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**Corruption inside the penitentiaries is now being brought under control, and drug runners have had their luxurious prison apartments (complete with stereos, videos and saunas) dismantled, and their visiting hours controlled**

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Journalist

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One of this year's most important arrests was that of Miguel Angel Felix Gallardo, "who had thousands on his payroll", while drugkings Rafael Caro Quintero and Ernesto Fonseca have been sentenced to 34 and 11 years jail respectively

identification cards to drug traffickers such as Caro Quintero.

Chao López also alleged that Zorrilla Pérez received five million dollars from Caro Quintero for protection of the ranch *El Búfalo* in Chihuahua, where Caro Quintero cultivated extensive plantations of marihuana.

Zorrilla Pérez has denied that he received any of this money, describing the accusations made against him by ex-Comandante Chao López as "absolutely false, perverse and fiendish".

According to the assistant Attorney General for Investigation and Combat of Drug Trafficking, Javier Coello Trejo (who is dubbed in the U.S. Embassy here as the "Iron Prosecutor"), Chao López "used to be a good policeman, but he went astray".

### Total Mobilization Against Drugs

Mexico's Attorney General, Enrique Alvarez del Castillo, ex-Governor of the state of Jalisco, has declared a "total mobilization against drug traffickers, against the bands of murderers who use peasants to cultivate marihuana and poppy, against the modern day pirates, the rubbish of today's world".

His department has been responsible for drug seizures in the first eight months of 1989, equivalent to more than half the amount of drugs confiscated during the entire six years of the last administration.

During the De la Madrid government, from December 1, 1982 to November 30, 1988, the authori-



The Mexican Army participates in the government's efforts to eradicate drug production and trafficking. Photo by Marco A. Cruz/Imagenlatina

ties eradicated 307,536 illegal plantations, with a surface area of 34,871 hectares; they seized 726.9 kilos of heroin and opium gum, 33,176.6 kilos of cocaine and nearly ten million kilos of marihuana.

Over the last six years, more than 70,000 persons were arrested and charged with drug related crimes, while 47 federal agents lost their lives in the anti-narcotics war.

Up till September this year, the Salinas administration has been responsible for the confiscation of some 300,000 kilos of marihuana and 21,000 kilos of co-

caine, 635 persons have been arrested on charges relating to drug trafficking, and ten agents have lost their lives on duty. A total of 8,007 arrests have been made for crimes against health, 4,527 weapons have been confiscated, some 3,000 land vehicles and 54 airplanes have been seized.

One of this year's most important arrests was that of Miguel Ángel Félix Gallardo, captured in Guadalajara on April 8 along with several collaborators. According to the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City, Félix Gallardo "had

thousands of people on his payroll" as he used to pay off federal highway officers, as well as some members of the Army and law enforcement bodies.

When arrested, 122 grams of cocaine, a Magnum revolver, several pistols, a submachine gun, a carbine and two grenades were seized from him. Félix Gallardo has been charged with health crimes related to drugs, bribery and illegal possession of arms.

One week later, Álvarez del Castillo received the Parents' Resource Institute for Drug Education (PRIDE) award, in recognition of Mexico's efforts and results in the war on drug trafficking and drug dependence. The annual "Spirit of Freedom" award was presented to the Mexican Attorney General in Atlanta, Georgia, on April 13.

Meanwhile, Caro Quintero and Ernesto Fonseca, who were charged with the death of Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) agent Enrique Camarena in Guadalajara in 1985, have been sentenced to 34 and 11 years jail respectively.

#### The Camarena Case

The Mexican Attorney General's department has released the following statement on the case

of Camarena, who was kidnapped, tortured and murdered by drug traffickers while on duty in Mexico: "The Camarena murder was the reaction of drug traffickers whose interests were being seriously affected. This action was an aggressive act by organized crime, and not by the Mexican government, and the case should therefore be viewed as a problem shared by the two countries and caused by a common enemy. Instead of being a source of friction, it should induce even closer cooperation in the fight against drug trafficking, in which many Mexicans have also lost their lives."

In fact, the U.S. government, through its spokesman in Mexico City, has declared that it is very pleased and satisfied with this

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**The Mexican government has stated that it combats drug trafficking for three fundamental reasons, in the following order of importance: for the health of Mexicans, for national security and for international cooperation**

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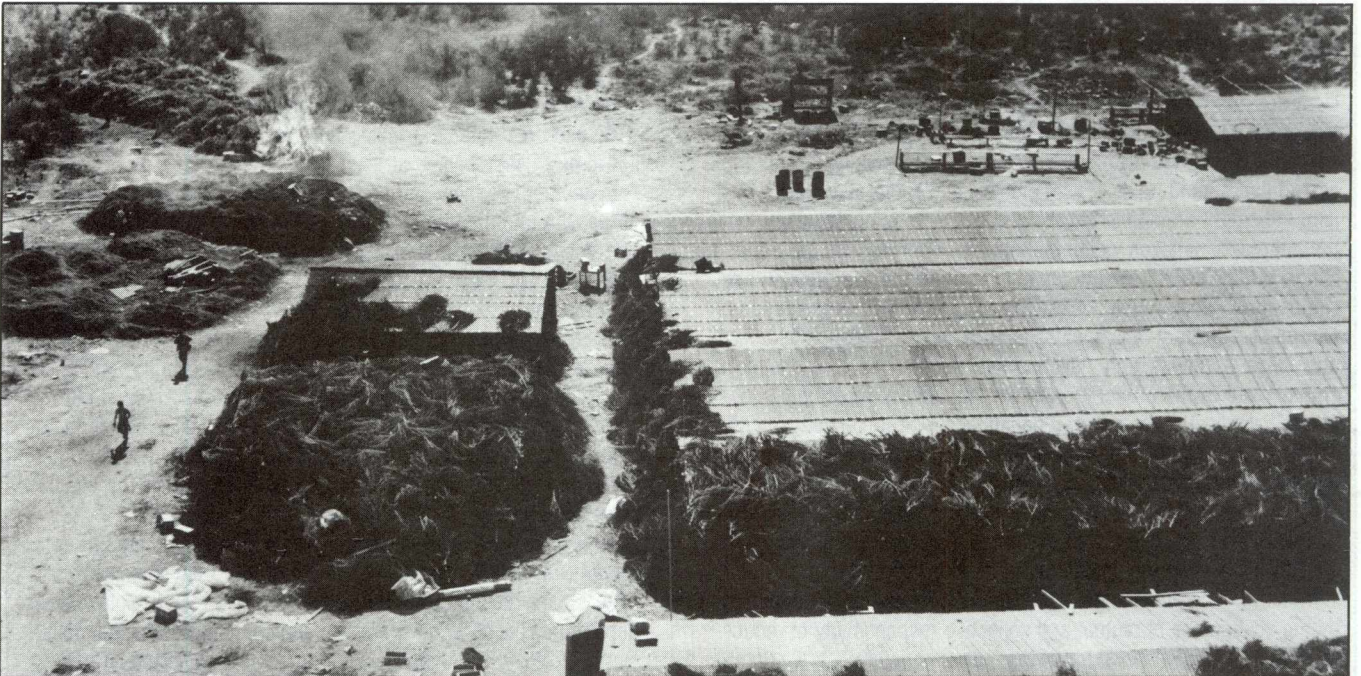
year's efforts against drugs. Spokesman Bill Graves told *Voices* that Mexico is really doing something now against drug running and against corruption in state, federal, executive and judicial branches.

"The efforts so far are very positive, we hope that they continue", said Mr. Graves, who added: "It is very typical to see a fictitious moral renovation campaign in the first year of a new administration, but it seems that President Salinas is not just throwing out rascals in order to put his own rascals in power. He seems to be really committed to improving Mexico's international reputation."

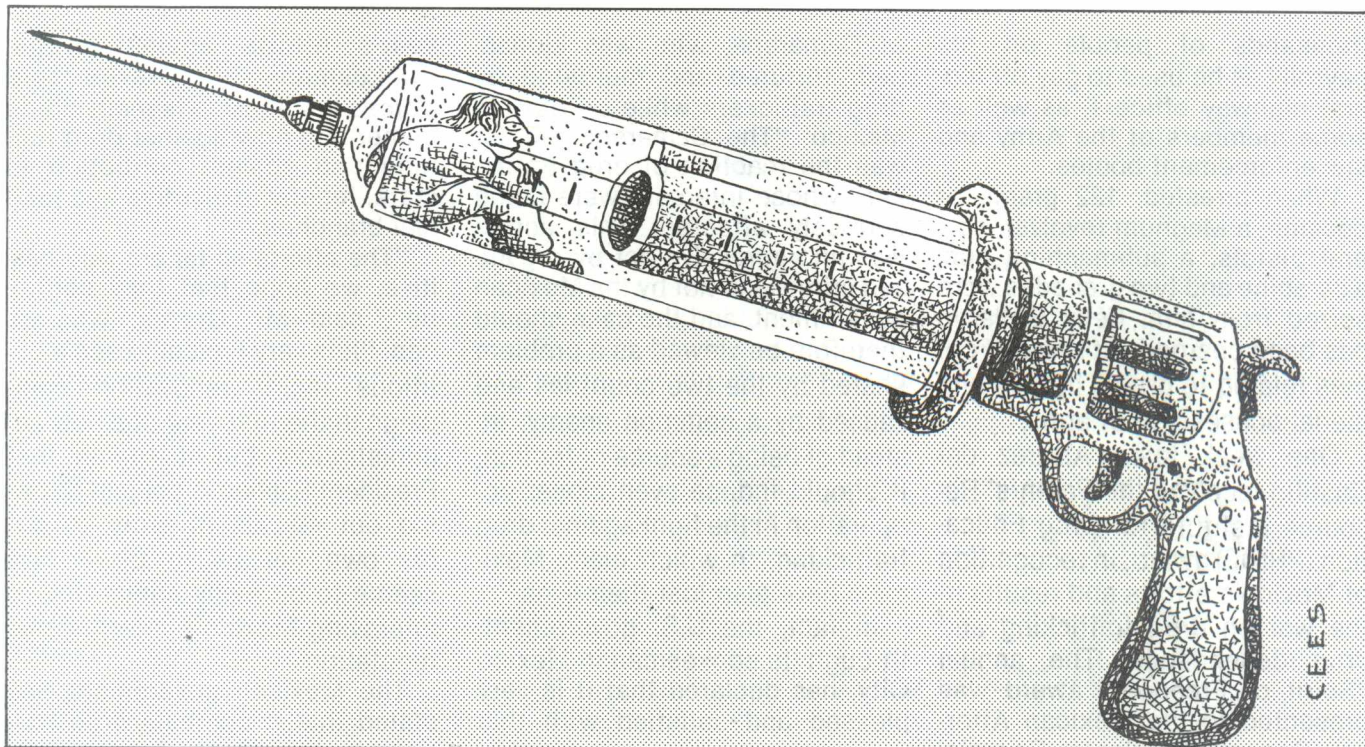
The Mexican government has stated that it combats drug trafficking for three fundamental reasons, in the following order of importance: for the health of Mexicans, for national security and for international co-operation.

The Mexican Attorney General's department has allocated 61 percent of its 1989 budget to the campaign against drug trafficking (more than 122 billion pesos), which represents a budget increase of 174 percent compared to 1988.

Meanwhile, the National Defense Department assigns 22,440 men (25 percent of the total ar-



Rafael Caro Quintero's ranch "El Búfalo" in Chihuahua was a grand producer of marihuana. Photo by Marco A. Cruz/Imagenlatina



## INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AGAINST DRUG TRAFFICKING

Mexico will be host to the eighth International Drug Enforcement Conference (IDEC) in April 1990, and a preparatory meeting was held in Mexico City at the end of August, with the assistance of delegates from the Bahamas, Belize, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica and Mexico, with an observer from the United States.

This meeting agreed on the need to unite efforts in a common front as an effective instrument in the fight against drug trafficking, with international solidarity and collective responsibility.

The delegates declared that the fight against drug trafficking will be considered an ongoing, priority action within each country, in view of the fact that this crime affects humanity in general and the fight against it should be deemed an affair of national security.

The delegates discussed the advisability of updating national laws and the means and instruments for applying them, with the aim of establishing severer penalties, and declared that crimes associated with drug trafficking, such as arms contraband and corruption, should be dealt with globally and comprehensively. The joint statement announced at the end of the meeting specified that the international liaison would include the following actions: eradication of illicit crops, seizure of vehicles and weapons, dismantling clandestine laboratories, dismembering criminal organizations, control of migratory movements, control and surveillance to detect and seize narcotics and psychotropic substances and chemical agents used in the preparation of narcotic and psychotropic substances, application of severer penalties for drug related crimes, destruction of clandestine airstrips, comprehensive regional development programs for the substitution of illicit crops, prevention programs to reduce the demand for drugs, and the provision of treatment and rehabilitation measures, as well as the exchange of information among the collaborating nations.

In the fight against drugs, international cooperation is supported by the acceptance of mutual and collective responsibility to reduce the supply and demand sides of the "drug equation". U.S. President George Bush has declared "it is time to stop placing the blame

on others. North Americans cannot blame people in the Andes for our voracious appetite for drugs", while John Lawn, Administrator of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) since 1985, has also said that the time for name calling is over, "we must work together to reduce this epidemic, this plague that threatens us all".

Interviewed by officials and journalists by telephonic satellite hook-ups in August this year, William Alden, of the Federal Narcotics Bureau, said that thanks to education programs in the U.S. over the last five years about the dangers to health involved in the use and abuse of drugs, attitudes are beginning to change. A Household Survey conducted in 1988 showed a 37% decrease in the use of cocaine, while a High School Survey showed an increased awareness among students about the dangers of drug use.

Mr Alden said that in 1988, 65 million people aged over 12 in the U.S. used marihuana at least once, while 21 million in the same age group used cocaine at least once.

In another telephone interview conducted by satellite, John Lawn of the DEA informed that the U.S. seized 682 million dollars in cash and goods from drug traffickers during the 1988 fiscal year, and expects to seize some 800 million dollars this year.

In the same series of telephonic satellite conferences, a spokesman for the Mexican Attorney General informed that penalties for drug related crimes have been increased in this country, and asked about the possibilities of U.S. restrictions on arms traffic to Mexico.

Speaking for the U.S. government in reply, William Alden commented that it is a constitutional right in the United States to bear arms, but he said that the DEA has no authority on the issue of arms control.

More than 80% of weapons in Mexico are said to come from the United States, while Israeli connections with Colombian drug traffickers have recently been denounced by the press in Colombia. In September, the U.S. government began sending 65 million dollars worth of aid to Colombia to strengthen that government's battle against drug traffickers in a war that increases in violence daily.



med forces on active duty) to the fight against drug trafficking.

United States aid to Mexico in this aspect amounts to some 15 million dollars annually, as well as the training of pilots for reconnaissance and herbicide spraying flights, and the provision of "some herbicides."

**A problem of National Security**

According to the U.S. Embassy here, there is no state in Mexico which is not producing poppy or marihuana, while drug traffickers have untold millions of dollars. Thus, there is a test of strength between the Mexican government and the drug traffickers: "There was a feeling in the government that it was losing control of certain parts of the country, such as rural Michoacán, Guerrero, Jalisco and the 'Golden Triangle' (an area north of Culiacán, Sinaloa, composed of parts of three states, Durango, Sinaloa and Chihuahua)", says Bill Graves.

He continued: "We speculate that Mexican efforts today also have something to do with fears

**"American states are interested in this problem not only because of the impact of drugs on human beings but because of the political dangers that are inherent in the power of drug traffickers."**

that Colombia drug runners were gaining more power in Mexico, and the Colombians are more ruthless and better armed."

On this point, the Mexican government has already stated that its fight against drug trafficking is motivated by reasons of national security, among others.

Dr. Irving G. Tragen, executive secretary of the Interamerican Drug Abuse Control Commission of the Organization of American States (OAS) has also commented on this theme: "American states are interested in the problem not only because of the impact of drugs on human beings

but because of the political dangers that are inherent in the power of the drug traffickers. In the case of Colombia, drug traffickers offered to pay the national debt in turn for legalization of their activities. A similar offer was made in Bolivia. We're talking about a problem that transcends public health; this is a geo-political security issue for most of the member countries of the OAS."

Dr. Tragen did not mention that in Mexico, Rafael Caro Quintero also offered to pay the foreign debt - in exchange for his release from prison!

The OAS executive, in an address to journalists on the organization's program of action against drugs, also had another opinion on the issue: "You can't 'Just say No' to drugs." (This was the slogan of Nancy Reagan's campaign against drugs.) The OAS plan of action includes proposals for standardization of legislation, improvement of co-ordination between police, courts and customs, and inter-American exchange of information. □

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 El 18 de agosto, con el apoyo de la Facultad de Medicina, se celebró la entrega de la Medalla al Mérito Universitario a Doljansoff, por parte del Rector de la Universidad, Dr. Irving G. Tragen, al Dr. Doljansoff, quien fue premiado por su destacada labor en el campo de la medicina y su contribución a la ciencia y la cultura de nuestra nación.

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# ALCOHOLISM - A SERIOUS HEALTH PROBLEM IN MEXICO

\* Juan Ramón de la  
Fuente

\*\* Haydée Rosovsky

The use and abuse of alcohol by Mexican people is one of the prime concerns in the health area since it is increasingly affecting the productive sectors of society as well as youth with damaging results in the family and the workplace.

Along with other countries with high alcohol consumption, Mexico suffers from a number of problems connected with this phenomenon. The effects of excessive drinking form a chain whose final link is an early, painful and unfortunate death that could have been prevented.

The following article describes the panorama of alcoholism in Mexico, supported by many statistics. The authors, Haydée Rosovsky and Juan Ramón de la Fuente, base their analysis on information about the extent, characteristics and social distribution of the problem. This information is the basis for the implementation of actions that tend to control such an urgent health problem.

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**Many negative social events that occur under the effects of alcohol, such as accidents, crimes or suicide attempts, are due to persons who drink infrequently but in large quantities**

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In order to establish appropriate measures to deal with the control of a health problem, it is essential to have reliable and up-to-date information on the magnitude, characteristics and distribution of the problem within a population as well as its changes through time. Excessive alcohol consumption constitutes an important public health problem in Mexico, due to the grave consequences endangering the health of these individuals, as well as due to the impact of the problem on their families, work and society as a whole.

A good number of medical and social problems are typically present in alcoholics and individuals who suffer

from the so-called "alcohol dependency syndrome." Hepatic cirrhosis and alcoholic psychosis are some of the health problems related to chronic and excessive consumption which is characteristic of these persons. Economic deterioration and disintegration of the family are other social effects that may be observed in these afflicted individuals.

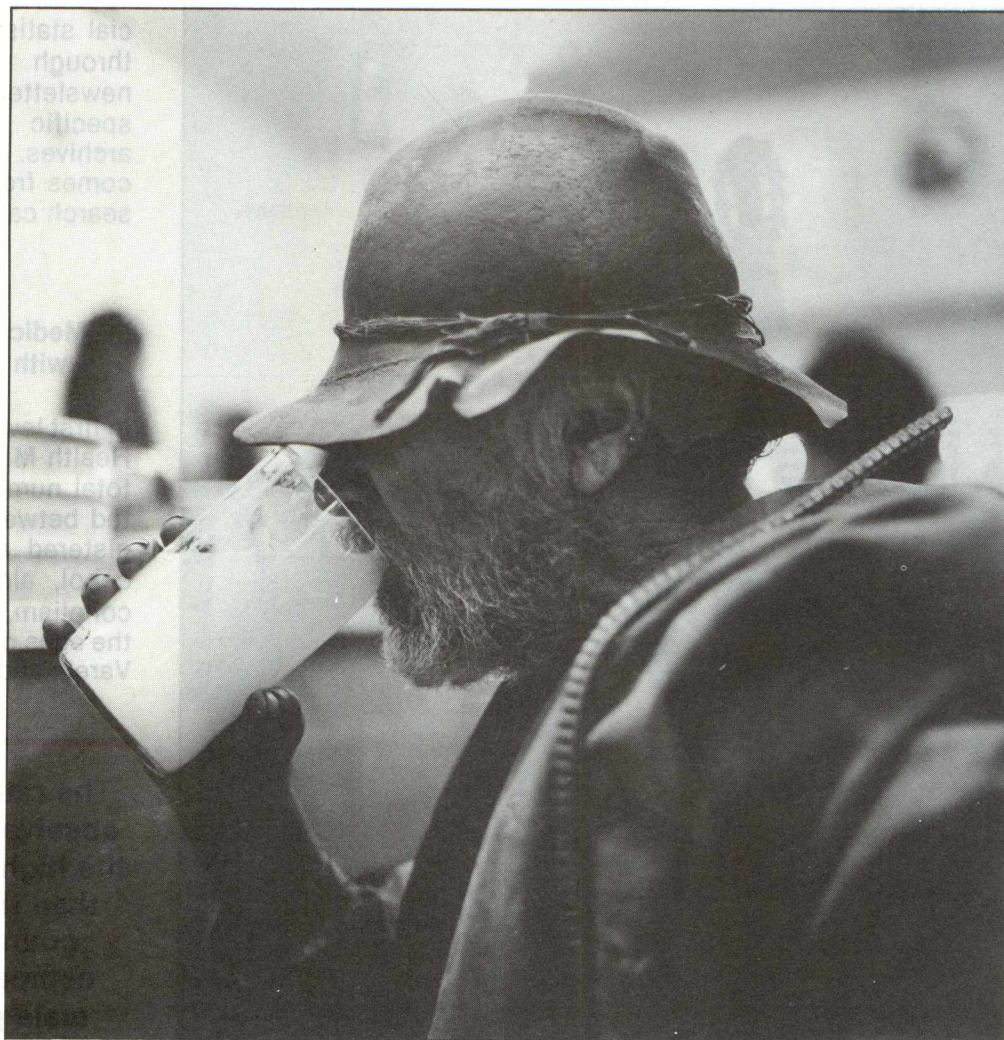
Many other drinkers, without being alcoholics, also present important health and social problems related to their way of occasional but excessive drinking. These problems may be acute, as for example in terms of episodes of intoxication, accidents and acts of violence.

It is essential to take these different types of drinkers and the different medical and social problems concomitant with their type of alcohol intake into account, both to obtain a pro-

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\*\* Head of the Research Department in the Mexican Institute of Psychiatry



"To your health..." Photo by Marco Antonio Cruz/Imagenlatina

per diagnosis of the alcohol problem in society, as well as to make decisions effectively.

This is particularly important in a country such as Mexico due to the different patterns of consumption prevalent in the population found in studies (Medina-Mora, de la Parra and Terroba, 1980; Medina-Mora, Rascón, Zavala and Ezbán, 1986; Calderón, Campillo and Suárez, 1980). According to these studies, there are a good number of abstainers, specially among women in rural environments,

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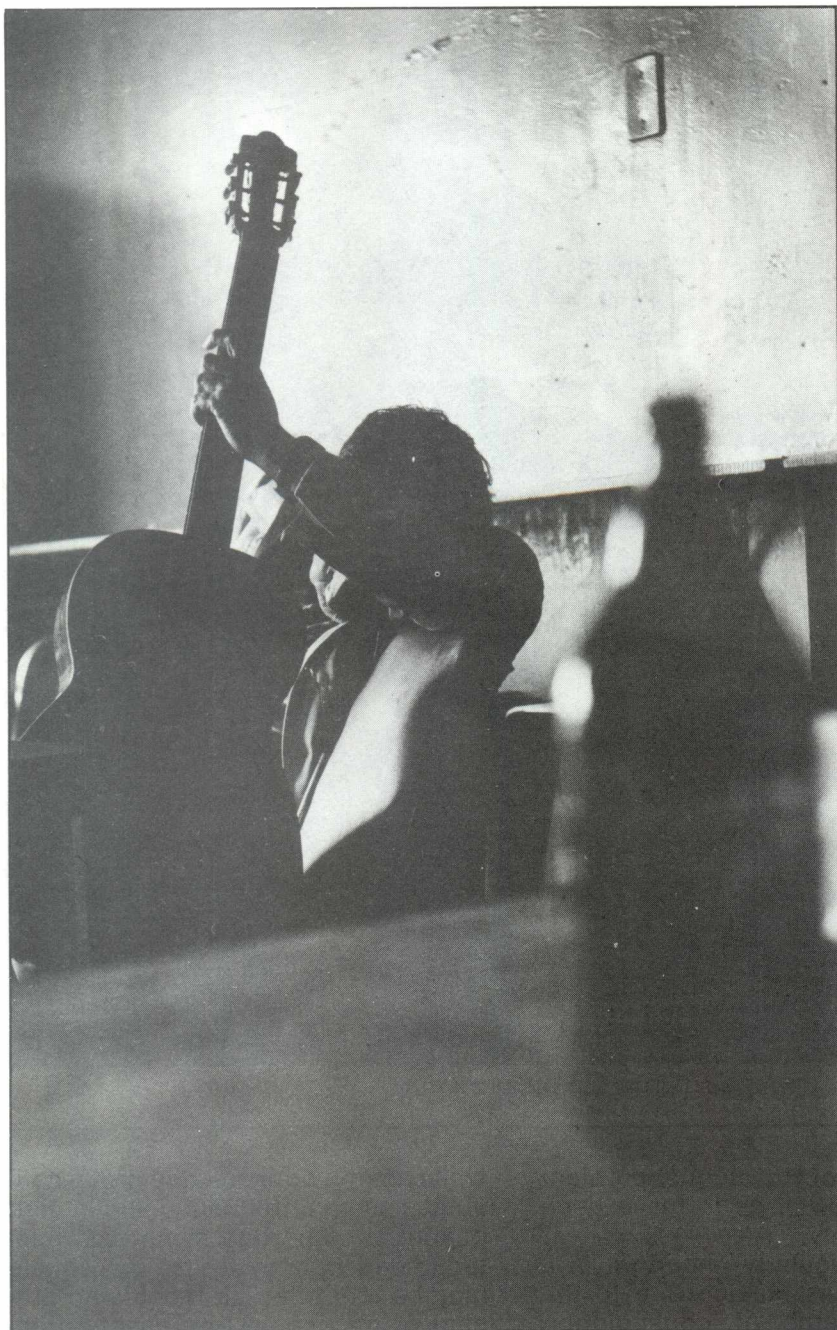
**According to data from three emergency hospitals in Mexico City, 10.7% of patients attended between 1980 and 1984 were, to some extent, under the effects of alcohol**

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while among drinkers, one group consumes alcohol frequently and in high quantities, reporting symptoms related to dependency. These individuals may be identified as those who present or may come to present pathological conditions derived from consumption and dependency, such as hepatic cirrhosis.

Another, much more numerous group among drinkers reports a type of infrequent ingestion but in high quantities, which implies that each episode of consumption results practically in drunkenness. Many negative health and social events that occur under the effects of alcohol, such as accidents, crimes or suicide attempts, are present in individuals who frequently correspond to this last ingestion pattern.

Data on health and social problems related to alcohol consumption in Mexico are presented in this study, on those identified as alcoholics, as well as on other problem drinkers. A part of the data comes from the Health Services records and from other offi-



"When the music's over..." Photo by Marco A. Cruz/Imagenlatina

cial statistics and was located both through institutional annuals and newsletters, as well as by means of specific searches in institutional archives. Another type of information comes from specific studies and research carried out in Mexico.

### Medical Problems Associated with Alcohol Consumption

In first level health care centers of the Health Ministry, less than 2% of the total number of consultations reported between 1975 and 1983 were registered as ailments related to alcohol, alcoholic psychosis and alcoholism, mainly in males between the ages of 15 and 44 (Mas, Manrique, Varela and Rosovsky, 1986).

**The rate of hepatic cirrhosis observed in Mexico is among the highest in America, higher than that reported in some countries in Europe and comparable to that for the male population in Spain**

In data on hospitalizations from the Mexican Institute of Social Security (IMSS), it was found that of the total number of patients interned in 1983, 3.4% corresponded to alcohol-related ailments, especially alcoholic cirrhosis at 2.6% (Mas, Manrique and

Chart 1

### Mortality Rates of Chronic Liver Ailments in Different Countries by Sex for 1983.

(Per 100 000 Inhabitants)

Country	Males	Females	Total
Canada	12.8	6.1	9.4
Cuba	6.7	5.7	6.0
U.S.A.	15.4	8.1	11.7
France	36.8	15.2	25.7
Italy*	47.3	19.8	33.2
Spain**	32.1	13.0	22.4
Uruguay	14.5	4.5	9.4
Venezuela	10.1	3.2	6.6
México	34.3	9.7	22.1

Source: World Health Statistics, WHO, 1986.

Compiled by the Alcohol Information and Documentation Center, Mexican Psychiatry Institute, 1987.

\* data for 1981

\*\* data for 1980

Varela, 1985). For that same year, in the Institute of Social Services and Security for State Workers (ISSSTE), 2.4 % of the total number of hospitalizations corresponded to alcohol-related ailments, with a notable percentage of 1.7% for cirrhosis. In Health Ministry psychiatric hospitals, the percentage of alcohol-related cases is higher, representing 8.1% of all ailments in 1978; notable among these are ethylic alcohol addiction, delirium tremens and alcoholic hallucinations.

According to information from the Health Ministry's General Directorate of Mental Health (Gutiérrez and Tovar, 1984), among men who attended out-patient psychiatric consultations between 1978 and 1980, alcoholism represented 15.4 % of the diagnoses between those of 35 to 44 years of age and 16.2% among those from 45 to 54 years of age. According to the same study, in cases of hospitalizations for psychiatric problems, alcoholism represented 21.1% in the 45 to 54 year age group, and 17.3% in the 55 to 64 year sector.

In an internal medical service for men in a general hospital in the provinces (Esquivel, 1982), 36% of the

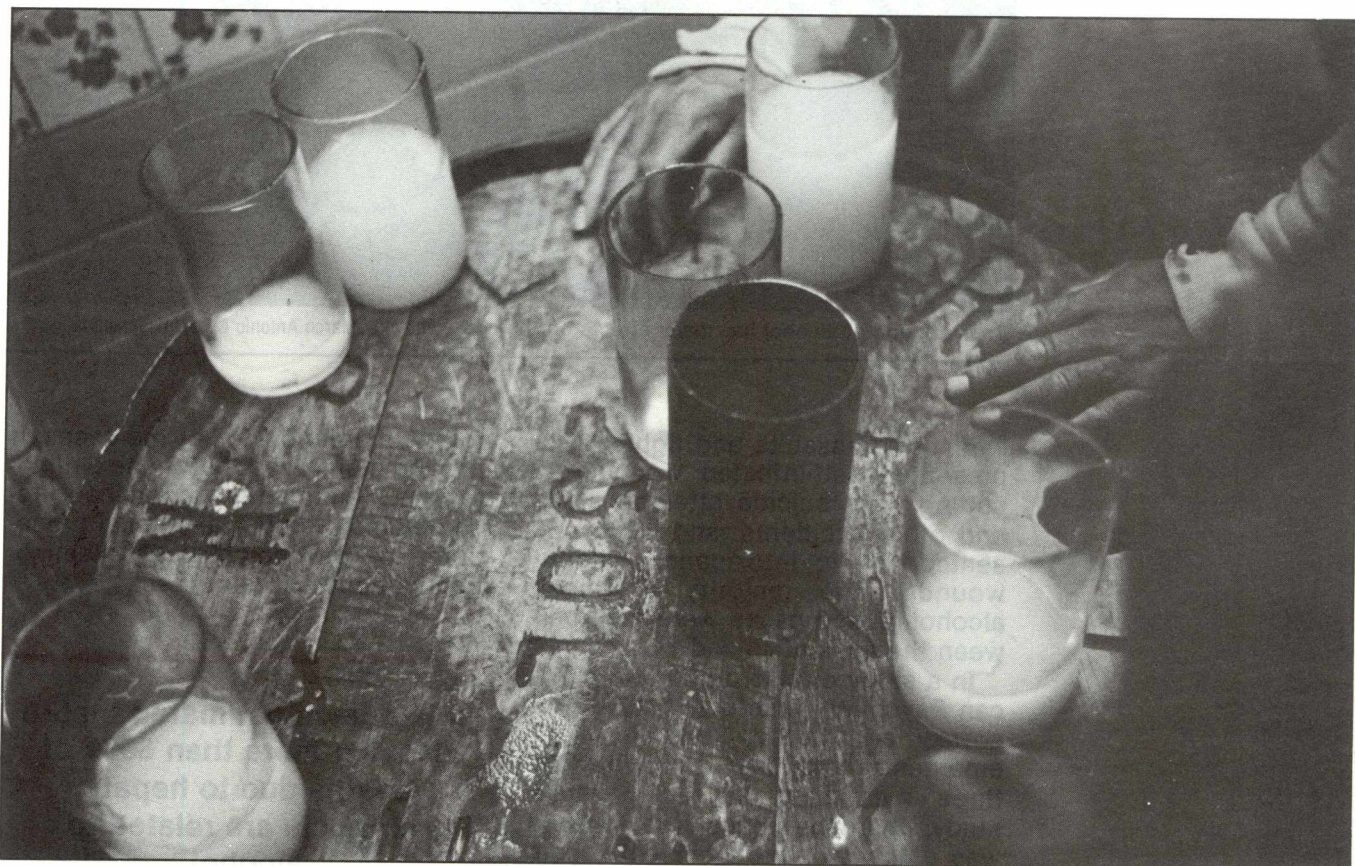
500 recorded internments were diagnosed as alcoholics, of which 80% were between the ages of 20 to 50 years and the main reasons for internment were digestive tube bleeding and liquid retention with important ascites, complications related to ethanol dependency. Clinical and laboratory data indicated hepatic insufficiency in 31.6 % of these alcoholics and the diagnosis of hepatic cirrhosis was established through histological study in 14%; alcoholism was frequent in the family background of these individuals.

According to archival data from three emergency hospitals in Mexico City (Mas et al., 1986) 10.7% of patients attended between 1980 and 1984 were, to some extent, under the effects of alcohol. Among these, 4.7% had suffered intentional

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**Cirrhosis is the principal cause of death in the male population between 35 and 54 years of age in Mexico**

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Pulque - a fermented drink made from the maguey plant. Photo by Marco Antonio Cruz/Imagenlatina



Consumption of alcohol has many effects on the body. Photo by Marco Antonio Cruz/Imagenlatina

wounds in assaults and fights, 22% presented self-inflicted wounds resulting from suicide attempts, falls and other accidents, and 3.5% presented ethylic intoxication without wounds. The majority of these alcohol-related cases were men between the ages of 15 and 34.

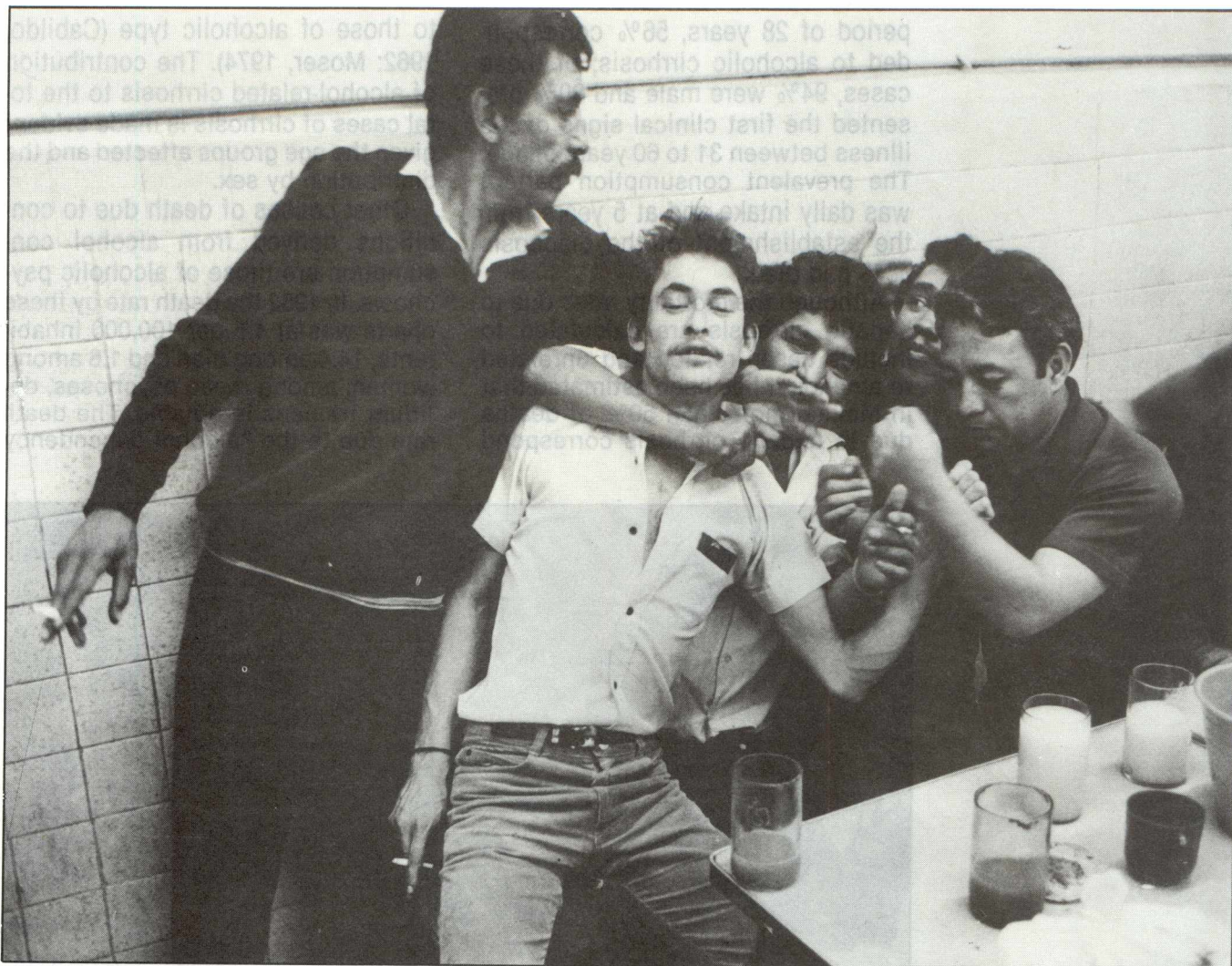
In a study carried out by the Mexican Psychiatry Institute in 1986 (Rovovsky and López, 1986) in eight emergency services, including the three mentioned in the previous study, where the alcohol level in blood was estimated through breath tests on all subjects older than 15 years of age, positive concentrations were

found in around 25% of the cases; it may be mentioned that these estimates are significantly higher than those obtained through the usual procedures of psycho-physical examination without laboratory test.

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**It has been estimated that in Mexico more than 50% of deaths due to hepatic cirrhosis are related to alcohol**

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"All for one and one for all". Photo by Marco Antonio Cruz/Imagenlatina

**In a comparative study between Mexico and the United States, 12% of subjects in Mexico consumed more than 40 grams of ethanol daily, while in the U.S. this figure stood at 16%**

The majority of alcohol-related cases corresponded to emergencies involving wounds in male subjects and 51% were under the age of 30.

#### **Hepatic Cirrhosis and Alcoholic Psychosis**

Within the estimate of alcoholism, death rates due to hepatic cirrhosis are considered classic indicators of the problem. The rate of cirrhosis observed in Mexico is among the highest in America, higher than that

reported in some countries in Europe and Oceania and comparable to that for the male population in Spain (Chart 1).

In Mexico, mortality due to cirrhosis is one of the 10 primary causes of death in the general population and the principal cause of death in the male population between 35 and 54 years of age. Even though these death rates have remained stable through the years in Mexico at around 20 out of every 100,000 inhabitants, (Chart 2), marked regional variations are evident, especially in states that are producers and consumers of pulque (a fermented drink made from the juice of the maguey plant.)

Differences by sex reflect the variations found in consumption patterns in the general population among men and women and are congruent with information on morbidity such as that reported by a study of the National Nutrition Institute (Dajer et al., 1978). There it is indicated that of patients with hepatic cirrhosis treated over a

period of 28 years, 56% corresponded to alcoholic cirrhosis; of these cases, 94% were male and 80% presented the first clinical signs of the illness between 31 to 60 years of age. The prevalent consumption pattern was daily intake and at 5 years from the establishment of the diagnosis 56% had died.

Although the mortality rates due to hepatic cirrhosis are calculated to include cases related and unrelated to alcohol, it has been estimated that in Mexico more than 50% of deaths due to hepatic cirrhosis correspond

to those of alcoholic type (Cabildo, 1962; Moser, 1974). The contribution of alcohol-related cirrhosis to the total cases of cirrhosis is made evident given the age groups affected and the distribution by sex.

Other causes of death due to conditions derived from alcohol consumption are those of alcoholic psychosis. In 1982 the death rate by these charts was at 4.5 per 100,000 inhabitants, 14.4 among men and 1.6 among women; among these psychoses, delirium tremens is notable. The death rate due to the "alcohol dependency



Pulque is consumed by young and old: in small quantities it is said to be a good tonic. Photo by Marco Antonio Cruz/Imagenlatina



Chart 2

## Mortality from Hepatic Cirrhosis in Mexico, 1956-1983

Year	Rate*
1956	22.1
1961	21.4
1966	19.5
1971	21.1
1976	19.7
1981	20.9
1982	21.8
1983	22.1

\*Per 100 000 inhabitants

Source: Compiled by the Statistics Center, Budget and Planning Ministry.

syndrome" in 1982 was 3.3% and 91% of cases corresponded to men (Alcohol Information and Documentation Center, Mexican Psychiatry Institute).

#### Prevalence of Alcoholism

Based on mortality rates for hepatic cirrhosis and according to the Jellinek formula, it is estimated that between 1956 and 1971, 5% to 7% of the population in Mexico over the age of 20 were alcoholics (Bustamante et al., 1978). These estimates may not be viewed as definitive given that Mexico does not have sufficient information on a national level to be able to apply this formula correctly. Nevertheless, there is a consistency between the above-mentioned percentages and those found in some studies, which report around 8% alcoholics in the populations studied, even when utilizing incompatible methodologies and indicators (Bustamante et al., 1978; Cabildo, 1968; Fromm and Macobi, 1973).

As for the prevalence of alcoholism in hospital populations, Mexico presents percentages of male patients (30%) similar to those reported by studies in England (29%) and the Uni-

ted States (27%) and among the lowest for women (5.2%) (De la Fuente et al., 1982).

In archival data from an alcoholic attention service in Mexico City, it was found that 90.4% of the population attended between 1970 and 1985 were men and 70% were under the age of 45 (Hospital General de la Secretaría de Salud, 1985).

#### Clinical Research

As for clinical research, a project coordinated by the World Health Organization in different countries proposed estimating alcohol sensitivity indicators through metabolism; type I dihydrogenase acetaldehyde enzyme deficiencies were found in an important part of the Asiatic population and this deficiency has a close correlation with the redness syndrome, "flushing," after drinking, which produces an unpleasant effect in individuals who suffer from this and results in a diminution in consumption, constituting a type of protective factor against the development of the dependency syndrome. According to these studies, no evidence was found of this deficiency in the population studied in Mexico nor in other countries included in the study, such as India, Australia and the Soviet Union (De la Fuente et al., 1986).

In another work on the relation between depression and alcoholism through biological indicators such as corticosteroids, 53 chronic alcoholics were studied. Depression itself did not seem to explain the adrenocortical activity observed in alcoholics. The patients diagnosed independently as probable depressives, by way of scales such as the Beck inventory, the MMPI and the Hamilton scale,

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**In Mexico, mortality due to accidents, poisoning and violent acts has gradually increased over the years, and particularly affects the male population from 15 to 44 years of age**

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The adult male population is the highest consumer of alcohol, and is most exposed to death by violence, accidents and cirrhosis. Photo by Marco A. Cruz/Imagenlatina

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**The role played by alcohol consumption as a risk factor in events such as accidents and violent acts has awoken growing concern in recent years among researchers of the problem and health authorities**

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did not obtain high percentages in the measurements of adrenocortical activity when this was compared with patients who were not depressed, for whom alcohol could be more responsible for this adrenocortical activity (De la Fuente et al., in press).

In research that is being carried out in different countries coordinated by the World Health Organization and the objective of which is the development and application of screening effects for drinking risk detection, it was found that approximately 20% of the men in a population attending

family medical services, drink dangerously (Campillo, 1987).

In a comparative study between Mexico and the United States (De la Fuente, 1986) the presence of symptoms associated with dependency in a clinical population according to the quantity of daily consumption was estimated. In the sample studied in Mexico, there was a prevalence of 12% of subjects consuming 40 or more grams of ethanol daily, as opposed to 16% in the United States, and the Mexican population presented consistent signs such as drinking in the mornings, guilt feelings and remaining in an inebriated state.

**Social and Medical-Social Problems Related to Alcohol Consumption**

Although alcoholism seems to constitute an important risk factor in the occurrence of suicidal behavior, even excessive consumption in non-dependent individuals seems to precipitate this conduct. The number of cases of suicide in Mexico is low

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**According to a women's support group, 84% of family disagreements and 82% of separations are caused by alcohol**

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when compared with that of other countries, but there seems to exist an important under-reporting of this phenomenon, mainly due to cultural reasons.

Contrary to what is indicated by the natural history of this phenomenon, in Mexico there are more consummated suicides than failed attempts, which surely is related to the limitations of the numbers reported.

"Alcohol intoxication" has represented, among cases of suicide, around 5% through the years (Chart 3). The cases of consummated suicides under the effects of alcohol are more frequent among men in 1984, 5.4% of the men took their lives as a result of ethylic intoxication while among women it was only 0.6% (Alcohol Information and Documentation Center, Mexican Psychiatry Institute, 1985). Nevertheless, the role played by alcohol seems to be more important than indicated by the records, and in research carried out by the Mexican Psychiatry Institute in the Forensic Medicine Service (Terfroba, Saltijeral and Del Corral, 1986), levels of alcohol above 100 mg were found in blood samples in 17% of the autopsied suicides.

#### **Accidents and Crimes**

The role played by alcohol consumption as a risk factor in events such as accidents and violent acts has awoken growing concern in recent years among researchers of the problem and health authorities.

In Mexico, mortality due to "accidents, poisoning and violent acts" has gradually acquired greater importance in the panorama of deaths: in 1971 the death rate due to these causes was 68 for every 100,000 inhabitants, rising to 98 in 1981, principally affecting the male population from 15 to 44 years of age (Alcohol Information and Documentation Center, Mexican Psychiatry Institute).

The role of alcohol consumption as a risk factor in these events has been extensively reported in international

literature, especially for traffic accidents. In Mexico, data on this is scarce, but in a study carried out in 1974 by the Forensic Medicine Service of Mexico City on cases of violent deaths, elevated alcohol concentrations were found in 57.6% of the 1600 blood samples analyzed. In these cases, 35% had died in traffic accidents, mainly by being run over by cars and in a smaller proportion from car crashes. The alcohol concentrations found ranged from 90 to 250 mg of ethanol per 100 ml. of blood (García, 1985).

Another study reports that of the traffic accidents that occurred in Mexico City in 1968, 8% involved someone in a state of inebriation, a proportion that rose to 15.85% in 1983 (Jiménez, 1985; Silva, 1972) (Figure 1).

According to judicial authorities, in 1983 of all of the "attacks on routes of communication" that occurred in Mexico City, 85% were recorded as involving someone in a state of inebriation (Data from the Federal District's Attorney General's Department, 1985). As for traffic accidents on roads and highways under federal jurisdiction, around 3.5% occurred with one of the parties under the effects of alcohol.

As for violent and criminal behavior, according to the Attorney General's Office, in 1975 17.5% of the criminals sentenced in Mexico were found to be under the effects of alcohol; this proportion registered increases in subsequent years reaching 24.7% in 1982.

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**The Mexican Social Security Institute estimated that 18% of accidents on the job are related to alcohol intake**

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In a study carried out in 1984 by the Mexican Psychiatry Institute in a Research Agency of the Government Attorney's Office (Rosovsky and López, 1986), cases in which alcohol was detected by the authorities, which represented 15% of the incoming cases, were compared with those detected by the researchers through self reporting, which was 39%. The greater part of the subjects who said they had consumed alcohol when they committed their crime were men

between 15 to 34 years of age. The prevalent socio-economic level was lower middle and lower class, and the principal reasons for detention were crimes such as disturbing the peace, damages to alien property, ingestion of alcoholic beverages on the road, infliction of wounds, attacks on routes of communication in a state of inebriation, and robbery. 65% of these "cases under the influence of alcohol" manifested that they were inebriated when the event occurred and 14% reported they had experienced previous problems with the police and other authorities due to their way of drinking and 39% had problems with their family.

**A child care institution reported that alcoholism occupies the second place among causes of aggression against children, being present in 19% of the cases studied**

**Impact on the Family and Work**

Other social effects of alcohol consumption are presented in the family and in the work-place. According to official statistics, approximately one in every thousand divorces are caused by the spouse's drinking problem, but there are reasons to believe that alcohol plays a more important role in family desintegration, but that its impact has been seen as limited due to cultural factors and the nature of the recording system.

According to a women's support institution, it is indicated that 84% of

family disagreements and 82% of separations are caused by alcohol (Barba and Arana, 1985).

In cases studied in a child care institution and as part of a prevention program against child abuse, alcoholism occupied the second place as the cause of aggression against children, being present in 19% of the cases (diagnosis made by the National Program against Alcoholism and Abuse in Consumption of Alcoholic Beverages, 1985).

Repercussions in the labor area are multiple in addition to the fact that alcoholics and excessive drinkers suffer from incapacities and many die, at ages considered to be of great productivity, and furthermore, work accidents are frequent, as well as absenteeism and job loss due to alcohol. According to the Mexican Social Security Institute, it has been estimated that 18% of work accidents are related to alcohol intake, representing great material and human losses (Campillo and Medina, 1978). It has been reported, in addition, that alcohol consumption is responsible for the loss of thousands of work hours among those with medical coverage from the Mexican Social Security Institute (Gamiochipi, 1976); another study indicates that in work absenteeism, 12% may be attributed to the effects of the "day after" (Menéndez and Di Pardo, 1982).

**Discussion**

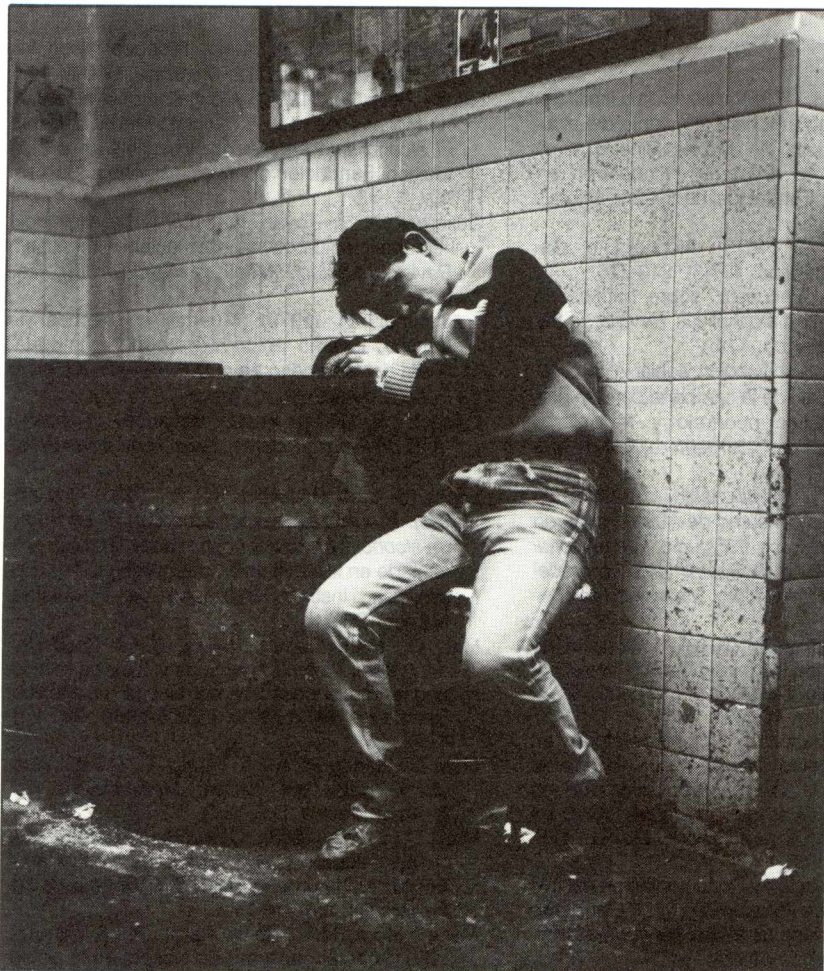
From the information presented it may be inferred that excessive alcohol consumption and its effects on health and society constitute important problems in Mexico.

As was mentioned, mortality due to alcohol-related hepatic cirrhosis and physical injuries are medical problems of outstanding magnitude.

*Chart 3*  
**Suicides and Alcohol**

	Total Suicides	% with Alcohol
1970	740	6 %
1975	893	5 %
1980	672	5 %
1982	843	6 %
1984	1 124	4.7%

Source: Compiled by the Alcohol Information and Documentation Center, Mexican Institute of Psychiatry, with data obtained from the Statistical Reports on Road and Highway Accidents, Communication and Transport Ministry, 1970-1984.



After the euphoria... Photo by Marco Antonio Cruz/Imagenlatina

These problems are presented in different populations of drinkers: one, of chronic heavy drinkers, above 35 years of age and the other of younger individuals who consume alcohol occasionally but in excessive quantities. This implies the need to develop particular preventive strategies aimed at specific risk groups, also taking regional variations into account.

Within the realm of social problems, it was found that crimes and traffic accidents that occurred under the effects of alcohol are growing problems frequently manifested in subjects with a pattern of occasional but excessive consumption.

The data available permits the formation of a general panorama of the problem, nevertheless, it is necessary to point out certain limitations in the data. On the one hand, data from official statistical records are not easily accessible and they are not sufficiently updated. Data are often omitted from these records that could be of use in delving deeper into determining and conditioning factors of the alcohol problem, as socio-demographic characteristics.

This situation responds both to routine procedures of detection of alcohol presence in events, as well as to the way in which the data are elaborated and disseminated. In this way, for example, there is often no clear distinction made between alcohol-related and non-alcohol-related deaths due to hepatic cirrhosis, in addition to the fact that in many regions medical certification of death is not available. In accidents and physical injuries, laboratory proofs are not routinely used to estimate alcohol levels in the blood of those involved. This is carried out in the case of violent deaths, although the results are not very accessible.

In instances of crimes committed under the effects of alcohol, relevant data regarding the characteristics of the events and of those involved are not available. Neither may one rely on even epidemiological information on the role of alcohol in other important health problems such as certain types of cancer (of the mouth and esophagus, for example) and pregnancies affected by alcohol consumption. Data available is insufficient for specialized studies of social aspects, such as effects in the work place and family.

This entire panorama makes evident the need to improve statistical records through a greater awareness of the problem of alcohol on the part of those responsible as well as through an effective coordination between authorities and researchers and experts in the problem. As has been seen, there are important differences between the data obtained from records and those generated by specific research. Relying on better recording systems would permit the improvement on an international level of comparability of indicators of the problem, as well as a saving in research resources which could then be oriented toward a deeper exploration of other aspects of the problem.

It is necessary to continue and to reinforce the cooperation that exists between Mexico and the United States both in terms of improving existing recording systems as well as in the development of research into problems such as those mentioned, utilizing comparable methodologies that would allow for a better assessment of the impact of alcohol consumption in both societies.

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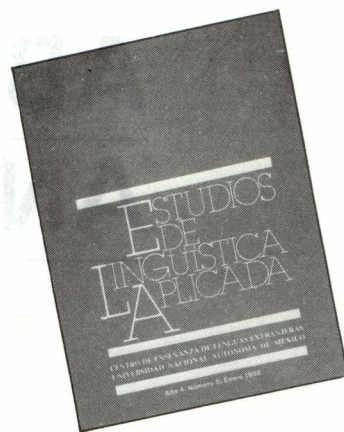
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# ABOUT READING AND LISTENING

Have people in the world always read the way we do today, silently, with the eyes only? We really should ask ourselves this question. The fact is that in Antiquity and the Middle Ages, written works were mostly transmitted in an oral—or rather, oral/aural—way. Texts were read aloud or recited from memory to groups of listeners; that is, they appealed more to the ear than to the eye. Actually, “reading” constituted a global phenomenon that exceeded the text. It involved the listeners’ physical perceptions—auditory and visual—of the reader or reciter and of the other listeners; it involved a kind of performance by the person who read or recited, while the audience participated in the performance by means of their reactions during and after the reading. The situation was similar to that of the theater.

Meanwhile, men of letters and scholars did read alone, but not necessarily in silence. They too would pronounce what they were reading, perhaps in a low voice and without physical expressions, but, anyhow, listening, absorbing the words through the hearing faculty as well as by their eyesight. People who read as we do today were very few. Saint Ambrose, in the 4th century, caused great astonishment because he used to read only with his eyes, without even moving his lips.

A long time was to pass before reading in silence became a general hab-



Photo by Ximena Bedregal

it. In spite of what is generally believed, this habit developed quite a long time after the invention of the printing press. Even Marshall McLuhan, great defender of the theory of a “new visual culture” established during the Renaissance, had to admit that poetry, and also some prose, continued to be oral, more than visual, during several centuries after Gutenberg. How many centuries? According to Gérard Genette, “the continuous weakening of auditory habits of literary consumption” did not begin until the 19th century...

These things have been *said*, but only recently have scholars begun to document them and to explore their many and fascinating implications.

Twelve years ago, the critic William Nelson published a very interesting article entitled “From ‘Listen, Lordings’, to ‘Dear Reader’”, where, speaking about the Renaissance, he commented:

Since customary activities are not usually recorded, evidence concerning reading habits is scattered, various, and sometimes ambiguous. Nevertheless, enough does exist to show that books of every conceivable kind, whether in prose or in verse, were commonly read aloud (...), the audiences ranging from the princely and sophisticated to the rustic illiterate.

Spain was not included in Nelson’s study, concerned only with England, France and Italy, but another scholar, Stephen Gilman, had previously written about the oral characteristics of literature and of university teaching in



Spain at the end of the 15th century:

Reading was still thought of as reading aloud to oneself or to somebody else (...). The printing press, in other words, had not yet created a public of silent readers; it had merely multiplied the number of texts available for reading aloud.

In my own research, I have collected evidence from the 16th and 17th centuries to show how much the idea and practice of reading were still predominantly oral/aural in Spain and Spanish America during this period. What follows are some of the results of this research.

Poetry, we are told, “should be soft and sweet to the ear”. The sonnets of a certain poet “were read and recited by him many times”. Another author read his epic poem to two friends, and in turn listened to the reading of a long poem by another writer. Those who theorize about prose fiction advise that narrative works should be able to “please every listener”. The same thing was expected for all sorts of scholarly writings. In Spain, Erasmus’ *Enchiridion* was often read “in public spaces and gatherings”. Bartolomé de las Casas says about his *History of the Indies*: “this chronicle will produce (...) greater appetite if it is followed by its listeners”. Antonio de Guevara is thinking about oral readers, even of his Epistles, when he says: “it could be that some day you will read them in front of people who are not very wise”, and when he explains: “I have wanted to tell these old stories so that all those present know about them”.

Thus, we see that, indeed, works “of every conceivable kind” were designed for reading out loud. And they were meant for the most varied kinds of listeners. Guevara’s audience was associated with the courtly environment; there, in the court, in the palaces, in the gatherings of nobles and clergy, the practice of reading aloud was especially frequent. That is to say, the oral diffusion of the written word was not the result of the generalized illiteracy; rather, it was due to the persistence of an age old habit.

On the other hand, social transformations of the 16th century—especially, the growth of the cities—in addition to the rise of the printing press, contributed to the growth of the listening public among the illiterate population. There were individuals who knew how to read even among the



*The Sisters* (1900) by Ralph Peacock. Photo by Alejandra Novoa

poor, and if there were just one in a family, hamlet, street, or guild of craftsmen, this would be sufficient to enable one single copy of a text to reach many people.

It is easy to believe the scene from *Don Quixote* (1:32) in which the innkeeper relates that

at harvest time a lot of reapers come in here in the mid-day heat. There’s always one of them who can read, and he takes up one of those books. Then as many as thirty of us sit round him, and we enjoy listening so much that it saves us countless grey hairs.

Thanks to the practice of reading out loud, those who had access to “litera-

ture” —understood in its widest sense— were much more numerous than is usually imagined.

With the growth of this listening public, the “reader” who knew how to read aloud acquired great social importance. And schoolteachers were most concerned about teaching how to read aloud for others. This explains why the orthography manuals of the 16th and 17th centuries are principally pronunciation manuals: they illustrate the letters of the alphabet one by one, explaining how each should be pronounced. As in the time of Quintilian, grammarians and orthographers considered a letter as a receptacle of sound to be reproduced intact by the reader in the moment of

reading. The famous Antonio de Nebrija said, in 1517, that “the writing of letters has no other use than to represent those sounds we deposit in them, such that they (the letters) return to us no more and no less than what we entrusted to them”. A century later, another scholar compared writing to a musical score, whose reader recognized the sounds “as if the same person who wrote them were singing them.”

Linguists of the Spanish “Golden Age” left us other precious evidence. For example, the humanist Ambrosio de Morales scribbled in the margin of a letter he received from a poet in 1570: “one writes so that what is written can be pronounced”. In other words, anyone who writes, about anything, does so in order that it be, sometime or other, said out loud. In 1611, Sebastián de Covarrubias, the great lexicographer, defined the verb *leer* in these very simple terms: to read is “to pronounce with words what is written with letters”. And in 1631, an orthographer dealing with the proper punctuation of texts said that the reader must “walk” his listener through the clause —“as the master of his comprehension”— “at times quickly, at times slowly, first stopping for a while (...), then asking, showing surprise, raising his voice...”

This last quotation shows us how much the reader had to master an al-

most theatrical art. This is confirmed by other evidence; for example, there are indications about how the tone of voice should be varied, together with the use of facial expressions and body movements, according to the content and the spirit of what was being read, and taking into consideration the effect the reader wanted to cause in his audience. During this period, the *reader* functioned as a medium for the text, as a bridge to the listening public, which was the main addressee of much that was written in these centuries. A reader was not, basically, a person sitting in an armchair silently perusing a book for his own pleasure.

The listening public, although cleverly managed by the verbal skills of so many readers—and of so many writers!— was far from assuming a passive stance. Everything seems to indicate that, just as in the Middle Ages, listeners continued to participate actively in the performance of text. Friendly or adverse interruptions of the reader and heated discussion were another important dimension of what McLuhan has called “publication as performance”. Fernando de Rojas left us evidence about the reactions which followed the oral reading of his *Celestina*: “some would say it was too long and tedious, others, too short, others, that it was agreeable...” for “when ten people get together to hear this comedy,

who can doubt that there will be a discussion.” Years later, the friends of Juan de Valdés met to read the letters that he had sent to them: “we had plenty to laugh about and to amuse ourselves (...), we had something to talk about and to dispute (...). Often we had big arguments.”

The writer of those times could foresee the reactions of his flesh and blood audience, so different from the abstract reader of today. The possible presence of a group of listeners would, no doubt, determine important aspects of the writing. Anticipating a probable and prompt conversion of their letters into voice, authors would listen to the sound effects of their words as they wrote, giving their text movement and organization according to what they imagined a listening public would understand and enjoy. They would imprint in their works, whether in prose or verse, a dynamic—often episodic—structure, apt for a linear reception (with no return); they would present their audience with a great variety of topics, events, styles; they would look for special effects aimed at keeping their listeners in a constant state of alert.

In addition to the generalized custom of reading out loud, there also existed the extensive practice of recitation of texts learned by memory. The great capacity of many people to remember even long texts astounds us.



Reading Aloud by Albert Moore (1841-1893). Photo by Alejandra Novoa

“I used to know many verses by heart”, says Juan de Valdés, “and even now I marvel about how some of them remain in my memory.” Prose texts were also learned by heart. We have evidence that stories and novellas were commonly memorized, and sometimes very long novels as well. We read about the youths who would go around “burdened with *Celestinas*” which they used to read until they knew them by heart. Don Quijote replied to his neighbour, the farmer, “in the very words and phrases in which the captive Abencerraje answer-

ed Rodrigo de Narváez, as he had read the story” (1:5). The *morisco* Román Ramírez was tried by the Inquisition towards the end of the 15th century because it was said that he had signed a pact with the devil, who would let him learn by heart the enormous novels of chivalry and recite them to the ladies and gentlemen in their evening parties. In the 17th century we are told about a person who was able to recite letters from memory as if this were the most normal thing to do.

Now, what kind of memorization

was involved? It seems that the literal reproduction of texts was not usual, nor was it considered necessary. Those who recited the texts seem to have taken all kinds of liberties that today would be inconceivable. Román Ramírez, who was practically illiterate, would promise to recite a certain novel, but in fact, as he himself later confessed to the inquisitors, he would learn the plot, the actions of the characters, the sequences of episodes, and then he would fill in this skeleton of the novel with improvisations of his own.

As for the poetry of this era, it has been pointed out that it is extremely rare to find two identical copies of the same poem: each copy, whether manuscript or printed, contains several or many variants. This phenomenon, I think, was not so much due to copy-errors, but to the quirks of memory and to a conception of the text that was noticeably different from our conception today. The text in this period was not a fixed and unchangeable object, but rather something fluid, malleable, capable of changing in successive repetitions. Precisely because of the “oralization” of texts, the written culture of the 16th and 17th centuries was not so divorced from oral culture as it is today. And this fact has important implications for literary history and criticism.

But things, even in this period, were beginning to change. We can observe in certain personalities of this era an increasing awareness of the differences between reading aloud and reading in silence. This awareness often took the form of nostalgia for something that was disappearing. Again and again the “living voice” is contrasted with the “dead letter”. Around 1530: “the spoken word exceeds the written word as much as a living man exceeds a body without a soul”; “there is a big distance between hearing something and reading it (...), for, as the apostle said, *littera occidit, spiritus autem vivificat*”. Beginning of 17th century: “the difference between the living and the dead, between men and statues, is the same as the difference between the written and the spoken word”; “there is no argument so strong that it does not lose its strength (...) if it is not touched by the voice’s breath”. The great Lope de Vega had one of his women characters say that she preferred listening to sonnets to reading them in silence, for “between reading and listening, there is a notable difference:

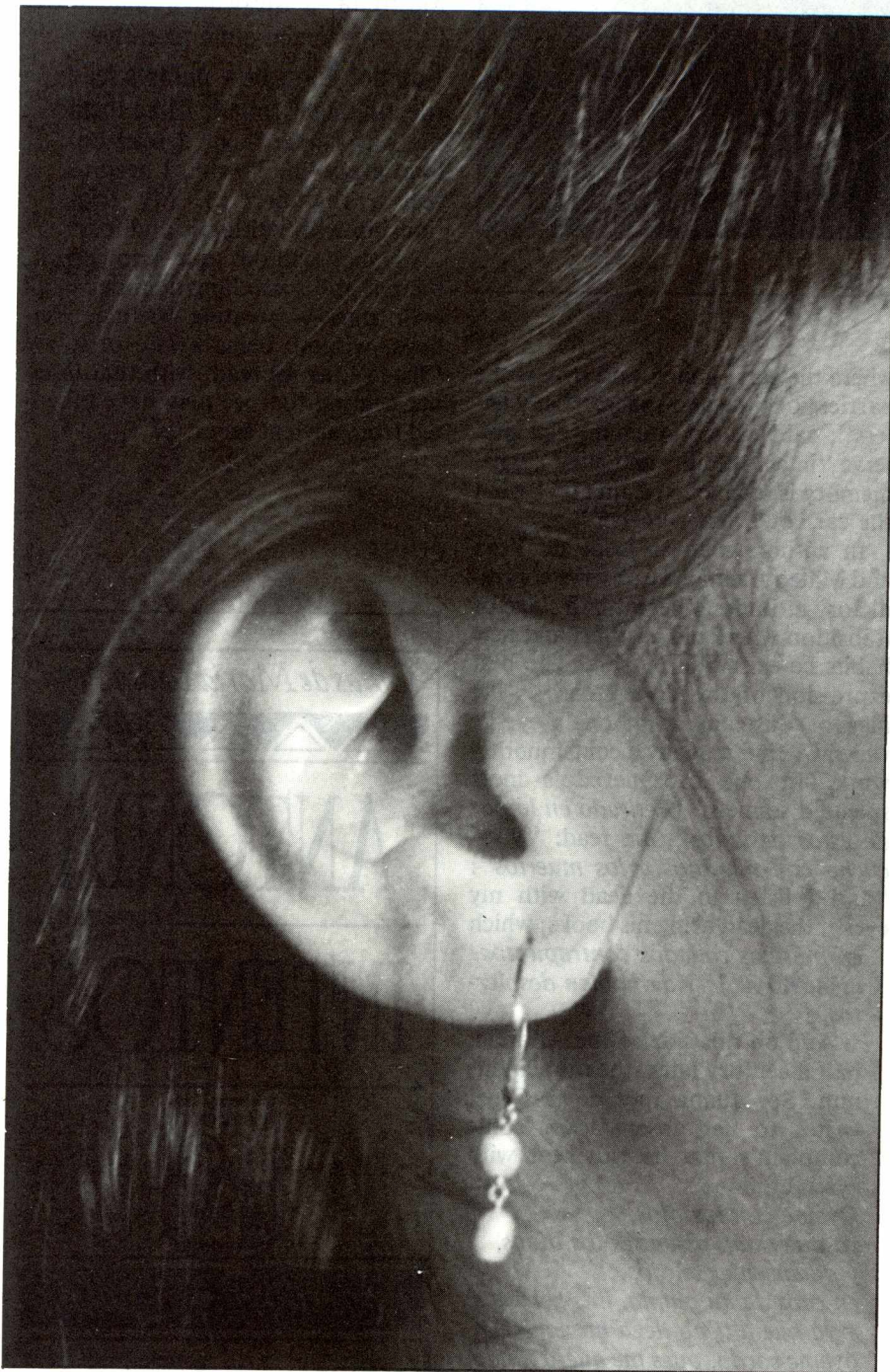


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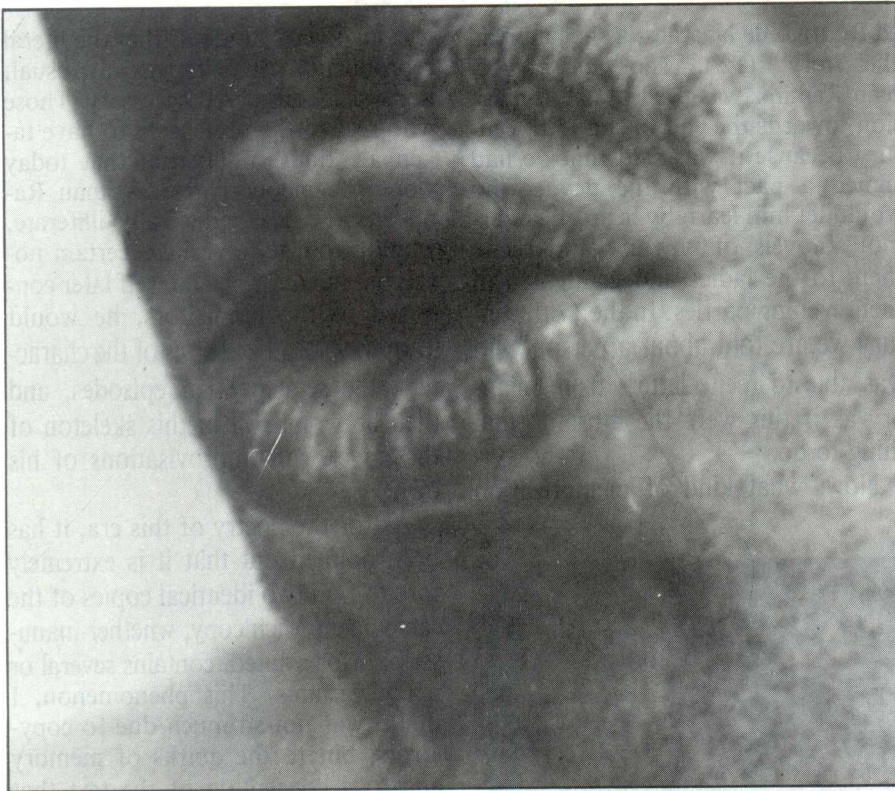


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they are both voices, but one is alive and the other is dead”:

Entre leer y escuchar  
hay notable diferencia,  
que aunque son voces entreambas,  
una es viva y la otra es muerta.

These writers were of the opinion that when read alone, silently, without intermediaries, without hearing the voice or watching the facial expressions and body movements of a reader or reciter, the text is poorer, it loses strength and vitality. “Only the eyes feast on the written word, but with the spoken word the heart is gladdened”, said Antonio de Guevara around 1530.

However, there was also a growing and joyful awareness in those years about the possibilities inherent in silent reading which are denied to those who read out loud. Reading aloud offers us a limited amount of knowledge; if we want to learn many things, we have to consult books ourselves and read rapidly which is impossible when words are pronounced. Even Lope de Vega says: “although it is an excellent thing to listen, with eyesight alone I can listen while reading and know without my ears all that has happened in the world” (*puedo yo con sola la vista oír leyendo y saber sin los oídos cuánto ha pasado en el mundo*’). The eyes reach

where the ears cannot, and bypass the barriers of time and space. “Only letters”, said Mateo Alemán, can preserve “intact, healthy and alive”, what memory is unable to retain and “what the ear could not perceive”.

In authors such as Lope de Vega and Mateo Alemán we observe contradictory attitudes inherent in a stage of transition where old customs and new habits co-exist side by side. The best expression of this co-existence is the idea of “listening with one’s eyes”, which we find in many a contemporary work. In one of Quevedo’s most splendid sonnets, “*Retirado en la paz de estos desiertos*”, we read: “*y escucho con mis ojos a los muertos*”: “and I listen to the dead with my eyes”, the dead being his books, which *en músicos callados contrapuntos al sueño de la vida hablan despiertos*.

And on this side of the Atlantic, half a century later, the miraculous nun, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, writes to her absent lover some complaints that he will hear with eyesight alone:

*Oyeme con los ojos,  
ya que están distantes los oídos,  
y de ausentes enojos,  
en ecos de mi pluma, mis gemidos;  
y ya que a ti no llega mi voz ruda,  
óyeme sordo, pues me quejo muda.*

(“Listen to me with your eyes, since your ears are so distant; listen, in echoes of my pen, to the cries of distress caused by your absence; and since my rough voice does not reach you, listen to me like a deaf man, since my complaint is mute”). In these words, we can perceive the passage from one historic age to another: writing is a speaking ever more silently to an increasingly deaf reader.

And yet... Today, three centuries later, we realize that, somehow, the voice cannot die. There are writers and there are readers that still have a conscious appetite for sound. Angeles Mastretta, a Mexican woman novelist, commented quite recently:

I do not know how phrases read silently might sound; I like them the way I hear them. I read out loud every line I write, I need to feel a rhythm (...). My relationship with writing is auditory.

Maybe, without our knowing it, there is still something auditory in all—or most—creative writing. Perhaps, without being aware of it, we “listen”, as we read, with that internal hearing that we may have inherited from ancient times. □

Obras de María Luisa Puga

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# OFFENSE AND PUNISHMENT



*The Frown* by Thomas Webster (1800-1886). Photo by Alejandra Novoa

One way of ending a difference of opinion is by exterminating those who differ from us. This is not a new idea, but perhaps it is not acceptable to us from an ethical point of view. This idea is at least as old as humanity itself, although some would argue that it is even older—maybe they consider it eternal— or at least as old as the beings in the Universe who have had to confront others who hold different viewpoints, that is, surely as old as those beings who at some point could have held an idea.

Another way of ending a difference of opinion—which is perhaps the most recent in the history of humanity—is that of holding a discussion through means of which we try to define the difference precisely, so as to later find the means of overcoming it. But what does it mean: overcome a difference of opinion? And how can it be done?

In the first place, we note that overcoming a difference of opinion does not mean ending the difference at all costs. One of the most effective means of achieving the latter is that men-

tioned at the beginning of the first paragraph. A difference of opinion can also end due to the natural death of those in conflict, or at least of those who defend any of the different opinions. Another way of ending a conflict is through the use of power to make the dissidents submit, forcing them to share the same opinion, or at least, to act as if they shared it.

Yet another option is negotiation: an agreement is reached, not because one is convinced that the other is right, but simply because they both consider that they have achieved all they can for the moment and that it is best to detain the confrontation there and make a concession. Finally, there

Director of the Philosophical Research Institute, UNAM.

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## A rational discussion is a relatively rare event

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exists another possibility, that of rational discussion, which tends to end discrepancies with an agreement where one party is convinced, by well reasoned arguments, that the other is right.

In a rational discussion, the idea is to take advantage of a great number of points held in common, and of shared suppositions— many of which will be implicit— so as to then debate, and in a given case, *modify the conflicting viewpoints. But a rational discussion is a relatively rare event. In fact, it is located at one end of a continuum, where the best possibilities for communication exist, that is, when the participants are interested in convincing the other, or are open to being convinced of some idea through the presentation of valid arguments. Besides, this process of convincing or*

*of being convinced, consists of a debate where only reasons are accepted, and where the parties are agreed that the best argument will win, according to shared criteria.*

*On the other end of the continuum, we find attitudes that we consider irrational, where, for example, the opposing parties try to end their differences of opinion through the physical elimination of the adversary.*

### The Satanic Verses

A recent case which on first sight could be analyzed as an example of a difference of opinion where one party proposed resolving the conflict by assassinating the other, is that of the Ayatollah Jomeini, who put a price on the head of Salman Rushdie.

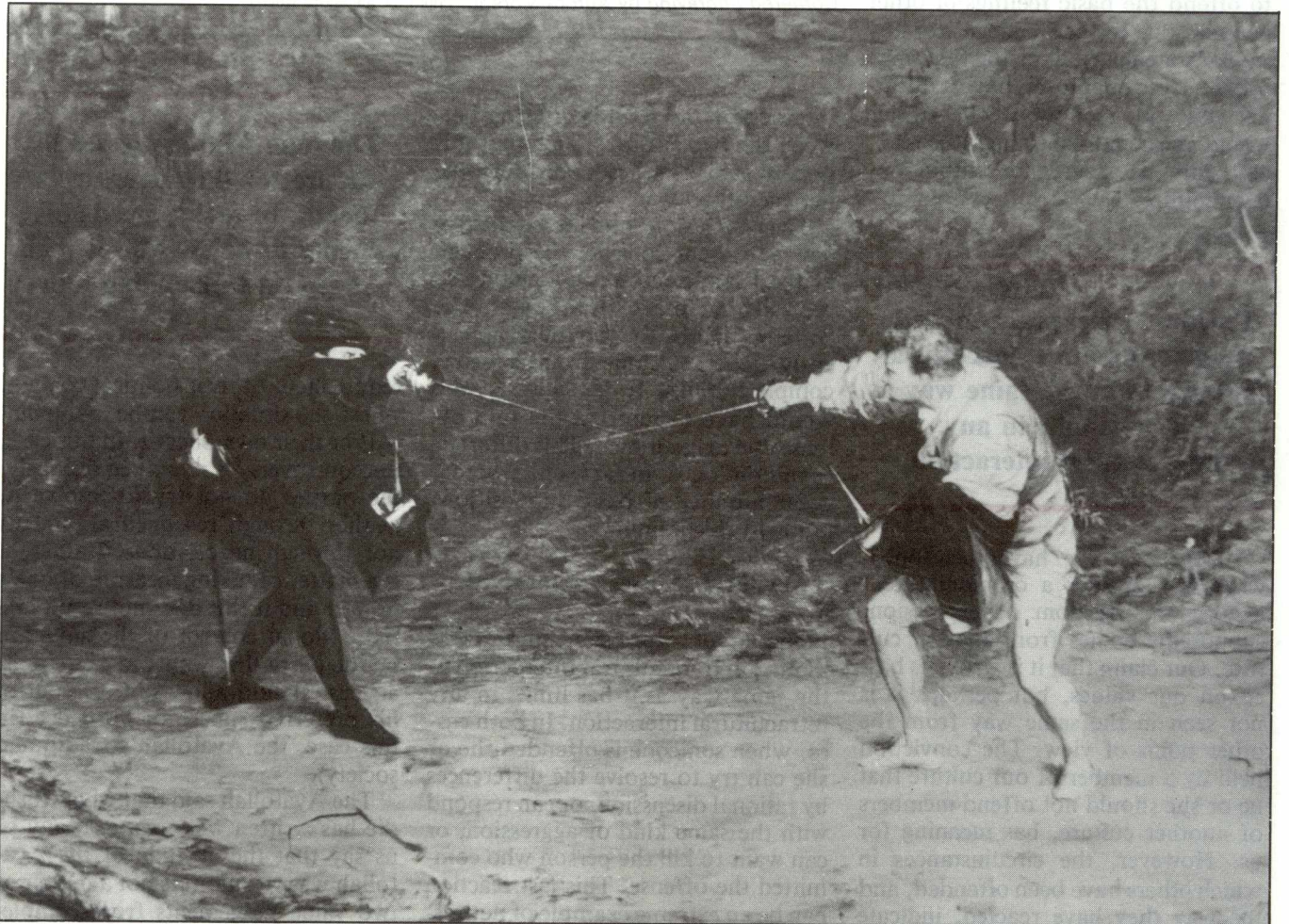
If we make an effort to *understand* the Ayatollah's action, we will probably manage to comprehend that a fundamentalist Moslem put a price on the head of someone who, in his opinion had offended him, or offended an entire population because of

its basic beliefs. But, can we justify or condemn him? An important current of opinion in the Western world has said that we cannot justify him and we must condemn him—but why? I believe that the basic reply is because it is wrong, fundamentally wrong, according to our values, that is, according to the values of a culture which we can vaguely call Western—to assassinate people, whatever the motive be; and besides, as it limits freedom of expression (especially in such a radical and violent way), it violates our fundamental values and beliefs.

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**In attitudes we consider irrational, opposing parties try to end their differences through the physical elimination of the adversary**

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Sword and dagger fight by John Pettie (1839-1893). Photo by Alejandra Novoa

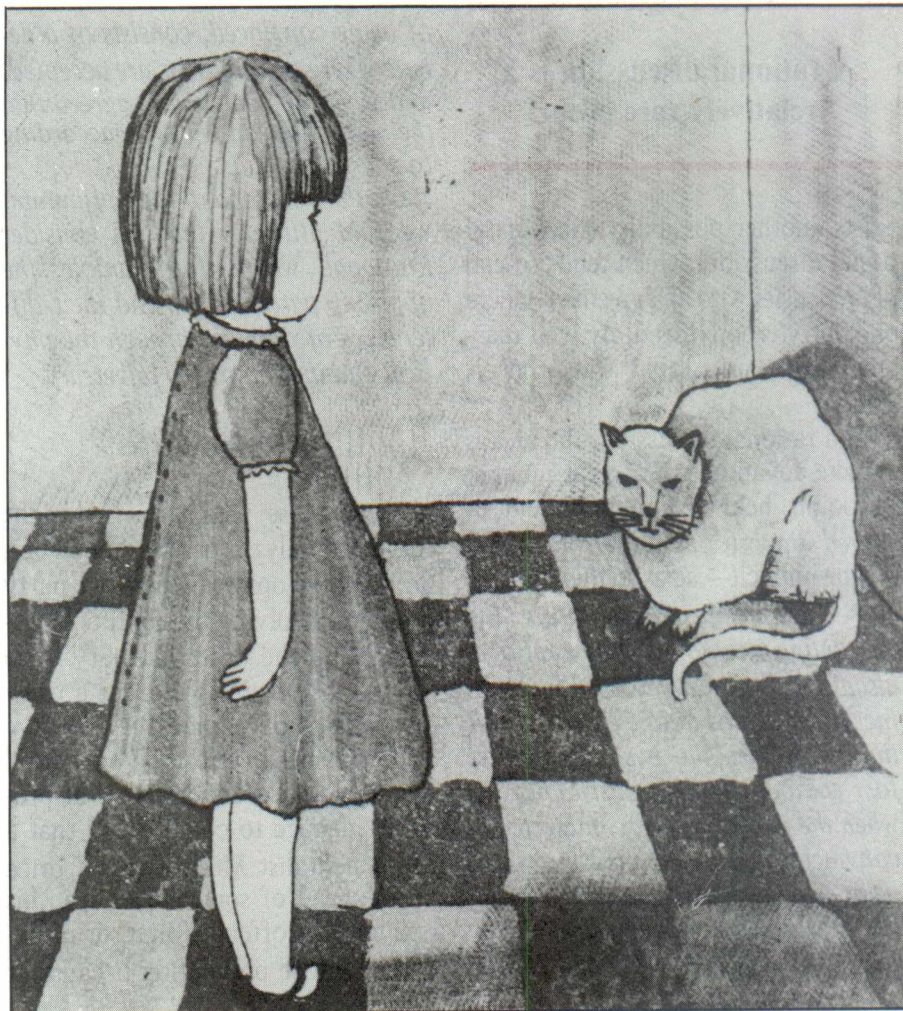
But it should be clear that neither can we condemn him, because any judgement would take into account the Ayatollah's reasons for proposing Rushdie's death—a proposal that we consider criminal, but which he judged the due punishment for someone who breaks established laws (in *his* context). Our condemnation of the Ayatollah, or of his actions, is internal to our culture, and therefore he was not obliged to assume our conclusions, or to follow our rules and laws. The justification and condemnation would seem to be relative to the principles, rules, values, basic beliefs and metaphysical conceptions of each society or culture.

**Any Condemnation is Based on Cultural Values**

Thus, a declaration in the sense that “we condemn restrictions on the freedom of expression”, especially if this involves the threat to kill (which would condemn the Ayatollah), but which at the same time asserts that “we lament that this freedom be used to offend the basic feelings of other peoples, due to their beliefs” (or any similar statement), implying that those other people or cultures have a different conception of the world, (which would mean admonishing Rushdie), can only be significant within our own culture.

**Freedom of expression finds itself limited in transcultural interaction in the same way as it has limits in any intracultural interaction**

In the case we have mentioned, what we consider a criminal threat against the freedom of expression, supposedly comes from another culture. Our claim that it is wrong is based on our values, but perhaps it is not seen in the same way from the other point of view. The conviction held by a member of our culture that he or she should not offend members of another culture, has meaning for us. However, the circumstances in which others have been offended, and the way they have reacted, indicate that the other culture is not so strange to us. Rather, there is an intense



Cornered Engraving by Aurora Moreno. Photo by Alejandra Novoa

interaction and a wide crossing between the two cultures, such that it is impossible to draw a clear dividing line between them.

The conclusion seems to be that today we cannot consider the problem of the Islamic culture as a culture so radically different from ours. The “offense” felt by the Ayatollah apparently does not come from someone completely alien to his culture, who would have committed the said offense due to ignorance. This difference of opinion is, in fact, one where a great number of basic suppositions are held in common.

**Political Motives are Involved**

Freedom of expression finds itself limited in transcultural interaction in the same way as it has limits in any intracultural interaction. In both cases, when someone is offended, he or she can try to resolve the differences by rational discussion, or can respond with the same kind of aggression, or can want to kill the person who committed the offense. This last reaction can be an extreme example of neurosis, or the impulse might be due to what the offended party considers a

**The man who expresses his desire for the adversary's death, in reality needs his enemy to be alive so he can keep on threatening him**

requirement of their political context, where the situation can be manipulated for their own benefit. In this case, the controversy is not taken seriously, the parties do not try to resolve it, neither through reasoned arguments nor through negotiations. Rather, it is a matter of taking measure of one's power: and if this does not result in a more global control of the situation by the party that wants to exercise it, at least should allow him to control his preferred sphere of influence (in this case, the Ayatollah's traditional society).

The Ayatollah said that what Rushdie has written was *wrong*. Many of us say that the attitude of the Ayatollah was wrong. It is not a matter of two value judgements from completely incompatible positions. It is a matter of a confrontation of two value



judgements in a complex web which could be resolved through the use of reason with all the elements held in common. But this could only take place on the end of the continuum where the opposing parties opt for rational debate. On the other extreme, as we saw, stands the age-old idea of killing the adversary with the aim of ending the discrepancy for good and for all. In the middle, there are interests for the political control of the situation. This, Ayatollah Jomeini had in common with many persons in all parts of the world. This discourse, after all, is one we can understand. In this interaction, the desire for the adversary's death and the interest in end-

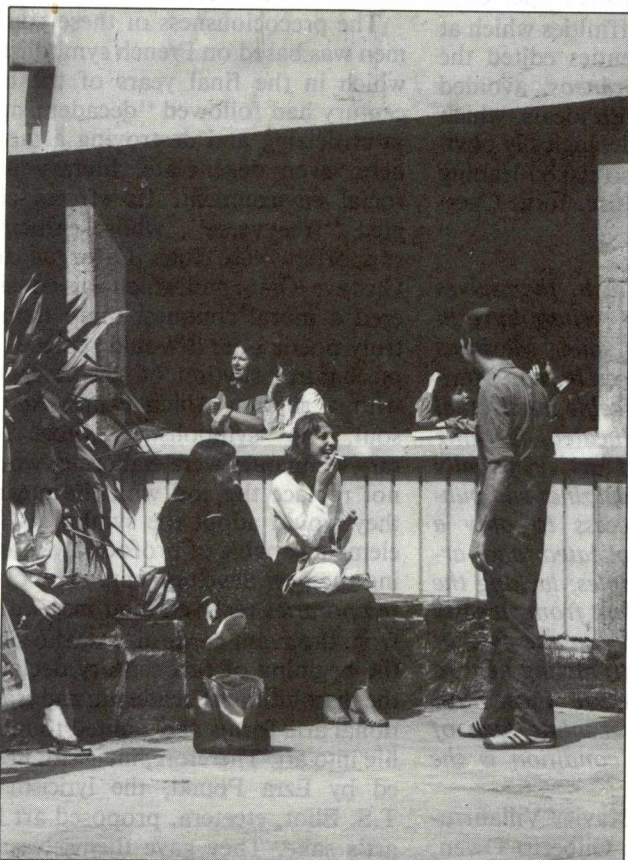
**The Ayatollah said that what  
Rushdie has written was  
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was wrong**

ing the discrepancy does not seem to be genuine: on the contrary, the man who expressed that desire needs his enemy to be alive, so he can keep on threatening him, and by means of these threats, achieve the realization of other interests (such as the control of his community).

The different groups contending in distinct political arenas know this perfectly well, but fortunately most of the time generally only reach the level of insults, not always threatening murder; on other occasions the opponents know how to negotiate, and sometimes there are even cases—unfortunately very few—in which the adversaries discuss their differences rationally. □

This article was first published in the September 1989 issue of the magazine *Universidad de México*.

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# THE TYRANNY OF POETRY

Juan Luis Campos

*Pero en mi lecho, solo  
dulcemente, sin recuerdos, sin  
voz, siento que la poesía no ha  
salido de mí.*

Salvador Novo

But in my bed, alone, sweetly,  
without memories, without voice,  
I feel that poetry has not left me.

Before Salvador Novo López was thirty years old he was already an important poet. He was a tireless writer, although he defined himself as the opposite of a man of letters, and dedicated himself to other tasks: essay, theater, translation, history, criticism, journalism and even chronicles.

Vocation requires abandon. All poets have experienced the tyranny of poetry. The poetic is created when feelings are combined with intuition. Feelings that have not only been experienced but also contemplated and shaped in the mind; intuition captures the depth of things, beyond intellectual pragmatism. It does not organize the world, it gives it an esthetic and personal meaning. So, this intuition must necessarily conflict with other uneven types of intuition. What lives on in the mind of a reader is not pure literature, but living words. But a personality with this type of impulses requires the influences of other personalities to from its esthetics.

The *Group without a group*, as Villarrutia called it, took upon itself

## The Group without a group. formed at the end of the 1920's, aimed to modernize Mexican literature

the task of modernizing Mexican literature. The group of strong personalities and profound affinities which at the close of the twenties edited the magazine *Contemporáneos*, avoided the triviality of art with ideals, which eventually becomes ideologically obvious politics. They also risked leaning towards Western culture. Jorge Cuesta summarizes:

*Those who distinguish themselves among this group of writers have in common with all the young Mexicans of their age: having been born in Mexico; growing up in a feeble intellectual milieu; being self-educated; learning about literature and art principally through European magazines and publications; having access to only a few, isolated, complicated and arguably brilliant examples; lacking the company of great talent from an early age, which is decisive in the fate of youth; and, above all, having near to them a body of literature whose most basic quality is an absolute lack of criticism. This last condition is the most important one.*

The objective of Xavier Villarrutia, Carlos Pellicer, Gilberto Owen, Jorge Cuesta, Jaime Torres Bodet, Enrique González Rojo, Bernardo Ortiz de Montellano, José Gorostiza

and Salvador Novo was to bring Mexican literature up to date, but without making chauvinistic, and therefore ideological, concessions. Literary discipline. Again, Cuesta:

*"It is wonderful the way Pellicer deceives our landscape, the way Ortiz de Montellano deceives our folklore, the way Salvador Novo deceives our customs, the way Xavier Villarrutia deceives our literature."*

The precociousness of these young men was based on French symbolism, which in the final years of the last century had followed "decadentism" in criticizing and destroying a mediocre, even degenerate, literary and social environment. Its efforts created "free verse", whose principal supporters were Jules Laforgue and Gustave Khan, and which was considered a moral conquest more than a truly poetic one: it would replace the mechanical rhythm of classic meter with a rhythm which expressed the soul. The "symbolists", whose literary techniques were elaborate, would not replace the end with the means: they would adopt the symbol as the element capable of profoundly directing the new developments. The *Contemporaries* received their inspiration from the avant garde artists who since the beginning of this century declared the dissolution of academic and traditional arts forms and wanted to make life into art. Therefore, imagism, headed by Ezra Pound, the lyricism of T.S. Eliot, etcetera, proposed art for art's sake. They gave themselves up to the passion of art at a time when in the political arena the passion for arms still burned.

Poet, essayist and collaborator for the newspaper *El Nacional*

## The Contemporaries wanted to make life into art; they gave themselves up to the passion of art

### The Tradition of Change

Art is paradoxical. When a group of artists wants our art to grow out of its provincialism, but has not manifested its own esthetics, they prefer to criticize the contemporary poets acidly (*Antología de la poesía mexicana moderna*, edited by Jorge Cuesta) and establish their own definition of desirable poetry. Following other paths, individual artists and groups of artists tried to reflect the revolutionary spirit and provide culture to a huge population which did not even know how to read. Today we can still see the bolshevik pompousness that the muralists (Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros, principally) painted on the square kilometers of walls of public buildings. Of course, there is also art. All artists are fighters and their strongest weapons are their tongue and spittle. The conflicts of the twenties and thirties demonstrate the tortuousness of cultural ventures.

In real art there is no "left" or "right". *Contemporaries* was not a politically active group, although its members worked in government offices for quite a while. A true Mexican tradition. Not even those artists who belonged to the Communist Party avoided these posts. Nevertheless, the creation of new esthetic values is an act of independence from the comfortable, existing tradition. *Contemporaries* were part of what Octavio Paz has called the tradition of change. The *Contemporaries* defined their tastes: they followed the daring attitude of Ramón López Velarde, whom they knew personally, and whose subtle eroticism, deployed with rapid adjectives, contradicted by a religious vein that called for attendance at twelve o'clock mass, leaves one's soul in anguish; they also appreciated the disciplined verse of Salvador Díaz Mirón—who was in fact a collaborator of the dictatorial government of Victoriano Huerta, assassin of constitutional President Francisco I. Madero—especially in his last phase, without a doubt one of the highest points in the rich tradition of Mexi-

can poetry. Díaz Mirón influenced this tradition both in form and content, but perhaps most in the proposal:

His esthetics, with a discipline that was extraordinarily strict as well as personal, were beyond the reach of that type of imitator who tries to satisfy himself, and looks for quick success, or at least, a less difficult path towards fame.

That is how these young men described his work in 1928 in the above mentioned anthology. The *group without a group* wrote about the never-changing qualities of the spirit of man in the timeless medium of poetry, with stark images, metaphysical contents, meticulous verses, and a lyricism equal to that of the English and French poets of the era. They wanted liberty in verse.

### Heart-rending Lyricism

The difficulties of understanding the program of the individualists grouped in *Contemporaries* forced its critics to simplify their criticisms attacking the sexual preferences of some of these writers. Faced with extreme forms of machismo, the modern *art purists* flaunted their homosexuality. Novo was an expert at this. His Europeanized taste in clothing, his plucked eyebrows and long fingers adorned with extravagant rings, all corroborated the impertinence of his tongue and his verses. At the same time, this shamelessness only demonstrated the



Salvador Novo in 1949. Photo by Héctor García/Foto Press

difficulty of making love endure. This conflict formed the two paths of his poetry: lyricism and satire.

The versatility of Novo's poetry is demonstrated in the skillful use of classic meters, especially the sonnet. He used this form with ease in his satires, because rhyming and using a rhythmic structure make the venom flow in the ear's memory. But Novo also used free verse, which should eliminate rhymes (even internal ones) and avoid metric repetitions. Free is the least free of verses, said T.S. Eliot.

In 1920, when he was still almost a child, at sixteen of age, Novo published a pair of poems influenced by Guillaume Apollinaire in the newspaper of the National Preparatory School. These adolescent poems resist time. At twenty he published his *20 poems*, in which he introduced the sound of day-to-day life, his scorn for mass movements, uncommon images and a preference for circumstantial things over eternal qualities. At the same time, he used irony. Novo resorted to urban imagery (as used by the artists who were part of Stridentism, led by Manuel Maples Arce-whose *Inferior Scaffolding* Novo renamed *Inferior Scaffolding*-who tried to be the Mexican avant garde of the twenties) but with the dexterity that characterized his poetry. These poems, according to Novo himself:

create a new form which has liberated itself from the shapes in which my voice acquired, nevertheless, a lasting outline. These poems could be hung like pictures, above all they are visual.

**The Group without a group wrote about the never-changing qualities of the spirit of man in the timeless medium of poetry, with stark images, metaphysical contents and meticulous verse**

In 1933 he published two of his most important works of poetry: *Mirror*, in which he remembers his childhood, and *New Love*, a pinnacle of Mexican lyricism of this century. Novo says, to the critic Emmanuel Carballo:

In *New Love*, passion is unrestrained and feelings have reached a new



Salvador Novo with the young writer Carlos Monsiváis in 1967. Photo by Héctor García/Foto Press

Nevertheless, our poet used satire frequently and with a particular cruelty. Novo is our Quevedo.

Satire expresses the sharp opinion of a subtle subjectiveness. In satire we find not only wit laced with poison but also criticism based on art. Novo aimed satirical poems at his enemies, at his friends and even turned his pen on himself. His shamelessness did not lose opportunities to make puns or double meanings, or refrain from invading his victims' privacy.

Novo dedicated the following sonnet to Diego Rivera, who painted the *Contemporaries* in the Secretariat of Public Education and whose presence in national art circles was intimidating during this era:

Cuando no quede muro sin tu huella,  
recinto ni salón sin tu pintura,  
exposición que escape a tu censura,  
libro sin tu martillo ni tu estrella,  
dejarás las ciudades por aquella  
suave, serena, mágica dulzura,  
que el rastrojo te ofrece en su  
verdura  
y en sus hojas la alfalfa que  
descuella.  
Retirarás al campo tu cordura,  
y allí te mostrará naturaleza  
un oficio mejor que la pintura.

Dispón el viaje ya. La lluvia  
empieza.  
Tórnese tu agrarismo agricultura,  
que ya puedes arar con la cabeza.

*When there is no longer a wall  
without your mark;  
nor a room or hall you have not  
painted,  
an exhibition that escapes your  
censorship, nor book without your  
hammer or your star,  
you will leave the cities for that  
soft, serene, magic sweetness,  
that the pasture offers you in its  
greenness  
and its shining alfalfa leaves.*

*You will take your  
wisdom to the country  
and there nature will  
show you  
a better occupation  
than painting.  
Make the trip now.  
It is starting to rain.  
Turn your agrarianism into  
agriculture, for now you know  
how to plow with your head.*

maturity. It contains an agreement (but not harmony) between life and its artistic expression. These poems are the fresh, immediate, direct experience of what they are expressing: they are not reconstructions of a state of mind or experiences. For me, this is important. When it was not worth exploring this subject in the way I do here (I got old and ugly), I stopped writing love poems.

The precociousness of this poet was based on his insolence. But he gives us a heart-rending lyricism with corresponding forms that are equally heart-rending:

Tú, yo mismo, seco como un viento  
derrotado  
que no pudo sino muy brevemente  
sostener en sus brazos una hoja  
que arrancó de los árboles,  
*You, myself, dry like a defeated  
wind  
which could only very briefly hold  
in its arms a leaf that it tore from  
the trees*

And Novo ends with a concise and tender sadness from which there is no relief:

Lloro porque eres tú para mi duelo  
Y ya te pertenezco en el pasado.  
*I cry because for me you are mourning  
and I belong to you already in the  
past*

Now that they are not lovers any more, they belong to a place beyond physical bodies, in a world that is definitive and timeless: memory.

### Novo was skillful in the use of classic meters, especially the sonnet, but he also used free verse

#### Satirical Verses

Lyricism presumes the individualization of the poet. It is no longer the bard giving voice to the multitude that fights and dreams for and of their gods. It is no longer the epic. With lyricism, the poet admits his own existence as a character, he is one who feels and lives between the margins of the page. Romanticism aggravated this subjectivity. And when the avant garde tried to achieve the complete subversion of art, they did so under the influence of romanticism. The post-avant-garde, disenchanted with this century, picked up the pieces and took shelter in permanent themes. In the end, the lyric poet wants his emotional state to be exemplary, of value: he offers himself in the hope that he will be eternalized in others.

In the nineteen-thirties Novo published a variety of books of poetry that were frankly provocative. In a time of nationalistic fervor, *Seamen Rhymes and Never ever* [partly written in English] were published as well as his *Proletarian Poems*, in which he mocks revolutionary regimes. In this way Novo confronts his enemies in the government and political parties.

Salvador Novo criticized the fact that this great artist governed the art world from a leftist position that owed so much to the bourgeois state. He also criticized the commitment to an agrarian reform that came down to more paperwork than actual land reform. He reminded Rivera that his previous wife, Guadalupe Marín, a matron of the arts, changed husbands: Jorge Cuesta, member of the *group without a group*, was her new partner. There are numerous poems like this one, in a variety of meters. Octavio Paz sums up *this* Novo very well, unimaginable for those of us who saw him on television in the early seventies.

*He had a lot of talent and a lot of venom, few ideas and no morals. Full of deadly adjectives but not so many scruples, he attacked the weak and flattered the powerful; he did not serve a belief or an idea but instead his passions and his interests; he did not write with blood but with shit.*

His lyric poetry described the itineraries of love. His social portraits were written with the same acid used in engravings by Goya. There is no doubt that his modernity, and above all his sarcastic humor, came from reading North American authors like Edgar Lee Masters in the first *Spoon River Anthology* and Carl Sandburg; also Europeans like Oscar Wilde and Jean Cocteau. His self-mocking in his lyric poetry and his satire proves to us that he was a poet who knew about love and verses. His cynicism is delightful; disillusioned with the world but *bon vivant*. The rest of his life has the same qualities: as an old man he covered his baldness with a Beatle's wig; as a public employee he wrote sonnets with biting criticism and at the same time sang the praises of the president. He was a great poet who could not resist the gratification of seeing, while he was still alive, his name hung on the corner of his own house. A poet who reduced his poetic constants to the circumstances, humor and desolation.

**Novo said he stopped writing love poems when he got old and ugly**

Novo enjoyed cooking, and did more than write about it; he had his own restaurant in Coyoacán, in the southern part of Mexico City. On the same location he had his theater: The Chapel. He wrote theater and patronized it through the National Fine Arts Institute. He was prolific in his chronicles and journalism where he did not spare anyone his praise or criticism. Just one example would be his *Lombardotoledanology*, aimed at the Marxist philosopher and organizer of union corporations such as the Mexican Workers' Confederation during the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas. A great variety of volumes compile his opinions about social life during different presidencies. He wrote memoirs which are practically unknown that refer to his adolescence and dare to go into detail about his sexual tastes. He wrote travel logs, most importantly *Return Ticket*, of which José Gorostiza says:

*Novo overcomes sin and invents the art of being reborn on each stop of his itinerary. He does not travel, he transmigrates. He does not transplant himself, he sows himself... His argument is travel, moving from place to place.*

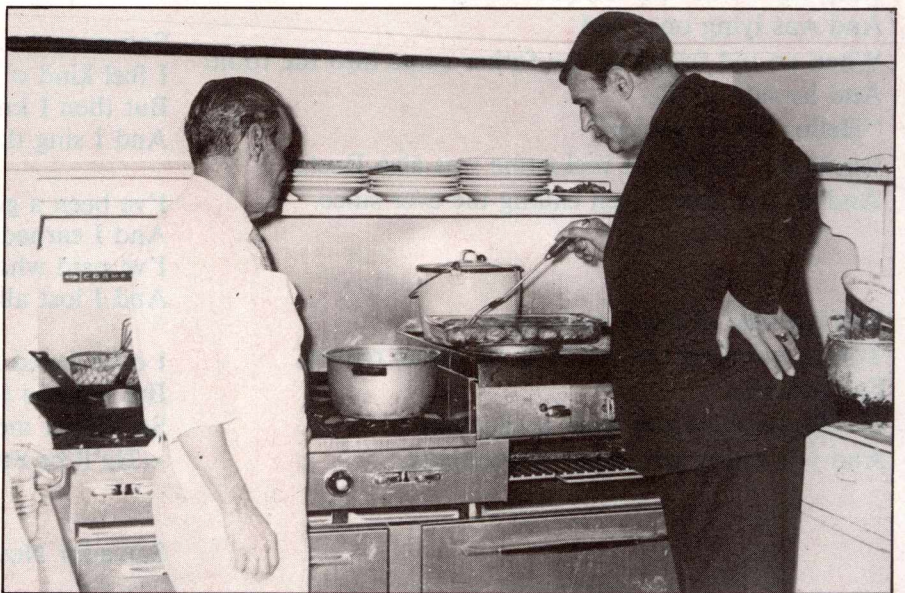
Our poet wrote charming, skillful prose, with a diversity taken from his poetry, without complications, direct and full of irony. During the term of Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, whose name the descendants of those sacrificed on October 2 in 1968 will never forget, Novo became the official historian. He

was named chronicler of Mexico City, a city that was already beginning to overflow. He wrote the history of times gone by: the city of a century ago, his neighborhood of Coyoacán, he remembered boulevards and avenues that no longer exist. He did not criticize the president for the massacre of the students. In his youth he was a dandy who scandalized "upright citizens"; in his old age he acquiesced to official policies that were removed from art. But in his soul he knew that all poetry had not gone out of him although:

*poetry written for others—a spontaneous flower— has gone, and in its place, the useless, bitter fruit of daily prose... I take refuge in it, now that I dare not tackle the other.*

His poetry had a few surprises even after his youthful passion had faded. Bureaucracy swallows us up mercilessly, and Novo was no exception. But the richness of his poetry rises above the sea of paperwork of the official Novo. In any case, he also suffered the tyranny of poetry, that is, the tyranny of that which is most human. □

**He was Chronicler of Mexico City during the government of Gustavo Díaz Ordaz at the end of the 1960's**



Novo established a restaurant and published a book on "The Gastronomic History of Mexico City". Photo by Héctor García/Foto Press

## From *Seamen Rhymes*/1933

II

“Take a man like myself—  
 See these hands?— They’re dirty.  
 This finger is all torn from my work.  
 You know —if I were on land  
 —see those tubes and screws and engines?  
 My job would be to keep them fit.  
 That is what I do on the ship.  
 If some passenger loses his trunk keys  
 I make one to fit  
 And the bathrooms, and the waterpipes, and all.

I work for a living.  
 But I’m no socialist or bolshevist or anything  
 I just go along the best I can  
 ’cause I think the most money goes to the most brains  
 And since I only get 55 a month  
 It must be that I’m only worth 55.  
 ’t ain’t much, is it?  
 But still I think if I’m not happy with that money  
 Somebody must believe it is a lot of dough  
 And wish he had it.

My name is Neville,  
 Neville Charles Rogers, but they call me Buster  
 ’n account of my father.  
 You know, during the war  
 They say I was nine months of age  
 And was lying on a bed  
 When an old friend of my father came into the room  
 And he said to me  
 “Hello, Buster junior”  
 ’cause my old man’s nickname was also Buster  
 And so they have been calling me ever since.

You are one of them passengers  
 You’re traveling on this boat for some reason,  
 For business  
 Or just because you want a vacation  
 And you enjoy yourselves thoroughly.

We see you at night  
 Dancing on deck  
 Or having swell drinks at the bar  
 Or may be you stare at us  
 Because you wonder  
 About real life  
 And men who work for a living  
 As we do.

I also like a good drink  
 I can have it in my room when work is finished  
 And I can play cards  
 Or read stories  
 But I have to do all that in the same little room  
 And I keep on doing the same things everyday  
 On this same ship  
 And getting 55 every month.

I have a brother in New York  
 He’s married and he has a child  
 But he has no job now.

Well —he has a home  
 They must be happy  
 I’m glad to share my 55 with them  
 And whenever we get to port  
 I take the child some toy for a present  
 Because he must be happy.

Sometimes at night  
 I feel kind o’ lonesome  
 But then I know some very old seamen rhymes  
 And I sing them.

I’ve been a good fellow  
 And I earned all I spent  
 I’ve paid what I’ve borrowed  
 And I lost all I lent.

I once loved a woman  
 But it came to an end.  
 So I’ll get me a damn dog  
 —He’ll be my friend.

Salvador Novo



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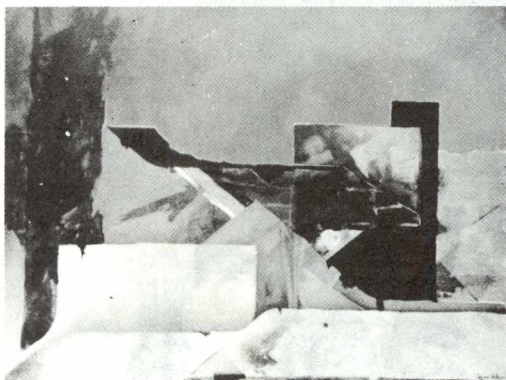
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# NOSTALGIA FOR EL INDIO

Fernando Fuentes

This biography of Emilio Fernández, one of Mexico's most famous film directors of the so-called Golden Age of Mexican film, was written with the analytic professionalism and historic vision characteristic of Emilio García Riera.

In his detailed revision of *El Indio* Fernández' cinematographic work, the author provides a critical evaluation of the film maker's production, and generally refers exactly to his sources, be these material from newspapers, magazines or books, or testimonies of those who lived or worked with *El Indio* Fernández during his artistic career and whose testimony sheds light on the film director's private life.

Emilio García Riera, author of more than ten books about the cinema, dedicates this text to a study of one of the greatest figures of Mexican cultural nationalism; a vigorous film creator who, in spite of his numerous weaknesses, managed to mark his movies with his own unmistakable style, a remarkable achievement in a film world which tends to reduce those who should be creators to the mere level of doers.

Emilio Fernández has been classified by some film buffs as the best film maker in classic Mexican cine. When we see the movies he made in the 1940's we can appreciate that these are poetic creations; his sentimentality is overwhelming but at the same time, lyrical, and his visual ca-

capacity creates a clear photographic identity whether he portrays the Mexican countryside or the urban scene.

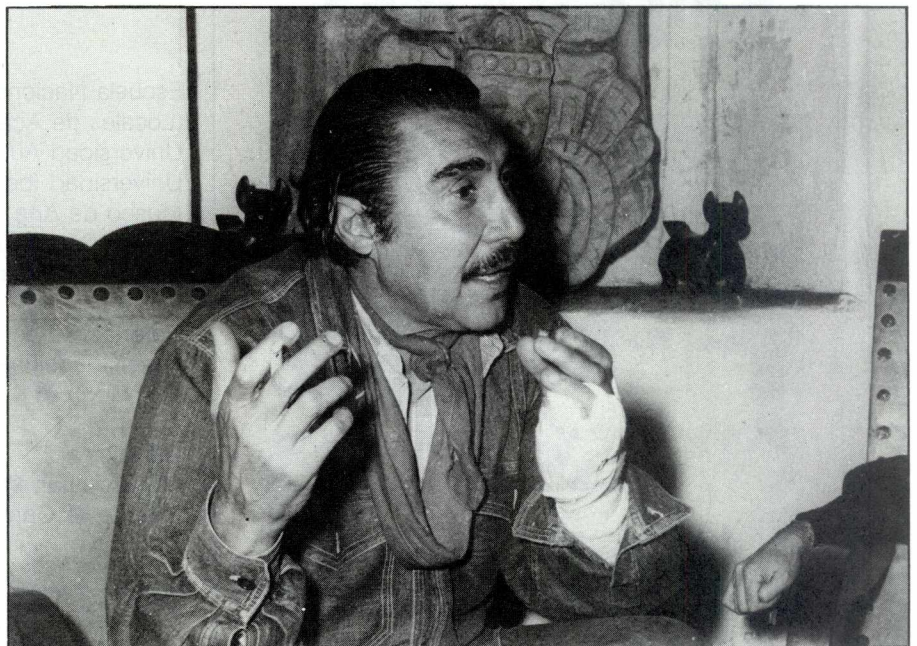
All the solemn moments in his films are impregnated by a nostalgia for the Revolution on the nationalist level, and by nostalgia for virginity on an emotional level, whether the film is set in the violence of the provinces or in urban cabarets or burdels. The rhythm of his stories is marked by impulses of a energetic sensibility and an admirable artistic capacity.

*El Indio* Fernández is a poet of pure and solidary ideals, a figure become legend.

## Origins, Revolutions, Emigration

Emilio Fernández, known in the film world as *El Indio*, was born in what is now a ghost town but was part of a mining zone called Mineral de Hondo, in the municipality of Sabinas, Coahuila. He was the only child of Sara Romo, a Kikapoo Indian, and of Emilio Fernández Garza.

He participated in the Revolution as a boy, or at least, he dedicated himself to taking mental photos: "I had what all boys dream about: a pistol, a horse and a battleground. These were my toys and the revolutionaries were my playmates. I grew up in



Descendant of the Kikapoo Indians, he was proud of his indian blood. Photo by Héctor García/Foto Press



the Revolution. At ten years of age, they made me a soldier, that's how I grew up. I studied in one school and another, from here to there. I visited all the cardinal points. From corporal, I became first captain." (Quote from García Riera.)

According to *El Indio*, he fought on the side of Pancho Villa's troops under the command of General Felipe Angeles, who was famous for his knowledge of artillery and for his moral and political integrity. *El Indio* entered Military College in 1920, and became part of the founding team of the Military School's aeronautics division.

"My greatest pride in life is having participated in the Revolution, which left me four wounds earned during armed actions," relates Fernández, adding that in one battle he was taken prisoner in Puebla and condemned to 20 years prison. Afterwards he was transferred to a prison in Tlatelolco in Mexico City, and he was able to escape three years later, and fled towards the United States, where he lived for nine years, working in various agricultural jobs.

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### **El Indio Fernández is a poet of pure and solidary ideals, a figure become legend**

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#### **In Hollywood**

He returned to Mexico only to go back to the United States a few months later, and headed for Chicago. Here, he saved a young German woman (Olga Freud) from drowning in a spontaneous act that brought him eventually to Hollywood. It turned out that Olga Freud was the lover of a well known gangster, "Baby Face", who, in gratitude, invited Fernández to eat and drink in a first class hotel in Chicago, where the cine's first "latin lover", Rodolfo Valentino, was staying. Valentino, impressed to see *El Indio* dance a perfect tango, invited him to a drink, and offered to take him to Hollywood. Valentino was on tour with his wife, Natasha Ramnova, and they went from Chicago to New York, but it was precisely there, in New York, where Valentino died. His body was taken from New York to Hollywood, passing through Chi-



With his daughter in 1951. Photo by Héctor García/Foto Press

cago on the way, and *El Indio* joined the funeral cortege to accompany Valentino to his final resting place.

This was how *El Indio* arrived in Hollywood in the 1920's, and there he met various people from Latin America, including Alfonso Sánchez Tello, Chano Ureta, Ramón Pereda, Roberto Gavaldón, the Cuban René Cardona, the Chilean Tito Davison and Gilberto Martínez Solares, all of whom later became directors of Mexican cine. *El Indio* began to work with them in Hollywood in the film industry, as extra, double, in secondary roles and as dancer, for example, in *Flying down to Rio*, (Thornton Free-

land, 1933), with the Mexican actress Dolores del Río.

He received his film education in Hollywood: exaltation for the movies of Serguei Mijailovich Eisenstein, devotion for the star system, faith in John Ford for his methods of historic reconstruction, and the conviction that melodrama is the best means to transmit the pulse of life.

#### **Return to Mexico**

Before returning to his native land, *El Indio* posed as model for the statuette used in the Oscar Awards, given by the recently founded Motion Pictures

Academy. This was an act of symbolic importance in his film career, and it was thanks to his athletic and well-proportioned physique that he was "immortalized" in the statue designed by Cedric Gibbons and sculpted by George Stanley.

Back in Mexico in 1934, Emilio Fernández began to work in the national film industry as actor in *Janitzio* (Carlos Navarro, 1934), a movie considered significant because it began a certain "erotic struggle" with established traditions. Thanks to *Janitzio*, *El Indio* discovered Mexican esthetics: the conquest of nature by the camera, and the taming of the human being by tragedy.

He also worked in films such as *Corazón bandolero* (Raphael J. Sevilla, 1934), *Cruz Diablo* (Fernando de Fuentes, 1934), *Celos* (Arcady Boytler, 1935), *Las mujeres mandan* (Fernando de Fuentes, 1936), *Allá en el rancho grande* (Fernando de Fuentes, 1936), *Almas rebeldes* (Alejandro Galindo, 1936), *Adiós Nicanor* (Rafael E. Portas, 1937), with a script written by *El Indio* himself, and starring him in the main role), *Aquí llegó el valen-*

*tón* (Fernando A. Rivero, 1938), *Los de abajo* (Chano Ureta, 1939), *Juan sin miedo* (Juan José Segura, 1939), *El Charro Negro* (Raúl de Anda, 1940), and *Rancho Alegre* (Raúl de Anda, 1940), among others, in which he worked as director's assistant and script writer as well as actor.

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**All the solemn moments in his films are impregnated by a nostalgia for the Revolution on the nationalist level**

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**His Films**

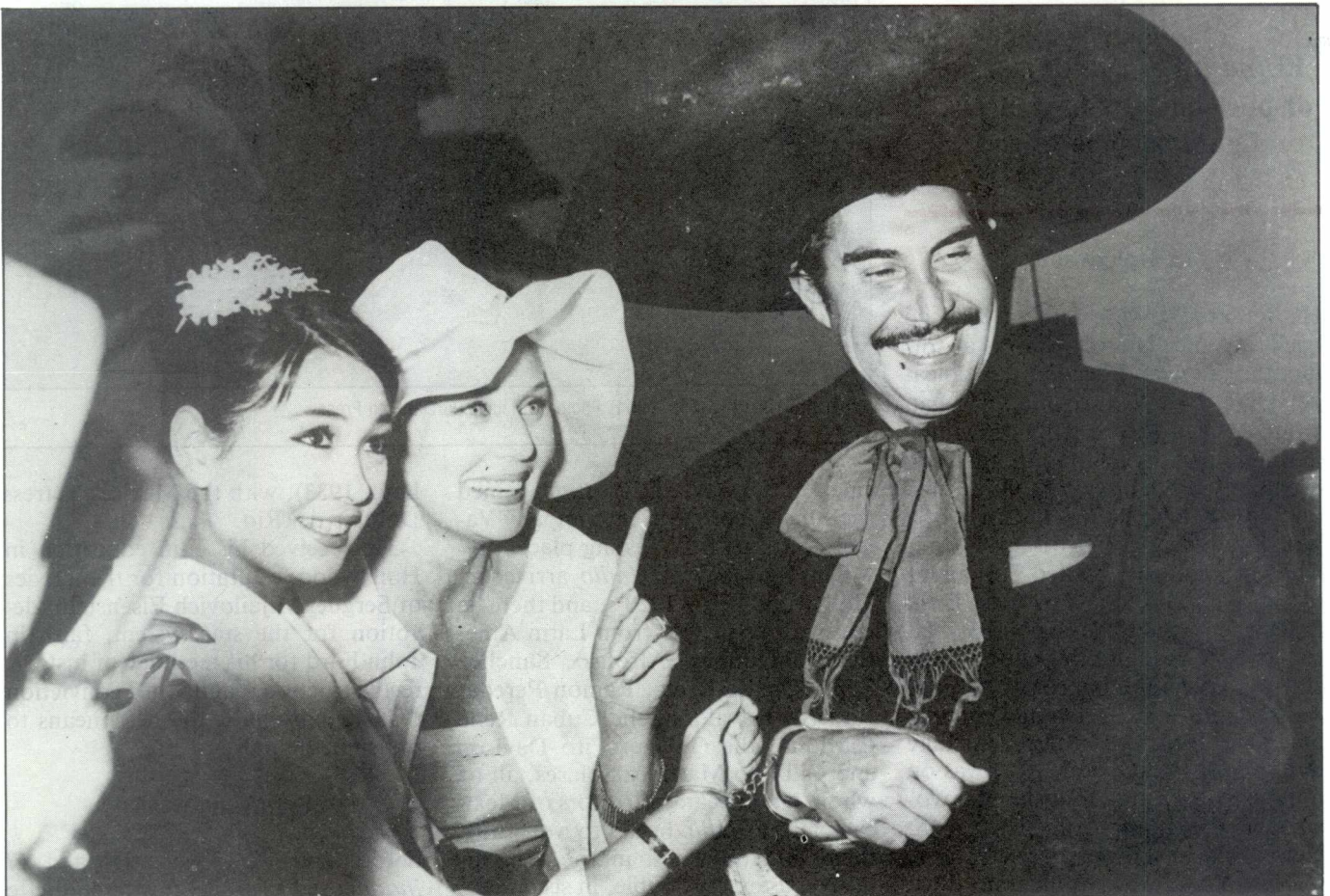
The first film he directed was *La Isla de la Pasión*, with David Silva and Isabela Corona, about the tragic adventures of a Mexican batallion which fought until death to defend the desert island of Clipperton (or of the Passion) in the Pacific Ocean, which belonged to Mexico up to 1931. The film abounds in strong pictur-

esque details and counts with the participation of convicts.

*Soy puro Mexicano*, directed by Fernández in 1942, starred Pedro Armendáriz and David Silva. Here *El Indio* demonstrated that Mexican machismo could be useful to Mexico's allies in the Second World War, but in spite of its patriotic excesses, it was not a box office success.

Emilio Fernández' real film making career began in 1941 with *Flor Silvestre*, film set in the revolution, where for the first time he worked with a cast and collaborators of the best quality and highest prestige in Mexican cine of that epoch: script writer Mauricio Magdaleno, the actors Dolores del Río and Pedro Armendáriz, and, most importantly, the photographer Gabriel Figueroa, who, due to the various movies he filmed with Fernández, won international awards, and who would be considered one of the best, if not *the* best camerographer in the world during the decade of the 40's.

The movies made by *El Indio* express tendencies inspired by Eisenstein, which can especially be appre-



He is remembered as a lover of his country and a defender of Mexican romanticism. Photo by Héctor García/Foto Press

ciated in another film made in 1943, *María Candelaria*, where he worked with the same crew as in *Flor Silvestre*. This story relates the vicissitudes of an indigenous couple from Xochimilco, convincingly acted by Dolores del Río (who was beginning to work in the Mexican film industry after having starred in Hollywood), and Pedro Armendáriz. This movie received world wide acclaim and was awarded prizes in the Cannes Film Festival.

A particular trait of films made by *El Indio* was the frequent use of characters of plebian extraction who portray some "social enigma" and become simple idealized symbols created in the reflection of a romantic image, but totally lacking in ideological force and tending to a demagogical treatment of "national problems". Indigenous themes are treated with all solemnity, with what could be described in ideological terms as a cult to indigenism, to the "eternal values of the native race".

However in *María Candelaria*, the beauty of Figueroa's camera work, combined with the intense poetic climate created by the director, caused general admiration for one of the first productions of a promising school of Mexican cine.

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**"I had what all boys dreamed about: a pistol, a horse and a battleground. These were my toys and the revolutionaries were my playmates"**

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The same group made two more films in 1944 and then did not work together again until 1949. The two films were: *Las abandonadas*, also set in the Revolution, and relating the trials of a heroine who finally succumbs after a life of sacrifices (misery, loneliness, prostitution and illness), and *Bugambilia*, a story set in the Mexico of the beginning of the 19th century.

In 1945, *El Indio* directed *Pepita Jiménez*, based on the Spanish novel by Juan Valera. This first attempt by Fernández to deal with non-Mexican themes, showed his obvious limitations. But in the same year, with the collaboration of Gabriel Figueroa and the actor Pedro Armendáriz,

with María Elena Marquez as the female star, he made what was perhaps his best film, *La Perla*. The story is based on a novel by John Steinbeck, and for the first time, deals with the social problems of the indigenous people in a coherent way without demagoguery, transcending purely picturesque elements. Here, both director and photographer reach their highest levels of artistic excellence; *La Perla* represents the best example of their style and esthetic conceptions.

#### Best Moments

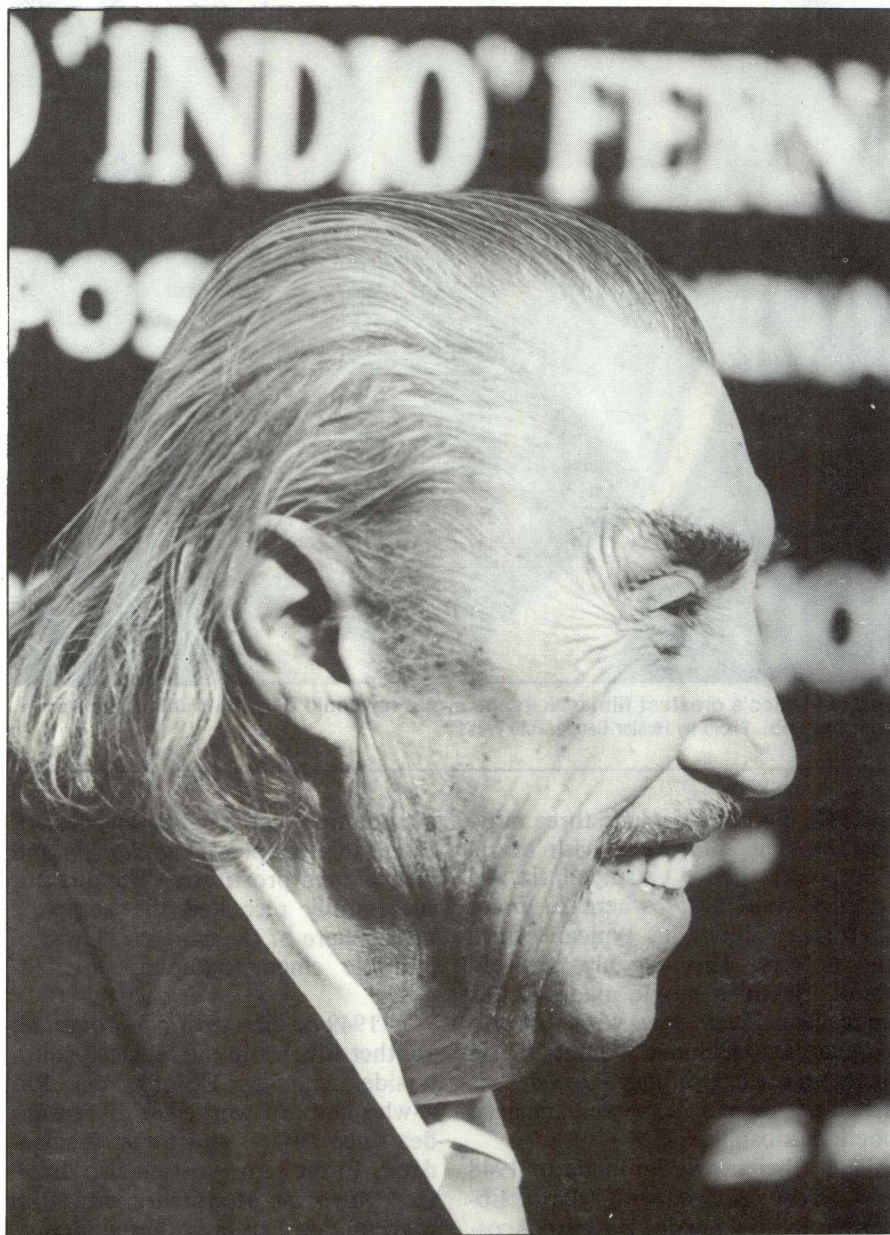
*La Perla* signified the height of Fernández' career. Mexican intellectuals

and other progressive sectors of the country, acclaimed the director and named him the "film champion" the people needed.

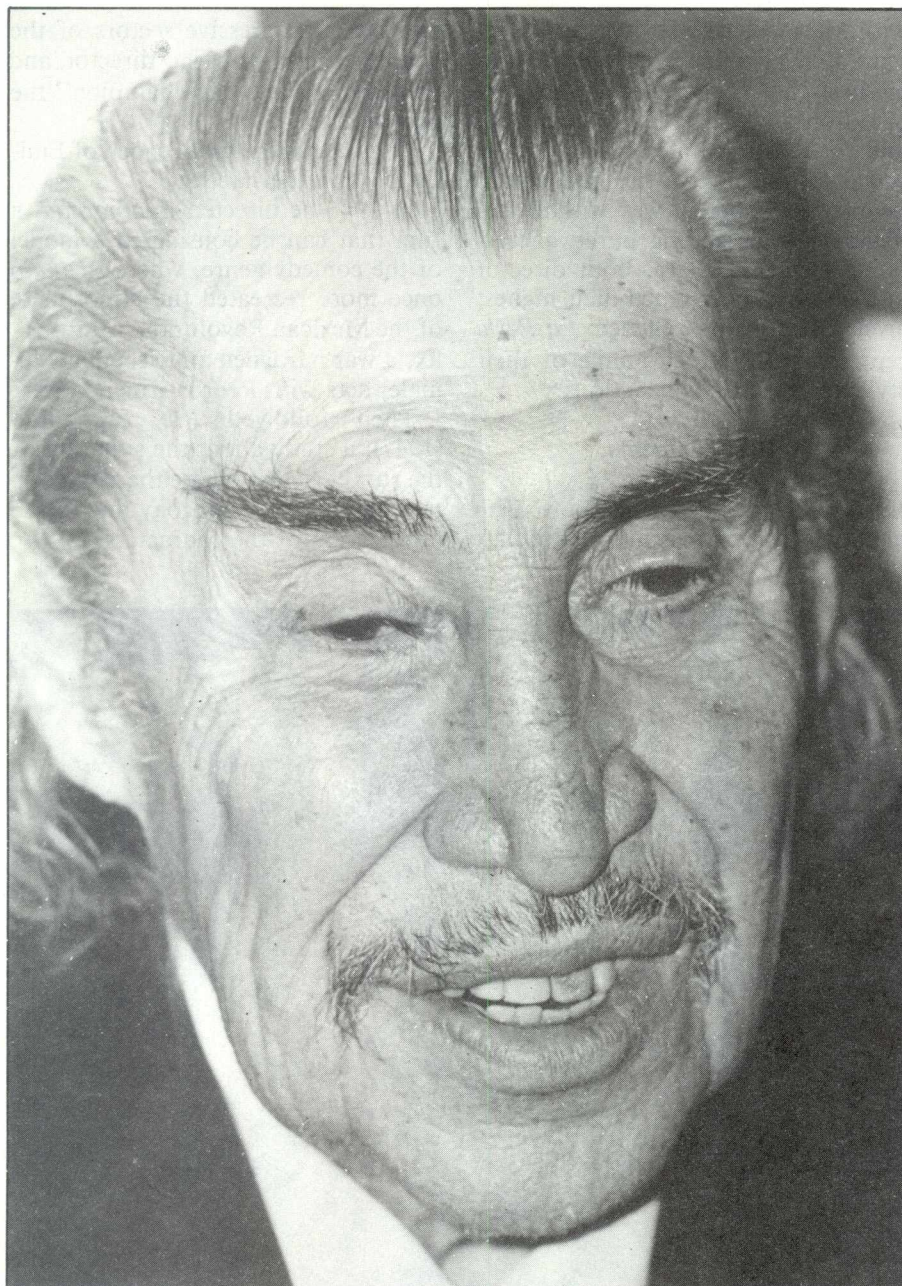
Thus began the great epoch of Emilio *El Indio* Fernández.

In 1946 he directed *Enamorada*, a film that can be considered a model of the comedy genre, where *El Indio* once more recreated the atmosphere of the Mexican Revolution. María Félix, a war hardened and rebellious female, acts with Pedro Armendáriz.

Then followed *Río Escondido* (1947), a study about the situation of the rural teacher, where there is a certain amount of demagoguery due to the idealization of the characters.



"Soy puro mexicano". Photo by Héctor García



One of Mexico's greatest film makers: he swore he would only direct films that came from his soul. Photo by Héctor García/Foto Press

In 1948, Fernández made three movies: the first, *Maclovía*, with María Félix and Pedro Armendáriz, is another rural story where *El Indio* once more shows his typical virtues and defects. This can also be said about the third movie made in this same year: *Pueblerina* with Roberto Cañedo and Columba Domínguez in the main roles, although *Pueblerina* is a better movie with a well-achieved poetic atmosphere.

The other movie he made in 1948 was *Salón México*, with Marga López, Roberto Cañedo, Rodolfo Acosta and Miguel Inclán. Fernández here abandoned the rural setting and located this film in one of the capital's

most famous cabarets: *Salón México*, a veritable temple of the *danzón* and of exploited prostitutes. The director successfully recreated the authentic atmosphere of the cabaret, source of multiple cinematographic possibilities.

In 1949 he directed *La Malquerida*, another film set in the Mexican countryside, starring Dolores del Río—who had not worked with Fernández since 1944—and Pedro Armendáriz. In the same year he also directed *Duelo de Montañas*, with Rita Macedo and Fernando Fernández.

*Un día de vida* (1950), a film about the Revolution with Columba Domínguez and Fernando Fernández, is

the last of the series which best show *El Indio's* talents and marks the end of the era when he appears to have worked with most freedom and confidence. Fernández placed great hopes in this movie, but it was poorly received by the public. It can be said that his decline and fall began at this time.

### The Downfall

In 1950 he directed *Víctimas del pecado*, with Ninón Sevilla, Rodolfo Acosta and Tito Junco, a film which clearly belonged to the then fashionable genre, the suburban melodrama, interspersed with the almost compulsory dances and Afro-West Indian music. This was a thoroughly conventional film which unwittingly included humorous moments.

His next films were typical examples of his style but were practically ignored by the public, in a clear indication of his imminent fall: *Islas Mariás* (1950), with Pedro Infante and Rosaura Revueltas; *Siempre Tuya* (1950), with Jorge Negrete and Gloria Marín; and *La bien amada* (1951) with Roberto Cañedo and Columba Domínguez.

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**Indigenous themes are treated with all solemnity, with what could be described in ideological terms as a cult to indigenism, to the "eternal values of the native race"**

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These failures led *El Indio* to try and gain the confidence of producers by making films to their liking. In this way, in 1951, he directed *Acapulco*, which turned out to be a pathetic attempt to conciliate commercial interests with his own style.

*El Indio* was in disgrace with producers, although he tried desperately to regain his prestige. For Fernández, the decades of the 50's and 60's were full of an almost uninterrupted series of offenses, frustrations and economic difficulties, and brought out his violent nature.

In 1952 he directed *Cuando levanta la niebla*, with Arturo de Córdova and María Elena Marqués. The following year he suffered a great setback in his career with *La Red*,

starring Rossana Podestá and Armando Silvestre. These two characters were confined on a beach, but the director failed to achieve the constant erotic violent tension that he wished to create.

Every film he made afterwards, lacked real importance: *Reportaje* (1953), a movie that with the pretext of linking various stories, counts with the participation of several of Mexico's most popular movie stars of the time: Arturo de Córdova, Dolores del Río, Jorge Negrete, María Félix, Pedro Infante, Pedro Armendáriz, Libertad Lamarque, and others; *El Rapto* (1953) with Jorge Negrete and María Félix, was a film that tried unsuccessfully to repeat the success of *Enamorada*; *La rosa blanca (Momentos de la vida de Martí)* (1953), a biographic film about José Martí, with the classic errors of historic-commemorative cine, and *El Impositor* (1956), with Pedro Armendáriz and Silvia Derbez, and other films.

**Final Years**

During the 60's and until the mid 70's, Emilio Fernández alternated between directing occasional films and acting minor roles in Mexican and foreign films, including some by Sam Peckinpah. He appeared in *Detrás de esa puerta* (1972, directed by Manuel Zeceña), *El Rincón de las Vírgenes* (Alberto Issac, 1974), in 1980 he acted in John Huston's *Under the Volcano*.

**He had the conviction that melodrama is the best means to transmit the pulse of life**

His last works as director were *La Choca* (1973), with Pilar Pellicer and Mercedes Carreño; *Zona Roja* (1975), with Fanny Cano and Armando Silvestre; *México Norte* (1977), with Roberto Cañedo and Patricia Reyes Spindola, and *Erótica* (1978), with Jorge Rivero and Rebeca Silva. All of these were considered unimportant works made by a director who was far from the fame and success he once knew during the so-called Golden Age of Mexican film.

On August 6, 1986, *El Indio* suffered a heart attack and died in Mexico

**For Fernández, the decades of the 50's and 60's were full of an almost uninterrupted series of offenses, frustrations and economic difficulties**

City. He is remembered as a flag bearer of nationalist values, a lover of his country, of the fecundity and fruits of this land and its people, a defender of Mexican romanticism, as

a man who showed the values of tenderness and solidarity with poetic expression in his films, and who made a great contribution to Mexican cine. □

*Emilio Fernández (1904-1986)* by Emilio García Riera.

Edited by the Centro de Investigaciones y Enseñanza Cinematográficas de la Universidad de Guadalajara; Cineteca Nacional de México, México, 1987.

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## BOOKS

### THOUGHTS ON NOÉ JITRIK'S NOVEL *LOS LENTOS TRANVÍAS*

Jorge Luis Sierra

Apart from the enchantment and peacefulness that reading this book produced in me, I believe that Noé Jitrik has spun his memories with a fine and delicate thread that converts them into a literary object. In the same vein as authors such as Luis Cardoza y Aragón, the prose of this Argentine writer who is undecided about returning to his country or staying in Mexico, is a generous and didactic sample of the infinite paths that literature can take.

*Slow Trolley Cars* enters the daily domain yet emerges from it with an enriched memory. It does not deal with the faithful ordering of autobiographical events nor with a simple nostalgia-saturated chronicle, but rather is a literary work which reshapes some aspects of the past and reduces the significance of others until achieving equilibrium. In one sense, *Slow Trolley Cars* gives value to an everydayness buried for a long time under the weight of triviality. In yet another sense, it awakens his and our emotions until they

become unified in a single text emanating from the writer and becoming richer in the reading. Here closes, as Mexican poet Eraclio Zepeda would say, the great circle of literary phenomenon.

As in poetry, Jitrik's text generates an endless number of possible interpretations, all equally valid. We can discover ourselves in it, moved by shared experiences, or lose ourselves as did Jitrik's brother, who, before he died, wrote his own voluminous and detailed version of the events in *Slow Trolley Cars* because he was opposed to his brother's treatment of family anecdotes.

The author dilutes the boundaries between poetry and narration, and gives the text a smooth syntax which makes the events flow as if they had indeed occurred that way. This could be called a poetic narration that catches the rhythms of early life and creates its own atmosphere of truth. A writer's efforts could not be better. Nevertheless it could be forgotten that Jitrik's work obeys the rigor of writing and unwriting because he works always with a rough draft on the desk, and sustains that the text can be purified as many times as required.

Even though Jitrik declares at the beginning of this "vast, unique, growing narrative paragraph", that it has no other reason or goal than as a response to the exigencies of an overflowing memory, *Slow Trolley Cars* is, more than an existential necessity, a literary project finding its influences and seeking to make its own contribution.

Nevertheless, what could become a literal work in the hands of a poor writer, emerges as the re-creation of dreams and images translated into literary structures; as the author

himself says, "...one way of seeing, understanding and preserving the important cores of that environment, reproducing, amplifying, and deepening them in the same severe manner which defined the tone of my childhood era."

The influence of Proust cannot be ignored, even though the disavowance of his work weighs on our consciences. The unknown phantom of Proust runs through Jitrik's work. The childhood of each writer, their expansive paragraphs, evoking familiar images and environments, the writing of a novel moved by other genres, are similar points. Jitrik let act "an acquired unexpressed inclination toward Proust and what he was capable of doing with his nuances." But neither can *Slow Trolley Cars* be spoken of as a Proustian work. As Jitrik clarifies, there is an early inclination toward Proust, but one has his own projects.

The author rejects totalistic projects which, on the supposition of coherence, can squash the author's nearness to his own experience. In life, as in literature, all paths are possible and valid, and their meaning cannot be grasped through the eye of a needle. Each person has his particular world view, and by no means is it

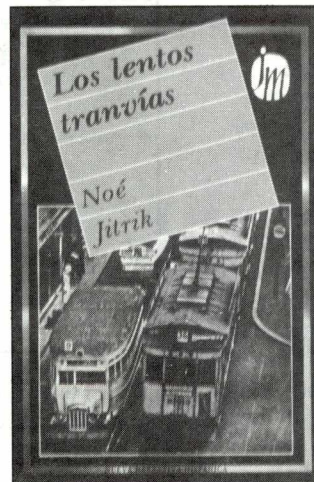
universality denied. It can be forgotten that totality is no more than a holistic attitude that guides, but does not make compulsory any path of research. "The fragments of thoughts" preferred by Jitrik constitute a serious and modest respite from the whirlpool of thought that wishes to be in the vanguard.

Noé Jitrik is closer to Cardoza y Aragón. Both develop a prose of extended feeling. If Cardoza can indeed hear the herons change to the other foot, then Noé speaks of the beauty of an Argentine mother so anxious to see the world that, in the absence of books, she reads pieces of newspaper. While the Guatemalan writer finds in his people a rich fountain of written works, Jitrik discovers that daily life is a Pandora's box where the riches of humanity lie in wait to be gathered by literary works.

*Slow Trolley Cars* is also a form of knowledge. For the author, writing is a "particular type of research, rather diffuse, about the unity that can exist between my own being and a deed, my relationship to the world." This is perhaps a response to the common clamor of the 1960's for a literature removed from praxis rich in form but empty of content.

In Jitrik's text, the content is born in the full development of form. There is no rupture despite the different biographical referents after literary elaboration. On the contrary, even as the writing enters an unknown area, the events become even more meaningful.

This virtue is not forbidden in literature, but pertains to the essentiality of the art which takes events without pulling them out of their context and puts them back further enriched. The work of art —said



Gabriel Zaid— is nothing more than a world; it widens the world. It does not mean that literature is a substitute for science, but rather that it is a form of knowledge which can transcend the empirical and the immediate.

It is clear, on the other hand, that Noé Jitrik's intentions cannot pass as discursive defense of literature. It is an exercise where words no longer are instruments but are passions in life, where personal history finds the written word, where autobiography is the immense desire to live and write.

After *Slow Trolley Cars*, our childhood, family, and friends will never be the same. Perhaps we will better appreciate sugar, coffee, dogs, the neighborhood, Sunday outings in Chapultepec park, matinees, the clothes hanging on the line, trips to the bakery, gossip at the laundry, or the noisy trolley cars which have disappeared but are recorded in our memories. Perhaps our words will be as seductive as the written voice of Noé Jitrik.

Noé Jitrik, *Los lentos tranvías*. Editorial Joaquín Mortiz, colección Nueva narrativa hispana. México, 1988. 120 páginas.

## MORE ON THE ORIGIN OF THE AZTECS

Erik Huesca

French historians have created a grand tradition for their interest and efforts in discovering the origins of the Aztecs. Faithful to this tradition, Christian Duverger recurred to both hispanic sources and to the few pre-

hispanic codexes and maps that survived the Conquest and subsequent destruction, in his investigation for this book. The author explains in this work, translated by Carmen Arizmendi, how a nomadic people later formed the great Aztec Empire, which fascinated Europe during the Conquest of Meso-america.

Duverger's book comes at an apt moment, shortly before the 500th anniversary of the European invasion, led by Christopher Columbus' expedition in 1492. The French researcher reconstructs the Aztec past from Aztlán — "Place of the Seven Tribes" — to Mexico, from Toltecayotl to Chichimecayotl: he explores the double cultural heritage of the Aztecs or Mexicas. Christian Duverger searches for the origins of this people even in the semantics of the words used to relate their story, and he calls our attention to contradictions in historical documents that were important sources for historians such as Soustelle, García Cubas, Jiménez Moreno, Orozco y Berra and Clavijero, as well as in codexes and other documents written shortly after the Conquest.

These contradictions are explained by Duverger in the light of the ideological positions of the historians of the time, who generally had their own particular interpretation of the history they studied: "Alongside formal or symbolic interpretations, one must consider an element that is extremely important in understanding Aztec history: that is, that it was written in Mexico, after the Conquest, and with ends that today we would not hesitate to call propagandistic"

In the first part of his research, the author remarks that the apparent contradictions are due to



the fact that the Mexican past is a constructed past, and that "the clues got tangled" during the search for origins. But, he adds, "one cannot refrain from studying the conditions in which the historical sources were constituted; the specific conditions which presided at the time when the documents were written illuminate by themselves many obscure points in the manuscripts. These also provide us with important indications about the spirit which inspired these 16th century codexes, which today are wrinkled and yellowed with age". The author also emphasizes the need for reliable editions of certain ethno-historic texts because, due to editorial or historical conditions, some of these texts were modified, or, as in the case of the manuscripts from Quauhtinchan, Puebla, sometimes were not even published.

In the second part of the book, Duverger discusses how the Mexicas sought to legitimate their stay in the Valley of Mexico, and specifically, on the island which the other Nahuatl people of the region called Mexico, through the construction of a circular history. The words Mexico and Aztlán have no written symbols or glyphs in the Aztec writing, and besides,

notes the author, Mexico was an island. These coincidences and others lead Duverger to assert that "the Aztecs wanted to legitimize both their presence and their authority as well as affirm their tribal particularities. This is the context in which the so particular construction of the Aztecs' origins should be analyzed."

After their first attempt to settle in the area of Chapultepec, the Mexicas had to settle on the island of Mexico, and they appropriated the name that the island already had. It is from this point that Mexican or Aztec history is incorporated with myths and stories from neighboring tribes and settlements — a tactic, says the author, that the Aztecs used in their conquest of other peoples: "the merging of ideas and traditions was an essential part of Aztec strategy: instead of unilaterally imposing their rites and beliefs, the Aztecs used to practice a sort of ideological importation, making efforts to assimilate some of the practices in use among the indigenous peoples they conquered."

The Mexicas did not hide their Chichimeca origins, on the contrary, they boasted about their pilgrimage, which they saw as a special strength corresponding to a dominant people. For this reason, says Duverger, dates were more symbolic than successive for the Aztecs, in contrast with the European vision of time: "This interpretation — which certainly has not been justified by any data — shows us a desire to explain an order of history which is totally alien to the Occidental mentality. This system, however, was commonly used in the pre-hispanic era, precisely because it allowed a fusion of history with myth: this alchemy of time allowed a

sublimation of the story of events, and the fortuitous course of things took place within the frame of destiny''

In the third part of his book, the author studies an ideological polarity that he says always existed in the Aztec universe, which was influenced by two currents of thought: the northern Chichimeca and the eastern Tolteca. Thus the author sees the existence of certain rivals of Aztlán who were at the same time ancestors of the Aztecs, and that the coexistence of multiple groups led to what other historians have interpreted

as contradictions in the sources, but Duverger sees these as indications about the cultural reality of the Aztec civilization.

Devuerger then examines the death myths of Chichimeca origin (the Chichimecas were "people descended from dogs"), the place of the dead, known as Mictlán, and the integration of these myths with fertility rites of Olmec origin.

The fourth part of the book examines the efforts made by the Mexicas or Aztecs to present themselves as a people with a special destiny with the

right to exercise human sacrifice. The author comments: "The affirmation of their cultural originality and their tribal identity is expressed in a privileged way through the filter of sacrificial symbology".

The work of this French historian proposes that Aztec history was written in the light of the domination by other peoples: "It is worth asking whether the Occidental norms applied to the recording of a history that was completely different and 'other', conceived totally outside the framework of European concepts, have not

considerably modified the content and spirit of the indigenous tradition". Duverger emphasizes the need to re-read the historic sources, taking into account that the history is full of symbols with multiple meanings, and that this is fundamental in the search for knowledge about the origins of the Mexica civilization. □

Christian Duverger: *El Origen de los Aztecas*. Editorial Grijalbo. Cultura y sociedad. Serie Enlace. México, D.F. 1988. 426 pp.

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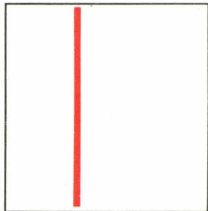
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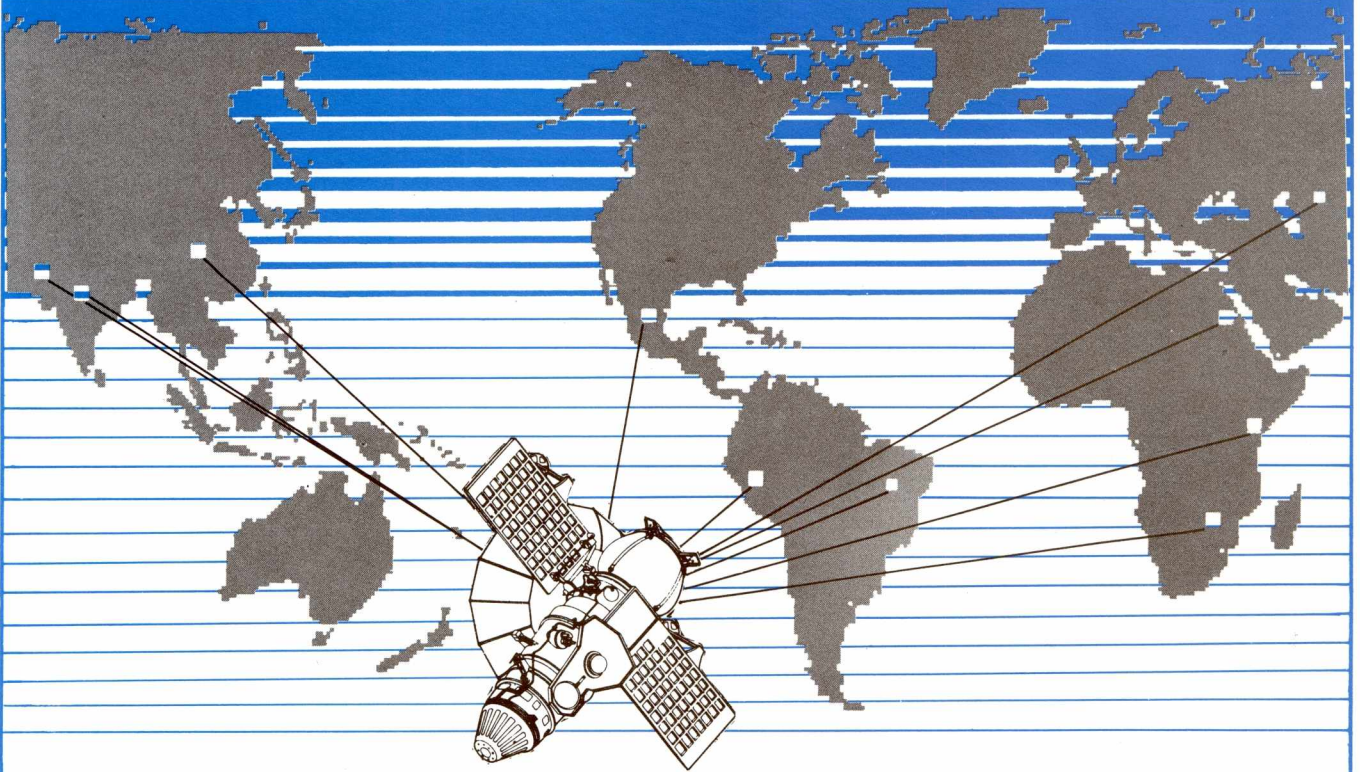
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