

IT'S ELECTION TIME AGAIN

Mexico's local elections have generated controversial responses on the part of the U.S. press. They are viewed differently from this side of the border.

In what could be termed a national referendum two-thirds of the way into President Miguel de la Madrid's six-year term, some 14,339,915 Mexicans will exercise their voting rights during 1986. They will elect 14 state governors, 1,154 mayors and 300 state legislators. Between July and December of this year, half of Mexico's citizens will vote to elect local authorities, choosing from among the country's nine political parties, whose politics range from the conservative National Action Party (PAN) to the Trotskyite Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT).

In view of the size of its membership and of the vote it has garnered in past elections, the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) has thirteen state governorships practically sown up. However, the PRI will face a strong challenge from the PAN in the border state of Chihuahua. As regards the state legislatures, the PRI will lose at least the 78 seats reserved for the losing parties according to the constitutional formula which provides them with proportional representation. In this way, minority parties are not excluded from state legislatures.

The states to hold elections this year are: Aguascalientes (293,488 registered voters), Chihuahua (1,190,670 voters), Durango (670,885 voters), Guerrero (1,093,364 voters), Michoacan (1,456,323

voters), Oaxaca (1,223,819 voters), Puebla (1,676,498 voters), Sinaloa (1,037,963 voters), Tamaulipas (1,064,695), Tlaxcala (300,028 voters), Veracruz (2,750,980 voters) and Zacatecas (580,849 voters). Since these states are located in different geographic areas and include many of the country's varied regional, socio-economic and political contexts, this year's elections could well be considered a sort of national referendum on the Mexican people's political leanings, as they face the worst economic crisis of their history.

In the North, a clear political tendency has emerged in favor of the PAN. Of the many attempts to explain this phenomenon, the most convincing appears to be the relatively great degree of social mobility experienced in the region in recent years, with the rapid emergence of a strong middle class. This social mobility was brought to an abrupt halt by the economic crisis.

According to recent polls, the rising popularity of conservative politics will have a notable effect on the coming elections in the state capitals of Sinaloa, Durango and Baja California. The PRI has to face the very real possibility of losing Culiacan,

capital of Sinaloa and commercial center for the agricultural life of northeast Mexico. The same holds true for Durango, capital of Durango state and the capital of Baja California, Mexicali, which borders on the U.S. If recent tendencies hold true, a two-party system of sorts will be reinforced, or at least maintained, in these three cities.

In the last national elections, held in July 1985, the results were as follows: in Sinaloa, the PAN won 17.9% of the vote, the PRI won 70.5%, while a third party, the United Socialist Party of Mexico (PSUM) won 3.62%. In Durango, the PAN received 26.22% and the PRI 66.38%, while the Socialist Workers Party (PST) garnered 1.70%. And in Baja California, the PAN received 25.93%, the PRI 46.56% and the PST 5.49% of the vote.

The primary challenge to the PRI, however, and where most of the attention will be focused, will be in the Chihuahua state-wide elections, despite the fact that the state accounts for only four per cent of the nation's electorate. The interest in Chihuahua springs from the fact that the opposition National Action Party (PAN) currently holds the mayorship in both the capital city and Ciudad Juarez, the state's most important city. Together, the two cities account for more than half of the state's voters.

Counting on support from economically powerful business groups, the PAN claims that it will win the mayoral races in both these cities, as well as the governor's seat. No opposition party has ever won a governorship in any state of the Republic. Since its founding as the bearer of the values and traditions of the Mexican Revolution, the PRI's candidates have always triumphed at the polls.

The recent electoral advances of the PAN in Chihuahua grew out of the September 1982 Presidential decree which nationalized private banking in the country. The powerful **Chihuahua Group**, a



Election day. Photo by Renzo Gostoli

veritable empire of financial, industrial, commercial and agricultural interests, resented the expropriation of its banks. The head of the **Group** and one of the country's richest men, Eloy Vallina Laguera, made his feelings public on December 2, 1982: "They took a bank from me, so I'm going to take Chihuahua from them." He certainly took important steps towards that goal when PAN candidates triumphed in the municipal elections in that state's principal cities. Since then, some 1,575,000 residents of Chihuahua have been governed by mayors from the PAN.

The economic resources of the **Chihuahua Group** have worked towards establishing an electoral beachhead in Ciudad Juarez. The PAN candidate, Francisco Barrio Terrazas, was an employee of assembly-industry magnate Antonio Bermudez. Bermudez used his economic muscle to support Barrio Terrazas's candidacy in Ciudad Juarez. Meanwhile in the state capital, the PAN candidate was party standard-bearer and ex-presidential candidate Luis Alvarez, who was backed by Eloy Vallina. Both candidates won.

Nevertheless, the panorama has changed substantially

for this year's elections. Eloy Vallina, head of the **Chihuahua Group**, has abandoned his search for revenge and has returned to the Institutional Revolutionary Party. He was named state-wide Director of the Center for Political, Economic and Social Studies, a PRI think-tank. And his money now fills the coffers of the ruling party.

In Ciudad Juarez, Bermudez has also returned to the ranks of the majority party and was named PRI candidate in the city's mayoral race. His former subordinate, Francisco Barrio Terrazas, is the PAN candidate for state governor. As its candidate for governor, the PRI named Fernando Baeza Melendez, another long-time associate of the **Chihuahua Group**.

It therefore seems probable that the Chihuahua elections, despite the opposition's expectations, will have results similar to those of last year's federal elections when the PAN received 36.01% of the vote, the PRI, 56.12% and in third place, the Revolutionary Workers Party, with 2.04% of the vote.★

Pablo Hiriart

CONCERN IN THE WAKE OF MEXICANA AIRLINE'S CRASH

There was widespread speculation that terrorists had brought down the Mexicana jet that crashed in Michoacan. This does not seem to be the case.

It was a conversation that presaged death:

Guadarrama: Mexico, Mexicana 940 requests permission to reduce altitude.

Control: Mexicana 940, proceed.

Guadarrama: MX 940, emergency. Mexicana 940 requests permission to return to Mexico City.

Control: Mexicana 940 proceed.

Guadarrama: MX 940 requests lower altitude.

Control: MX requests lower altitude from 280?

Guadarrama: MX 940, emergency. Request permission to return to Mexico City.

Control: MX ACC 940, 940 is authorized to descend to 200.

Right turn directly to vor (initials of an electronic radio assistance team) of Mexico City.

Guadarrama: MX ACC, Mexicana 940, Control Mexico...

Control: Mexicana 940, can you hear me!!

These were the last words of Captain Carlos Guadarrama Sixtos, chief of the crew on board Mexicana's flight 940 bound for Los Angeles, via Puerto Vallarta and Mazatlan, from Mexico City. The plane exploded 105 kilometers from Mexico City, killing all 166 people on board.

The March 31 accident shocked the entire nation. The same day, President Miguel de la Madrid ordered "a complete and detailed investigation to determine the cause of the accident" to be carried out by the Communications and Transportation Ministry.

Daniel Diaz Diaz, Secretary of the Ministry encharged with the investigation, declared that the contents of the plane's black box would clarify the cause of the accident and that a detailed report would be forthcoming. "It is an extremely sensitive matter," he stated, "and will require an analysis of all available information."

The Airlines Pilots' Union (ASPA) sent six technicians to the scene of the crash and were able to determine that human error had not been a factor in the accident.

Congress called the director of Mexicana Airlines, Manuel Sosa de la Vega, to testify after comments began to circulate, which laid the blame for the accident on inadequate maintenance,

It was Mexicana's first accident in 17 years. The last two accidents were both in 1969. The first was on July 4th, when a plane crashed into a mountainside near Monterrey. Seventy-two people died in that crash, including Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) activist, Carlos A. Madrazo and tennis player, Rafael Osuna. The other crash occurred near Texcoco on September 21; there were 18 dead and 91 survivors. Among the survivors of that accident was Esther Macias, a stewardess who later retired to marry Pilot Carlos Guardarrama. She was on Flight 940, this time as a passenger, along with her two-year old son. They died together with everyone else on board.

There are some 1500 Boeing 727s flying around the world; the one that exploded on March 31 near Maravatio,



The bodies are brought in from Michoacán. Photo by Luis Humberto González.