

position, while proposing to play opposition politics from inside the government in the old, limited way.

An Act of Faith

What no one in the government doubts, and which is dispensed as dogma, is that Salinas de Gortari won the elections. In front of this dogma or act of faith, the PAN candidate declares, "He who would like to think of himself as an even slightly ethical or moral man cannot claim to have won." Clouthier discredits Salinas de Gortari and he discredits Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas. He discredits the elections "chaos." He has warned, "If they rob this election, I can assure you that they won't finish the term." He even attributes greater economic deterioration to the "lack of credibility" resulting from the elections of July 6. In these circumstances he makes an extreme demand, the elections should be annulled and new elections should be called. Clouthier's proposal appears to be the furthest from a viable, political negotiation. From the very first, he calls for the annulment of the elections.

Cárdenas' position is different. Cárdenas' proposal lends itself much more to a social and political negotiation of the new type, if legitimacy is seen as a key problem to the nation's future. Cárdenas does not say he won; he doesn't state it as an absolute truth. "We believe," he affirmed on July 28 en route to Tula, Hidalgo, "that we won, but, if they can show us that the result is otherwise, then we can find no reason not to accept that fact."

Cárdenas asks that the government not demand that its word be taken on faith. But he does not stop there. He demands that the government continue to divulge the electoral information that it has stopped doing. More concretely, he demonstrates that the Federal Electoral Commission, which had originally made public the figures from the polls, suddenly stopped doing so. Cárdenas asks that Mexico be permitted to see the results of the official polling affidavits, all of them.

The problem and the solution lie in the following:

Cárdenas' argues that for Salinas to have obtained 50.36 percent of the final total, he would have needed to have obtained 67 percent of the vote in the totals of the polling places of which there is no public information, that is to say, almost double what he

WHEN THE ELITES DIVIDE

Lorenzo Meyer

Each time that there has been a significant change in the Mexican political regime, it has been preceded by a rupture in the elite

A little more than a year ago we were all witness to a spectacle that developed in an entirely predictable way. At the 12th assembly of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) a handful of dissidents proposed the internal democratization of the ruling party that has the longest tradition in the western world. Without great ceremony, the heterodox members were put in their place. First they were ridiculed, then ostracized, finally to wind up abandoning the Great Party to be condemned to live in error, that is to say, outside the party's budget. In normal times this would have been the end of the story, a mere footnote in the Great Party's long history. But it turns out that 1987 was not a normal time in Mexican politics: it was the fifth year of the Great Mexican Depression.



PAN supporters at a PRI meeting.
(Photo from uno más uno archive)

Today that small group of reformers, headed by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, has incredibly turned the tables. Now, in pursuit of the July 6 elections with several aces in hand, the Cardenist movement has demonstrated to Mexico—and incidentally to the

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This article first appeared in *Excelsior*, July 27, 1988.

rest of the world—that the ones who were in error were not those who ended up leaving the state party, but rather those who remained inside. Wielding a hollow authority, now without content, the PRI denied the possibility of channeling the political discontent brought on by the economic crisis into a more or less free play for the party's nomination of its presidential candidate.

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Now then, how is it that this minority that called itself the Democratic Current and that failed in its attempt to win a niche within the PRI, today has enormous popular support that allows it to very successfully confront the invincible Mexican presidency of yore to the point of prohibiting in from being able to govern? Part of the answer can be found by examining past experiences when the governing elite weakened by the exercise of power, lost its cohesion and divided.

Casting a glance at our political history, one fact stands out: each time that there has been a significant change in the Mexican political regime it has been preceded by a rupture in the elite. That is to say, a conflict within the dominant group has ended in the branching off of another group. That does not mean that the division has been the only cause for change. These historical changes have been the result of very complex processes, the origins of which predate the fragmentation of the governing group. Nevertheless the rupture within the elite has been a powerful catalyst putting other players into action, namely the subordinate, mass groups who, after all, are crucial in the process of change.

Historical Memory

A fundamental rupture in the core of the dominant group served as a precedent to the great political movements of Mexico's Independence, the

Reform and the Mexican Revolution, to mention just three of the most important examples from our history. In each of the three cases, the causes of the clash between a minority of the small privileged group—the standard bearers of change—and the bulk of their equals—the defenders of the *statu quo*—arose from a fundamental disagreement over how to confront a major crisis within the dominant system. These crises were the Spanish invasion and the capture of its monarch by the French, the United States defeat of Mexico and the disastrous leadership of Santa Anna, and finally, the presidential succession during the dictatorship of General Porfirio Díaz. Along with a disagreement over *how* to confront the challenges of each one of these three crises another equally critical point of disconformity arose, namely *who* should do the confronting. That is to say, a personal struggle arose within the elite over who had the right to exercise supreme power in the moments of change.

In each one of the three crises that have marked the end of one historical era and the beginning of another in Mexico, the group that put the extant arrangement into doubt in the name of another, new, more legitimate one, was a marginalized minority within the elite group in power. To successfully challenge their powerful enemies, the dissidents always had to call on the non-powerful classes for their support, that is to say, the middle classes or the common people or both. In reality, in these three cases the banners raised by the discontented ones were general principles that were aimed at rescuing the dignity and interests of the Mexicana people as a whole, interests and dignity forgotten by those who had exercised power.

From this perspective, what is happening today is not in its essence anything entirely new. The dispute between the ones in power has given origin in various occasions to an explosion that has broken the iron circle that has always surrounded power in Mexico. Due to that rupture, new forces, new actors burst in, actors who challenged the ruling system until it was transformed.

But if there is nothing entirely new under the sun, neither is history repeated in exactly the same way. Today, for

example, the rupture has not come from only one point: it comes from the left as well as from the right. In effect, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and Manuel J. Clouthier and part of the group that surrounds both of them were in their times central parts of the system of domination that is today put into doubt. Both leaders despite their antagonistic positions agreed on one point: on an invitation to the masses of citizens, still passive up to a little while ago, to cease being mere objects in the political arena and to convert themselves into conscious political actors. This invitation in the face of the deterioration of the quality of life turns out to be very attractive and even necessary.

However, the most important difference between the rupture in the elite of the past and of the present is not its double character, but rather the fact that today, for the first time, the possibility exists that the rupture will not lead to violence. If all of those involved in the process conduct themselves with a minimum of good sense—and the citizens who have responded to the call of the new leaders have behaved in an optimal way at the balloting boxes as well as in the streets—perhaps it will be possible to pass with difficulty, but without falling hopelessly into chaos, from an authoritarian system to a pluralistic one.

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The historical memory—the recollection of the immeasurable suffering and tremendous losses provoked by the civil struggles of the past—should serve to curb the passions of those who have launched the assault on the citadel of authority as well as to limit the inflexibility of the defenders of the citadel. Today it is not utopian to suppose that it is possible to peacefully overcome the authoritarianism and corporatism of the present and to arrive at a situation in

which a true pluralism reigns, permitting, with the passage of time, the existence of true political parties and competitive, reasonably clean elections, in which basic agreements are made in broad daylight between the legitimate representatives of social groups and not as today, in the solitude of the palace between the president and the upper corporate echelons.

Peaceful Transition

Undoubtedly it is the principal responsibility of the government and its supporters to regulate the transition from one system to another. In effect, the government must accept that what has happened now is not a mere electoral setback, but rather the beginning of a process that must arrive at a change in the fundamental rules of the political game. Today, the president, his collaborators and his supporters must think about what, until yesterday, was impossible: that it is necessary to be prepared for the peaceful transfer of power in some not very distant future to someone who obtains it by way of voting that can no longer be stained as today's ballots, by the shadow of fraud. Any attempt to step backward, to resist change by the path of violence, would be suicide and an unforgivable historical error.

As far as the opposition is concerned and Cárdenas supporters in particular, they must not demobilize themselves nor disappoint their followers by relinquishing their demands for clean elections and, above all, for more just rules in the political game. Nevertheless, the opposition must not arrive at limiting situations. In any event, it is essential that the new leadership search for ways of channeling the action of the people as actors via a new party—today, the action of the Cardenist masses seems to have gone beyond that of the existing parties. Otherwise the risk is run of not efficiently channeling that genuine creation of power that the appearance of a massive leftist electorate signifies. Only with the formation of a party of leftist masses of the PRI can the present-day rupture of the elite lead to a peaceful, long-term struggle that puts a definitive end to the drawn out, authoritarian history of Mexico. □

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won in the polling places of which we have figures. Of course, at the same time, Clouthier would have had to have obtained in the unreported polling places 12 percent instead of 22 percent and Cárdenas 20 percent instead of 39 percent, that is to say, almost half of what they obtained in the public, official polling affidavits, according to the vote totals.

Cárdenas' argument is very precise and conclusive. He asks that all the parties be allowed to examine the affidavits that have not been made public yet and that are still being retained. This is a perfectly serious petition. And if the government wishes to recover its legitimacy, it needs to make this information available and ask that it be analyzed in a clear fashion. This petition is not a provocation. It is a demand that may be attended to if the political will exists, if the government is willing to preserve constitutional order. If this will does not exist, then they will not deliver the affidavits.

It is true that asking the government to exhibit some documents that is has been more than reluctant to do is based on a simple conjecture—that they contain evidence of electoral manipulation. But if this hypothesis is incorrect, if in fact these documents of 25,000 polling places provide more support for the government and the official candidate, then there is no reason to hide them. The documents would legitimate the ruling party's triumph.

Without a doubt, there are still other sources which have called the election's legitimacy into question, for example, the irregularities in the voters' lists, the denial of election identification cards to those who were entitled to them, the ballots that were cast by election officials, the ballots that were stolen, the polling documents that "disappeared", the precincts from which opposition representatives were expelled and the "voting brigades" that went from one polling place to another to vote. Absenteeism was the highest in Mexican electoral history in both absolute and relative numbers. Given the absenteeism, only 25.32 percent of registered voters ac-

tually voted for Salinas. This is a political fact that may be added to the apparently statistical, facts, like the magic 50.36 percent which Salinas supposedly obtained.

But there is still one more source of incredulity and of illegitimacy. It is found in the distrust of the present electoral process in which the PRI holds the vast majority of the positions on the different commissions such as in the Federal Electoral Commission and the Electoral Disputes Court. The political parties and the public have shown themselves to be very sceptical of a court in which the judge and the accused are from the government. Only one step remains, the establishment of the Electoral College made up of the Chamber of Deputies. Its responsibility will be enormous.

There is no doubt about it. In order to legitimize not only this government but also the next one it is absolutely necessary to deliver and analyze the polling affidavits from *all* the polling places and to make a decision based on these figures and other evidence that suggests a need for corrections in particular cases of electoral fraud. Added to the decision to deliver and not hide the remaining 24,642 documents from the same number of polls, is the obligation to emit an objective judgement on the real results of the national, state and district totals. And added to this is another decision that can only be conceived as scandalously provocative and irresponsible to those who postulate consciously or unconsciously a policy of repression. This is no exaggeration: or voting is respected as a governmental practice or we are headed towards a policy of repression in which the army would be called out against the population without knowing why or wanting to. Sooner or later, and sooner than later, this will be the alternative.

Preserving the Constitution

On the supposition that Salinas' triumph is not supported by proof, the Electoral College's responsibility will be enormous with its 260 PRI deputies and 240 from the opposition. In particular, it will be an enormous responsibility for the PRI deputies who seriously believe it necessary to preserve the nation's constitution and with it a democracy that satisfies the demands of the people for the truth. Several PRI deputies will be faced with a civic and moral dilemma which they