

Canadian studies in Mexico: a new challenge

On May 19, the Council of the National University of Mexico (UNAM) approved the proposal to change the name of the Center for Research on the United States (CISEUA) to the Center for Research on North America (CISAN).

At the University Council's plenary session, I put forward the following reasons why the name of the center should be changed.

The recent world changes that have occurred at breath-taking speed confirm the need to study this hemisphere in depth in order to achieve greater understanding.

Our university is therefore required to provide analyses, alternatives and answers that contribute to national and regional development, in accordance with the current world-wide phenomenon of globalization that has given rise to a new order of powerful economic blocs.

Although knowledge of the United States is increasing, there are still considerable gaps concerning basic factors that go beyond the strictly bilateral approach. While knowledge of the United States is still far from adequate, ignorance about Canada is much more widespread.

Very little has been written by Mexican researchers about the situation in Canada and the latter's relationship with Mexico. There is still a great deal to be done to establish a minimum basis of general knowledge about Canada.

Canada's vast territory, its multi-racial population, economic structure, legal and political system and social complexity are some of the many subjects for research from a multi- and inter-disciplinary perspective.

Our new economic and political relationship with Canada will doubtless transcend the present and become a much more solid relationship. It is important to note that if the trilateral Free Trade Agreement is signed, our relationship with Canada, hitherto virtually unknown to Mexican society, will rapidly intensify.

Even if the agreement is not signed, the current rate of increase in economic, political and diplomatic exchanges has been so fruitful and significant that attention will be drawn to the fact that bilateral relations between Mexico and Canada are already different from what they were before.

Including Canada as a formal object of study at the Center will also affect our approach to studying Mexico-U.S. relations, since research projects aimed at analyzing the different aspects and key players of complex border relationships in particular and bilateral relationships in general are already underway.

Given current conditions, Canada, the third member of the region, will necessarily influence both the readjustment of a bilateral relationship to a new member and also the new, solid trilateral relationship that will obviously have to



be assessed using different methods of analysis.

The latter will no doubt lead to new ideas, points of view and even different answers and solutions than those of the past.

I am certain that North America's economic integration should be consolidated at the same time as specialized teams of personnel are being organized in all three countries. These groups should be able to propose medium- and long-range initiatives allowing their countrymen to understand and enjoy the benefits provided by this form of integration.

This in turn leads us to the urgent need to open an area of Canadian studies, as part of the second stage of our Center's academic development, almost four years after its creation. We think that as part of UNAM, the center is ideally qualified to carry out research on Canada and will continue to maintain the high standards achieved in its research on the United States.

This center of formal research, that will not only be the first of its kind at the National University of Mexico, but also in Mexico, will help encourage innovative, in-depth studies of Canada through different multi- and interdisciplinary perspectives as well as being an

ideal place to promote academic

activities on the North American region as a whole. Our long-term aim will obviously be to analyze the region as a whole, from

a regional and global point of view.

We already have a number of academic contacts at Canadian institutions that have supported us in international seminars such as "Canada in Transition," held in November 1992, with the financial support of the Canadian government and its embassy in Mexico.

Some Canadian academic institutions have offered to accept our academic staff, through a program of research fellowships, to enable them to carry out the necessary interviews and consultations for their research projects.

Finally, the Center has an ongoing program for training researchers on U.S. and bilateral issues that uses publications, refresher courses, specialized seminars and credited courses to keep Mexican academics abreast of Canadian issues ❧

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