

Mexico's presidential candidates

*Hernán Ancona C.**

The political scene is set, the lights are on and the entire cast of nine actors have begun to deliver their lines with a vengeance; their supporters and the circumstances demand no less.

The Mexican electorate can look forward to a wide range of political options including Luis Donaldo Colosio (PRI), Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas (PRD), Diego Fernández de Cevallos (PAN), Pablo Emilio Madero (UNO), Cecilia Soto (PT), Jorge González Torres (PVEM), Marcela Lombardo Otero (PPS), Rafael Aguilar Talamantes (PFCRN) and Alvaro Pérez Treviño (PARM).

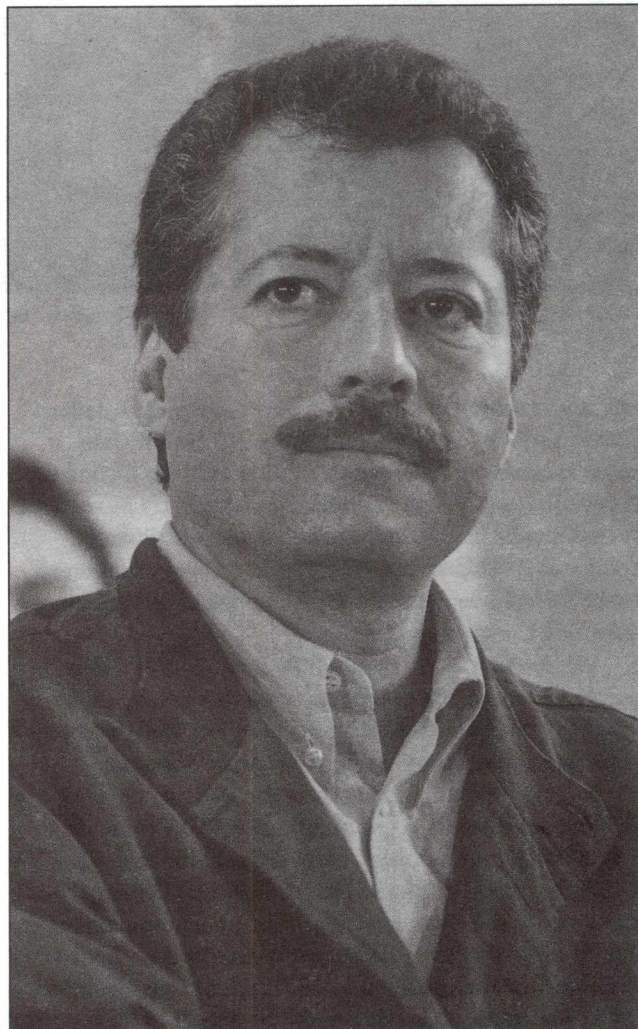
The candidates' initially lackluster performance was followed by a radical change, largely as a result of the uprising launched by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN). Although experts say the EZLN will not guarantee the transition to democracy with acts of violence, it has made the country's leaders aware that democracy has become a necessary pre-requisite for social peace.

The terms of the new Federal Code of Electoral Institutions and Procedures have forced minority and so-called satellite¹ parties to offer presidential candidates.

The forthcoming August 21 elections will be the most hotly contested in the country's modern history. Yet while the number of candidates is the largest in recent years, only three candidates are thought to be really in the running: Luis Donaldo Colosio, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and Diego Fernández de Cevallos.

The long list of candidates includes two women, who, although little-known in the national political scene and virtually outside of the hard-fought contest, also form part of this smorgasbord of options: Marcela Lombardo Otero and Cecilia Soto González.

Daughter of the socialist ideologue Vicente Lombardo Toledano, the 67-year-old Marcela enjoys the benefits of her paternal surname, but lacks any political background. Since her youth she devoted herself to organizing cultural events as part of the construction of the Popular Socialist Party (PPS), founded by her father in 1949.



Luis Donaldo Colosio (PRI).

Marcela Lombardo graduated as a teacher in 1943, and as an economist from UNAM in 1948. She carried out studies in science in Canada and was awarded a Ph.D. *honoris causa* by the Simón Bolívar University of Colombia, to name but a few of her academic qualifications. Despite having served as a member of congress on two occasions, Lombardo has always been far removed from the dynamic activities of party life, charged

¹ I.e., those which traditionally backed the PRI. (Editor's note.)

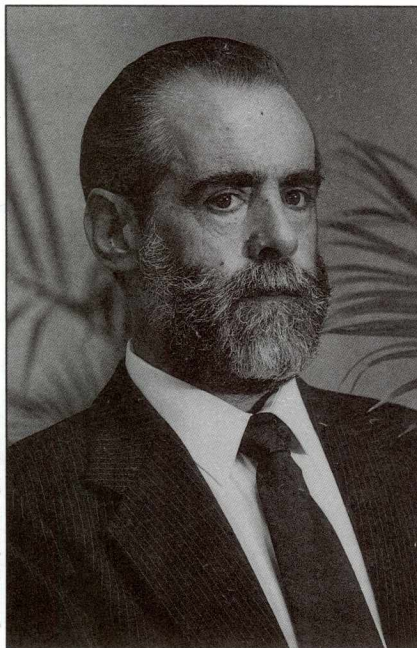
* Journalist.

Marco Antonio Cruz / Imagenlatina.



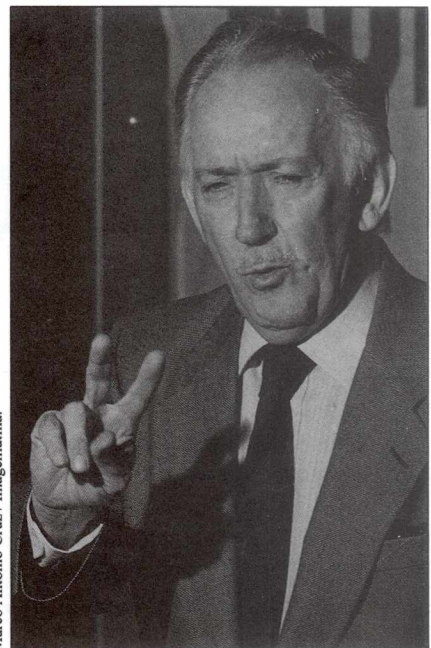
Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas (PRD).

Angeles Torrejón / Imagenlatina.



Diego Fernández de Cevallos (PAN).

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Pablo Emilio Madero (UNO).

only with running the PPS's Vicente Lombardo Toledano Center for Philosophical, Political and Social Studies.

It should be mentioned that this is only the second time in over 50 years that the Popular Socialist Party has offered its own candidate, the last one being when its founder, Lombardo Toledano, ran. The PPS had always supported the PRI's candidacies, with the exception of 1988 when it supported Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas.

While there is not much to be said about Marcela Lombardo's election prospects, even less can be said about Cecilia Soto González, about whom little is known or remarked except in her native state of Sonora.

In 1985, she joined the Authentic Party of the Mexican Revolution (PARM), a grouping that split off from the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in the mid-50s.

As a student of physics at the National University of Mexico, Cecilia Soto participated in student movements. One of these allegedly had a profound effect on her life: the June 10 demonstration in 1971, which was repressed by police forces. A social activist on behalf of the working class, of great prestige in her home state, Cecilia Soto was a member of the Sonora legislature during its 52nd term.

With a candidacy born from in-fighting within the Labor Party (PT) —given that until recently she was a member of the PARM— the 43-year-old Soto considers that a social movement like the one she represents has possibilities of becoming a viable option for voters.

In contrast, several things can be said about Jorge González Torres, the candidate of the Mexican Green

Ecology Party (PVEM), but very few or none in his favor. The dominant feature of this presidential hopeful, in the words of political analysts, is that he does honor to his party's colors —in other words, he is a bit green for this sort of thing.

González Torres has come under attack from all sides; both from ecological groups who reject the political use of ecological phenomena and from the opposition, which argues that his party was created at the government's behest to steal votes from Cárdenas' Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD).

Born in Mexico City, González Torres began his political career in the early '80s when he led the "Work, Democracy and Social Justice" brigade, aimed at demanding solutions to problems in poor neighborhoods. Later, as a result of the influence of environmental deterioration in Mexico City, the brigade decided to change tack, becoming the National Ecological Alliance, which later changed its name to the Mexican Green Ecological Party.

An industrial relations graduate from the Ibero-American University, González Torres has joined the presidential race with no political background or gifts, no team, cadres or party structures. Although he states that his party has principles and a platform, very few know what these might be, and many doubt the feasibility of proposing a serious government structure based on environmental and ecological recovery.

Diego Fernández de Cevallos, leader of the National Action Party (PAN), has already had a taste of power. Even

As we go to press...

Luis Donaldo Colosio was assassinated at the end of a campaign event in a low-income neighborhood in Tijuana, Baja California, on the afternoon of March 23. Taken to the city's General Hospital, he died three hours later as a result of the two shots he received point-blank—one in the abdomen and one in the head—from a .38-caliber revolver.

President Carlos Salinas, after receiving the news of the candidate's death, delivered an address to the nation in which he condemned the assassination: "There is no political or moral reason for violence to be justified in Mexico; this is an affront because there was a climate of dialogue, understanding and negotiation among political forces aimed at leading the diversity of proposals along the path of law and legal reform."

He stressed that energetic and rapid efforts would be made to clarify the assassination within the framework of the law, while making a call for concord: "The Mexican people must be assured that at all times we will abide by the Constitution and laws of the country.... Political and party leaders have communicated to me their conviction and commitment to act responsibly in accordance with these new circumstances.... Today, the best way of showing love for Mexico and faith in its future is to strengthen our unity and for our voice of concord, as one people, be heard in all corners of our motherland and throughout the world."

All presidential candidates condemned the assassination and announced the suspension of their campaigns.

In three months of campaigning—beginning on January 10—Colosio travelled through 21 of the republic's 32 states, seeking to convince the citizenry of his commitment to politically transforming the country, strengthening democracy and guaranteeing clean elections on August 21, as well as restoring credibility to his party, whose links with the government have guaranteed the victory of its candidates for over 60 years.

His will for change while "conserving what is valuable" was expressed in his most important speech. On March 6, during the PRI's 65th anniversary celebration, he stated:

We will lead a new stage in Mexico's political transformation.... Today we are living amidst competition and we must abide by competition, and in order to do this we must leave behind old practices: those of a PRI which carried out dialogue only with itself and with the government, those of a party which did not need to make a big effort in order to win. As a party in competition, today the PRI's victories are not guaranteed in advance; it has to fight for them.... We want neither concessions outside the framework of votes nor votes outside the framework of the law!...

I state my commitment to reforming government in order to democratize it and put an end to any vestige of authoritarianism.... Reforming government means a presidency strictly subject to the constitutional limits established by its republican and democratic origin... strengthening and respecting the role of the federal Congress... making the system of administering justice an independent body, with the highest level of respect and certainty among the institutions of our republic... bringing the government to communities through a new federalism... this also means new methods of administration....

I hope that together we will broaden the autonomy and fortify the impartiality of our electoral institutions, so that the will of the people, and only that will, determines the results of elections. Reliable, certain, regular and clean elections cannot remain mere aspirations.... This is the reason for our commitment to having observers of the electoral process....

In these months of intense travel throughout the country, of visits to many communities, of contact and dialogue with my party and all the citizenry, I have met the Mexico of justified complaints, long-standing grievances and new demands; the Mexico of hopes, which calls for answers and can wait no longer....

I see a Mexico with a hunger and thirst for justice. A Mexico of people aggrieved by the distortions imposed on the law by those who should instead be serving the law. Of women and men afflicted by the authorities' abuse and the arrogance of government offices. I see citizens anguished by the lack of security....

My commitment is to all Mexicans: to fight against inequality and prevent the creation of new privileges for groups or regions.... The time has come for Mexico's different regions to better use the resources, abilities and talents of each of the country's communities... for a regional development which opens up the hopes of every corner of Mexico....

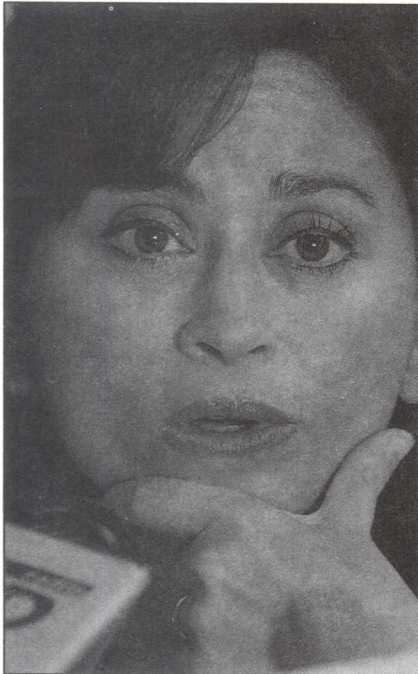
This is the time to overcome the arrogance of centralism... to resolutely support the municipalities... to give greater political and financial power to our states... to fully guarantee the conservation of our ecology... of high-quality, nationalist education.... Education is our greatest battle for the future. We will provide it with greater resources....

We want a united, strong, sovereign Mexico; a Mexico of liberties and peace, because the channels of democracy and justice are broad.

Luis Donaldo Colosio, rest in peace.

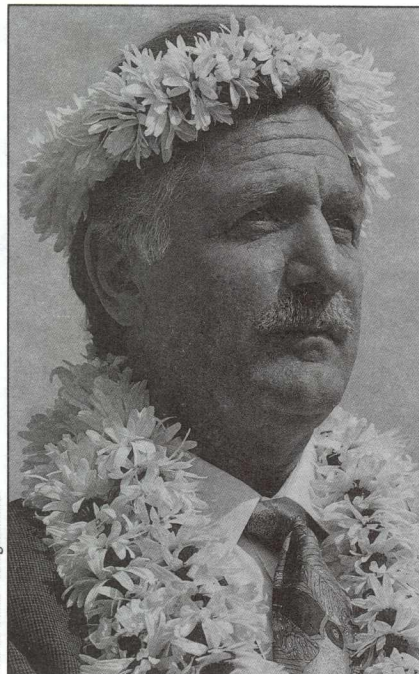
The editors.





Héctor García / Imagenlatina.

Cecilia Soto (PT).



Martín Salas / Imagenlatina.

Jorge González Torres (PVEM).



Martín Salas / Imagenlatina.

Marcela Lombardo (PPS).

though its presidential candidates have invariably been defeated by the Institutional Revolutionary Party, the PAN's political situation is promising, since it currently has three governorships (Baja California, Chihuahua and Guanajuato), 99 mayors, 232 federal and local congresspeople, one senator and 2,000 municipal officers throughout the country.

Nevertheless, the PAN's success has given rise to questions both inside and outside party ranks. Its leaders have been accused of achieving electoral and political successes through alliances with the government, with the PRI's agreement, and of abandoning the party's original doctrinal principles. As a result, the PAN has lost several outstanding members, many of whom now belong to the Doctrinal and Democratic Forum, which, once established as a political party, decided to support Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas Solórzano's presidential candidacy.

Since its founding, the PAN has been closely associated with the Catholic church. Its declaration of principles is based on a doctrine regarded as humanistic and democratic and on a political philosophy characterized by conservatism, as attested by the priority given to private property and its desire to exclude the state from managerial control. Broadly speaking, this is the party represented by Diego Fernández de Cevallos in the presidential race.

Born in Mexico City on March 16, 1941, Diego Fernández de Cevallos obtained his law degree at the National University of Mexico. Since his youth, his political career has been linked to the National Action Party, and he was greatly influenced by his father, one of the party's

founders. A charismatic but controversial personality, he has been accused of "agreement-concession politics" a reference to his negotiations with the government.

Under the shadow of party infighting and reproaches against his line of action, Fernández de Cevallos has so far elicited a muted response from his followers, who hope his campaign will gather strength over time. However, his bid is still regarded as having great potential.

A former PAN member, Pablo Emilio Madero Belden reappeared on the election scene sporting the red and white colors of a minority party, the Mexican Democratic Party (PDM), renamed for the elections as the National Opposition Union (UNO). This party is also linked to the Mexican right and is the inheritor of the far-right "Synarchist" movement.

As well as having been the leader of the PAN and a member of congress, Madero also sought the presidency in 1982. A native of Coahuila, now resident in Monterrey, Madero left the ranks of the PAN, because, as he explained, "We were fighting against the constitutional reform that opened the way to the 'self-assessment' of the Chamber of Deputies and Senators and the inclusion of magistrates chosen by the president in the Federal Electoral Tribunal, and the PAN agreed to accept this setback."

A co-founder, together with other distinguished former PAN members, of the Democratic Forum Party, which he later quit, Pablo Emilio Madero is now criticized for accepting the candidacy of a party that seeks only to preserve its legal registration, thereby dividing a powerful-

looking opposition. At the age of 72 —the oldest presidential candidate ever— Madero is thought to enjoy the support of only a few disgruntled PAN members.

First among the front-runners, in spite of everything, is Luis Donaldo Colosio, the PRI candidate who in the past eight years has occupied all the posts one could aspire to: deputy, senator, presidential campaign coordinator, party leader, secretary of state and now presidential nominee.

Born in 1950 in Magdalena de Kino, Sonora, Colosio was educated in public primary and secondary schools. He later graduated in economics from the Monterrey Technological Institute. Two years later, in 1974, he left for Pennsylvania where he obtained a master's degree in regional development and urban economics.

Spokesman and energetic lobbyist for programs to combat poverty during his time as head of the Ministry of Social Development, the coordinating body for the National Solidarity Program, Colosio is regarded as the candidate of continuity, as attested by his first campaign speech, during which he paid homage to Carlos Salinas as the "president of modernity."

Colosio outlined his plan for government in that same speech: complete exercise of Mexico's sovereignty, free trade, favorable conditions for competitiveness, improved rules for political competition, regional development, recovery of marginalized zones and continuity in the fight against inflation.

Although he benefitted from the work of the National Solidarity Program, created to attack extreme poverty,

Colosio more than any other candidate will have to overcome the weight of the Chiapas conflict and combat opposition taunts that his "continuity" will only prolong the current administration.

Under pressure from the current situation and overshadowed by events in Chiapas, Colosio Murrieta has had to strengthen his campaign by focusing more on the country's marginalized zones and, above all, stating that he will unconditionally respect the outcome of elections. The country's political and social establishment favors this candidate.

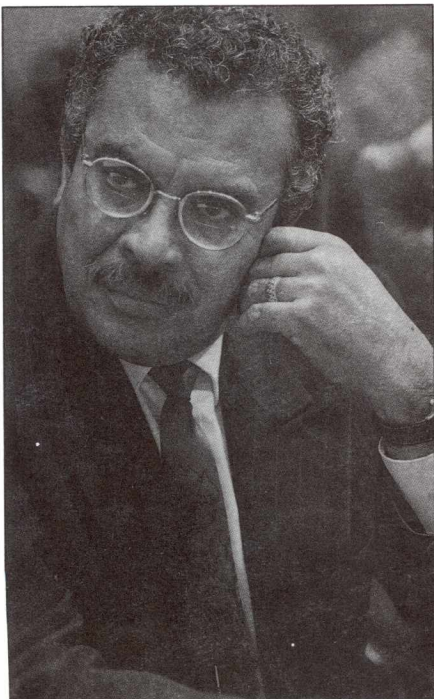
A controversial personality who inspires distrust among both leftist and rightist parties, Rafael Aguilar Talamantes is currently candidate of the Party of the Cardenista Front for National Reconstruction (PFCRN, not to be confused with Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas' PRD). His political career began in 1958, when he identified himself with working-class struggles, for which he was eventually imprisoned.

Aguilar's political swings have taken him from the leadership of the Communist Youth to supporting the left wing of the government, and from his party's support of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas' candidacy in 1988 to marked affinities with Salinas' government.

This Baja Californian undoubtedly lost whatever supporters he once may have had, when he discredited himself by taking his election campaign to Chiapas during the height of the armed conflict in that state.

The Authentic Party of the Mexican Revolution (PARM) was late in offering its candidate, Alvaro Pérez Treviño, about whom only the barest minimum can be

Marco Antonio Cruz / Imagenlatina.



Rafael Aguilar
Talamantes
(PFCRN).

Héctor García / Imagenlatina.



Alvaro Pérez
Treviño (PARM).

said, since he has hardly campaigned at all and has virtually restricted himself to making declarations from his native Tamaulipas.


The following quotation from Pérez serves to define the candidate's political profile: "Our proposal does not support the left, the right nor disorder. It supports legality and honesty." In political spheres, it is thought that Pérez Treviño will eventually step down and offer his party's support to the PRI.

Cuahtémoc Cárdenas Solórzano, former governor of his native Michoacán and son of former president Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, came into the political spotlight in 1988, when he made a bid for the presidency as representative of a coalition of parties grouped together as the National Democratic Front.

Cárdenas' candidacy shook the Mexican political system when his campaign proved unexpectedly successful. Although the official vote count established the PRI candidate as the winner, some sectors of the population believed that Cárdenas was the real winner. The famous "collapse" of the computerized vote-tally system and the Electoral College's difficulty in assessing the results fed people's doubts.

Founded by a group of former members of the PRI who led that party's so-called Democratic Current—headed by Cárdenas himself and Porfirio Muñoz Ledo [a former president of the PRI]—as well as a combination of different leftist organizations, notably the Mexican Socialist Party, the Party of the Democratic Revolution has come to be regarded as the PRI's main political opponent in the five years since it was formed.

The party's main proposals include the creation of opportunities for a free, egalitarian and equitable society; democratization of the state; encouragement of private enterprise; fair distribution of wealth; unlimited respect for the *ejido*,² communal land and smallholdings; and stimulation of industrial development. Despite the burden of his PRI background, Cárdenas is still in the line of battle.

The most important issue at stake for the country is the re-establishment of a lasting, equitable peace. A prerequisite for this is democratic progress, which can be achieved only through impartial, democratic and indisputable elections accepted by Mexico's citizens and political forces alike 

² A form of common land ownership established after the Mexican Revolution. (Editor's note.)