

# OUR VOICE

September 30 marked the 164th day of the conflict in the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) that has paralyzed much of its academic activities, particularly classes. Part of the student body rejected the university rector's and council's proposal of establishing tuition fees for students who could pay, those with family incomes over four times the minimum wage a month. The idea behind the proposal was to supplement university resources, particularly those related to the needs of students themselves, to improve the quality of their education. With public monies scarce, the fees would be used mainly for libraries, laboratories, books and computers.

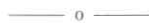
An important part of the university community thought that the proposal violated the right to free public education and was a cover for the intention to privatize higher education. The University Council modified its original proposal and stipulated voluntary tuition fees, allowing each student to decide according to his or her own conscience how much he/she would pay.

Nevertheless, the conflict intensified because the student movement broadened out its original demands to include holding a congress that would make binding decisions to transform the university and its governing bodies.

Clearly, at least two conceptions of a national university are at play here (there are probably more, but a great many members of the university community have not yet really been able to participate in the discussion). It is also clear that the conflict transcends the university and involves higher education as a whole.

This means that imaginative solutions are needed to guarantee access to professional and technical education for all Mexicans, regardless of their social or economic status, without sacrificing the UNAM's academic quality. What is needed are proposals to conciliate the two currently hegemonic conceptions of the university: one which emphasizes academic excellence (without disregarding social questions) and the other which emphasizes the social aspect (without ignoring academic questions).

Thousands of professors, researchers and students are working and studying in unusual circumstances, or have had to stop altogether. This is why a return to normalcy within the legal framework of the university's already existing institutions is imperative; with that, it would be possible to foster the participatory, inclusive spirit required for the transformation the UNAM truly needs. Our hope is that when this issue of *Voices of Mexico* is distributed, the conflict will already have been resolved.



Without a doubt, the most important issue in Mexican politics in the last few months have been party and candidate activities for the 2000 federal elections, including the presidential race.

Carlos Casillas presents us with an article highlighting the historic importance of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) holding primaries for the first time to select its presidential candidate. He also points to the paradox the PRI faces: to be able to possibly win the elections, it has had to democratize, but this could lead the party to split, in turn risking the electoral victory.

On the opposition side, the spotlight was on the "Alliance for Mexico," an attempt to forge a coalition of almost the entire opposition which finally failed September 28. In this issue of *Voices of Mexico*, we include two articles that look at the reasons this alliance was unviable. Ricardo Espinoza describes how it was based only on opposition to the party in power, with no programmatic framework. If the alliance had been formed, this could easily have led to ungovernability or the emergence of a super-authority above the parties. Esperanza Palma, for her part, questions making an alliance at all costs, which put a priority on discussion about candidate selection mechanisms at the expense of an attempt to arrive at basic programmatic consensuses. The events proved to the parties that the alliance was unviable and that they had more to lose than to win.

In the "Science, Art and Culture" section, we continue to look at the vast artistic production that has come out of the state of Oaxaca. This issue includes the work of three extraordinary Oaxacan painters, Rodolfo Nieto, Rodolfo Morales and Luis Zárate, with commentary by critics Jaime Moreno Villarreal, Antonio Rodríguez and Christine Frérot.

*Voices of Mexico* pays homage to the great universal painter, born in Oaxaca, Rufino Tamayo in the centennial of his birth. We also include Alicia Pesqueira's presentation of the Rufino Tamayo Museum of Pre-Hispanic Art of Mexico.

The "Splendor of Mexico" section continues our focus on Oaxaca. Teresa Morales and Cuauhtémoc Camarena introduce us to the rich tradition of Oaxacan community museums. The state is also famous for its fiestas and traditional celebrations, so in this issue we bring our readers Elsie Montiel's review of three of them: the Day of the Dead, the Night of the Radishes and the *Calendas*. Natalia Toledo then offers us a delicious article about traditional food from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and we furnish our readers with a sample of Graciela Iturbide's brilliant photography of Juchitotecan women. Finally, we offer an interesting article by María de los Angeles Romero Frizzi about the sixteenth-century canvases preserved by the Chocholtec town of San Miguel de Tequixtepec.

Our "Museums" section is also dedicated to Oaxaca: Jorge Pech Casanueva gives us a glimpse of the Contemporary Art Museum of Oaxaca.

To pave the way for the new millennium, *Voices of Mexico* recently began to promote young Mexican artists who have already made contributions to their respective fields, but who also constitute the nation's promise for the next century. This issue's "Science, Art and Culture" section is rounded out with an article by Mario Pacheco about Mexican film makers whose quality and innovative proposals have opened the way for them in Hollywood, and a piece by María Tarriba about young Mexican theater.

Our "Literature" section is also dedicated to young artists. Eduardo Hurtado writes about the work of two Mexican young poets who have had the greatest impact at the century's close, Julio Trujillo and Luigi Amara. We also present the reader with several of their poems.

Trade relations between Mexico and the United States recently became very tense when a group of U.S. oil producers accused Mexico of dumping and unfair trade practices. Fortunately, the U.S. court decided in favor of Mexico. In his article in our "Economy" section, Andrés A. González says that decision really could not have gone any other way and explains the Mexican point of view on the question.

We are including two articles about the situation of women in Mexico. The first, by Estela Serret, in our "Society" section, takes a close look at current gender inequalities. Though the panorama is not bright, Serret recognizes that there are reasons for optimism because since 1975, the issue has become important among political parties, civic organizations and the media. In the second, researcher Lee M. Penyak contributes an article to our "History" section about the *casas de depósito*, an eighteenth- and nineteenth-century institution used to control women. It consisted of assigning "problematic women" to "decent places" for rehabilitation and/or to guarantee their safety in difficult conditions.

The same section brings our readers the second and final part of Jesús Velasco's article about U.S.-Mexico relations in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This part of the article deals with the period from the end of the French intervention to the end of the Porfirio Díaz government, which, according to Velasco, sought to balance our relations with our northern neighbor through establishing closer ties with Europe and Latin America.

The "United States Affairs" section rounds out the analysis with a balance sheet of U.S.-Mexican relations in this century by Remedios Gómez Arnau, who finds important similarities between the current state of bilateral relations and those at the beginning of the century: in both periods they were uncertain and unstable. Although trade has increased with the North American Free Trade Agreement, tensions have also increased due to issues such as Mexico's transition to democracy and migration, which shows that Mexico is not a completely developed country.

In the same section, Barbara Driscoll contributes a review of the state of scholarly work about Mexican migration to the United States, focusing on academic efforts with different theoretical-methodological frameworks south of the Río Bravo.

In "Canadian Issues," Elisa Dávalos looks at the United States as the driving force behind the Canadian economy, an economy more based on export than on developing its own internal markets. Dávalos observes that this could make for problems for Canada in the era of globalization when economies can become more vulnerable.

Our "In Memoriam" section pays homage to Mexican painter Alberto Gironella, recognized for his creative body of work that portrays an irreverent view of art, life and death. **MM**

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