

Mexico's Opposition Alliance

A No-Go

All hope of an opposition alliance with the participation of both the National Action Party (PAN) and the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) for the 2000 presidential elections evaporated September 28.

It was the PAN that finally made the definitive move, rejecting the negotiation results, specifically the candidate selection method.

On September 13, the parties had named a group of well known citizens to design a mechanism for choosing a candidate. This Citizens' Support Council for the Alliance Negotiations presented its proposal September 21.

The two big players among the parties at the negotiating table, the PAN and the PRD, differed in that the former proposed the presidential candidate be chosen using a national survey or poll and the latter proposed a primary election open to the entire population.

After months of negotiations, the apparent solution was leaving the design of a third road in the hands of the citizens' council, which finally proposed carrying out a "national consultation," or primary, and four surveys (three prior to the consultation and one exit poll). However, their proposal did not specify the minimum number of people to be included in each survey, the relative value that would be assigned to the results of the surveys and the consultation, the minimum number of polling booths that would have to be set up for the primary or a minimum number of voters who would have to participate in the primary for it to be valid. It left these "details" to the parties to decide.

This call for an "autonomous action," as it was dubbed, would have been organized by another 14 member citizen's council, including the participation of civic organizations, with the parties as observers who would "commit themselves to provide the necessary resources for successfully carrying out the primaries." The proposal did include the idea of training 40,000 volunteers sponsored by the civic organizations to participate in the logistics of what would be called the "Consultation for Mexico."

For the surveys, the council proposed hiring a company specialized in opinion polls. The firm would have to be vetted by the parties and the methodology by the council. The survey results would be given only to the members of the citizens' council, the party presidents and the candidates.

THE PARTIES' RESPONSES The leaderships of the PRD and the Labor Party (PT) and four of the new parties (the Party of the Democratic Center [PCD], Convergence for Democracy [CD], the Party of the Social Alliance [PAS] and the Party of the Nationalist Society [PSN]) accepted the proposal with no reservations. Luis Felipe Bravo Mena, president of the PAN, however, stated his party's rejection of the proposal, saying it was not a third road, because it included a primary.

The PAN also asked a series of questions which it did not consider were answered satisfactorily. The most important was what would happen if the results of the surveys and the primary were contradictory.

WHY IT DIDN'T WORK One of the problems that decided the break-up of the alliance was undoubtedly that negotiations centered on form and not content. The two articles that we publish in this issue of *Voices of Mexico* look at the reasons the alliance was unviable. Both were written before September 21, so they do not evaluate the final outcome of the whole process. However, both will provide the reader with a wealth of insights into why it turned out as it did.

WHAT NOW? The alliance seems definitively dead, at least the one that was originally conceived, one that included all the opposition parties. It is possible, however, that there will be attempts to forge partial alliances: the PRD with the PT and probably the PCD and CD; the PAN with PAS and possibly the Green Ecologist Party of Mexico (PVEM), etc.

New proposals might even be made to revive the original idea of the alliance. But that would be very costly to anyone involved.