

# OUR VOICE

Last February 16, President George Bush made his first visit abroad soon after his inauguration to Mexico, a clear good will gesture, breaking a long tradition of U.S. presidents who usually reserved that distinction for Canada. Undoubtedly, it was a sign of recognition of our country, today the United States' first trade partner. Guanajuato and all of Mexico celebrated. However, an unfortunate coincidence clouded matters: during his visit, Bush ordered a military attack on Irak. In our last issue of *Voices of Mexico*, my article on the U.S. elections pointed to the fact that the sharply contested, relatively unclear election results brought with them the risk of giving rise to a weak president. I expressed my concern that there is a clear temptation for weak U.S. presidents to rely on confrontation and war as a foreign policy strategy because of the public's tendency to support their presidents in times of international crises. Nevertheless, I did harbor the hope that my prediction would not come true. Long before I could have imagined, however, the new U.S. president sent a clear message to the international community about who holds the reins of world power: despite its crisis of democracy, the United States is the world's leading power, and make no mistake about it. Bombing one of the U.S. people's "traditional enemies" had the desired effect not only internationally, but also on the domestic political scene.

Even if it did put a cloud over Bush's visit to Mexico, this does not mean that U.S. relations with its most important trade partners should be affected. That was why Bush emphasized his commitment to the hemisphere, and, concretely, his desire to support the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and to promote the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA). This is the main message that should be remembered because it may make for greater growth in the region as a whole, with possible comparative advantages for Mexico given its being part of the NAFTA region. However, it remains to be seen if it can be translated into actions. We should not forget that the U.S. Congress is sharply divided, which could mean serious obstacles for any attempt to get fast track treatment for the FTAA. In addition, if his message is not going to be mere discourse, Bush should show that, now that North America is going through an economic slowdown, he is willing to share the solutions with the other two countries in the region, Mexico and Canada. This could be interpreted, undoubtedly, as a positive sign for all the countries of the continent in advancing toward the FTAA.

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Our "Politics" section in this issue includes an article by Roberto Gutiérrez about the challenges that the Fox administration will face in its first year. Two are of particular note. The first is the need to move toward a political and social model based on common norms accepted by all, which implies a serious effort to reform the state to generalize the rationality of political actions and propitiate the construction of a system whose main characteristic would be certainty. Secondly the fundamental challenge is the encouragement of a political culture of respect for legality, making it the priority on Fox's political agenda. This is especially the case because impunity has clearly not yet been stopped, which in turn puts the security of society at risk.

Mexico's party system has gone through important transformations since the landmark elections of 1988. It has gone from a system of a hegemonic party to one with at least three dominant political forces (the Institutional Revolutionary and National Action Parties and the Party of the Democratic Revolution). Esperanza Palma has written on this theme, showing how the other, new parties are not really organizations with strong ideological and institutional underpinnings and broad social bases. Rather, she argues, they are political forces grouped around the personality cult of a leader that feed on the contradictions and momentary splits in the three large parties, which have gone into profound crises —particularly the PRI and the PRD— since the July 2, 2000 elections.

Amado Avendaño Villafuerte's contribution is especially relevant in the current context of attempts to find ways forward that lead to dialogue and peace in Chiapas. Avendaño analyzes the different strategies that, in his opinion, the Mexican government has used to deal with the conflict. He points out that peace is understood by the Zapatista National Liberation Army and Subcommander Marcos not as a simple signature on an accord between the two parties, but as the authentic transformation of the conditions of backwardness and marginalization thrust upon Mexico's indigenous peoples.

In our "Society" section, we have inaugurated a debate on the question of abortion in Mexico. An extremely complex issue, we plan to present several points of view on the question, and in this issue, we include two. Specialist Myriam Brito Domínguez focuses on abortion as a public health problem. She maintains that extreme positions on both sides have blocked a profound analysis of the problem and therefore have made it impossible to create the conditions for having a serious national discussion. Anthropologist Marta Lamas points to the fact that criminalization of abortion does not lead to its eradication. Serious efforts in sexual education are needed to reduce the high rate of abortions in Mexico, but above all, it must be recognized as a human rights issue involving women's sexual and reproductive rights.

Luis Nishizawa is one of the most poetic painters in Mexico's visual arts. This may be due to his embodying two profoundly humanistic pictorial traditions that masterfully use visual metaphors: the Mexican and the Japanese. Art critic Margarita García Luna and cultural journalist Merry Mac Masters both write about this outstanding Mexican painter in our "Science, Art and Culture" section.

In the same section, we present an article by René Hernández, who goes back 65 million years to offer us a panorama of some of our country's inhabitants in the Jurassic and Cretaceous periods of the Mesozoic era: dinosaurs. Research by the UNAM Geology Institute has uncovered the heretofore unknown existence of dinosaurs in what is now Mexico.

Arturo Cosme has contributed an article about the painting of Sabrina Villaseñor for this section, whereby our magazine continues to promote the work of young Mexican artists.

*Voices of Mexico* considers it an honor that a team headed by Mexican scientist and UNAM researcher Antonio Velázquez Arellano has been given the Queen Sofía Prize, about which we have included a brief review in this issue.

Undoubtedly one of the fundamental issues on President Fox's agenda is fiscal reform. This is not only because previous administrations have long promised and always postponed it, but also because Mexico's economic development now demands it without delay. In our "Economy" section, Miguel Molina says that the timing is perfect for such a reform, given the approval ratings and legitimacy still enjoyed by Mexico's new president. The task is urgent, as testified to by the current low tax revenues. However, Molina argues that fiscal reform must also set social goals so that the benefits are channeled on a priority basis to those living in extreme poverty.

In the same section, we present an article by economist Bernardo Olmedo analyzing the role that businessmen could play in the country's new situation. He contends that the move from the protectionist economic model clear during the Luis Echeverría and José López Portillo administrations (1970-1982) to a more open one today has substantially modified businessmen's relationship to the state, increasing to previously inconceivable levels their influence in the country's economic policy. With this article, we are continuing the analyses about the role that different political actors will be playing in the process of changes in Mexico.

One of the social groups that has increased its influence in decision making about public policy is the so-called third sector, or civil society. In this issue, we have dedicated both our "United States Affairs" and "Canadian Issues" to the analysis of the striking development of this sector in the whole hemisphere, particularly in reaction to globalization and the creation of regional markets and in the protection of the environment. CISAN researcher Silvia Núñez points to how organizations of civil society in the United States and North America in general have oriented their activities toward demanding solutions to problems that are

not solved by either the market or the state. The limitations on civic participation through traditional institutions has spurred third sector organizations to a new dynamism. Delia Montero and José Sosa write on the same topic, arguing that one of the main challenges that civil society faces on a hemisphere-wide basis is moving toward a model of democratic integration and communication that will allow the interests of all the groups—whether large or small—to be represented.

The archaeological, colonial and environmental wealth of Mexico's state of Morelos occupy our "The Splendor of Mexico," "Museums" and "Ecology" sections. In the first, Leonardo Sepúlveda gives us a glimpse of the little-known "city of eternal spring" by taking us for a walk through historic, traditional Cuernavaca and stopping to admire its colonial architecture, museums, gardens and plazas. The variety of climates, rich soil and abundant flora and fauna were determining factors for the establishment of important human settlements in Morelos during the pre-Hispanic era. Archaeologist Barbara Konieczna describes several of the archaeological sites that have been discovered and excavated in the state, each invaluable for constructing that part of our history, among them Xochicalco, the best known site in the region. Architect Alfonso Toussaint finishes off the section by introducing us to the world of sixteenth-century religious architecture that left us a valuable legacy of monasteries, many of which have been declared World Heritage Treasures.

The "Museums" section is dedicated to the Ethnobotanical Garden and Museum of Traditional Medicine and Herbalism, located in a beautiful corner of Cuernavaca. Museum Director Laura Parrilla explains the importance of conserving and increasing the garden's collection, a source of not only botanical but also important cultural and social knowledge.

Lastly, in our "Ecology" section, Francesco Taboada takes us to the low tropical forest of the Huautla Mountains, Morelos' most important ecological reserve. Behind the figures and data about biodiversity and the efforts to preserve the area, Taboada discovers the world where the collective imagination has produced its own myths and beliefs about the beings that inhabit the region.

Mexican literature has prolifically produced very original, high quality short story writers. One of the perhaps least studied sub-genres, but undoubtedly one of the best known and most enjoyed by readers, is the ironic, humorous short story, almost always an urban narrative. Among the writers who have successfully ventured into this genre are many prestigious authors like Jorge Ibarguengoitia, one of whose small masterpieces we have translated and published in this issue. It is accompanied by a rigorous analytical article about Mexican humorous literature by researcher Lauro Zavala.

In our "In Memoriam" section, we pay homage to well-known Oaxacan painter Rodolfo Morales, one of the artists who has contributed to the prestige of Mexican art worldwide, and part of whose work we were fortunate enough to publish in issue 49 of *Voices of Mexico*, dedicated to Oaxacan painting.

We are proud to announce that the Printing Association of Florida gave *Voices of Mexico* printers Editorial Offset the Judges Award in its 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Floridaprint Awards for its production of our magazine. We send them our warmest congratulations!

For the last three years we have made considerable efforts to maintain the price of our publication. Unfortunately, for different reasons, among them the constant growth in material and production costs, we will be forced to raise the price of the magazine as of our next issue, number 56. Even with that increase, it will still be more economical than most similar magazines published in Mexico. At the same time, we will seek to maintain and increase the quality of our contributions and graphics.

Paz Consuelo Márquez Padilla

**Director of CISAN**