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**THE AMERICAS**

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## A City Under Siege

### *How Street Vendors Captured Mexico's Capital*

MEXICO, Mexico City

December 3, 1996

By William F. Foote

Mexico City is under siege. In recent years, armies of street vendors have taken positions on the sidewalks of the capital. Hawking everything from chewing gum to roller blades to hi-fi stereo systems, the peddlers are a byproduct of economic crisis in a country with no unemployment insurance. Their numbers have grown in step with Mexico's financial woes: in 1994, this city had approximately 600,000 street vendors. But since the botched peso devaluation, 900,000 more have joined their ranks to try to make a living.

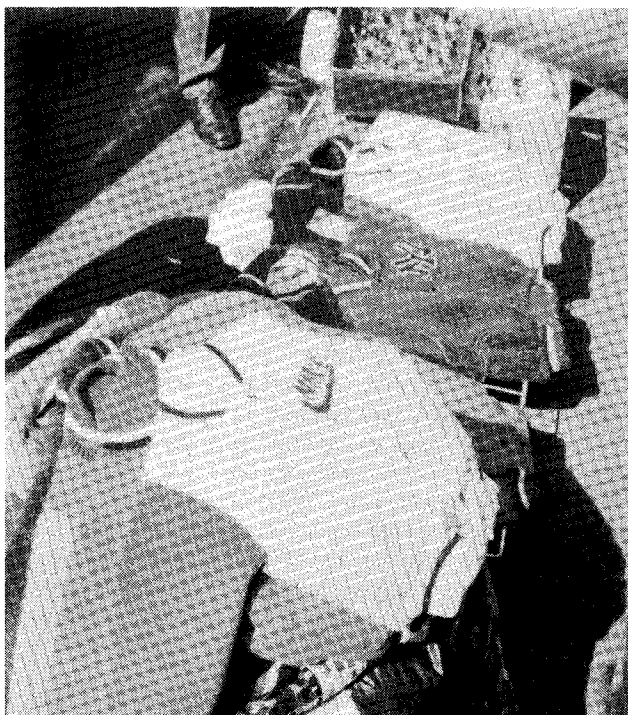
At present, informal traders outnumber legitimate retailers by two to one. Incensed by the competition, store owners complain that street peddlers pay no rent, do not support public services or contribute taxes. Moreover, established merchants say they cannot match sidewalk prices because the vendors sell smuggled merchandise. Roadside stalls, they claim, are but one link in a nationwide distribution chain of stolen property. Like '30s-style gangsters, the leaders of street-vendor associations are believed to have capitalized on crisis, dumping pilfered goods on an unsuspecting, penny-pinched population.

"It's a huge mafia," says Daniel Treviño Loeza, a restaurant owner and spokesman for store owners in downtown Mexico City. It was bad enough when street vendors sold the traditional contraband (e.g., goods smuggled across the U.S. border without paying customs duties). Yet in recent months, across Mexico, highway bandits have been hijacking a daily average of one hundred trailer trucks filled

with merchandise, says Treviño. As many smaller distribution vehicles are stolen each day in Mexico City. Hours later, their contents turn up on city sidewalks, where unregistered vendors sell untraceable goods at prices that often undercut those of retailers by 70 percent.

"Twenty years ago," adds Treviño, "these vendors hawked fruits and vegetables. Now they are selling things that compete directly with our businesses. It's killing us."

This huge and illicit underground market is pervasive throughout Mexico. Estimates



*Rip-off Nike jackets sold on the street in Mexico City*

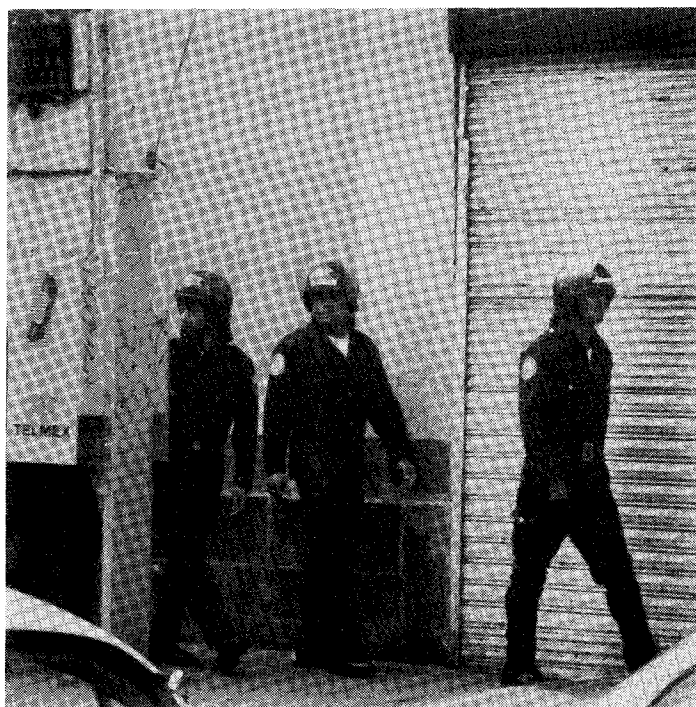
suggest that only 34 percent of the country's economically-active population participate in the formal economy.<sup>1</sup> That means the government is losing two-thirds of its potential tax base. A case in point: each year in Mexico City alone, street vendors evade an estimated 20 billion pesos (2.5 billion U.S. dollars) in taxes. This helps explain why Mexico has one of the world's lowest levels of tax-revenue collection — just 10 percent of gross domestic product compared to an average 35 to 40 percent in OECD countries.<sup>2</sup>

Still, the informal sector has its advantages. Most importantly, economists view it as a way of mopping up surplus labor. For this reason, government officials have long tolerated, if not actively fostered, the proliferation of street marketeers. For many years, city bureaucrats have rented-out public space (*i.e.*, sidewalks) for private commercial use, a practice strictly prohibited by the Mexican constitution. The benefits are two-fold: by promoting the underground economy, officials can keep a lid on social unrest amid out-of-work Mexicans while also turning a profit by collecting fees from street vendors or kickbacks from their organizational leaders.

As for the peddlers themselves, they consider their job a lesser of greater evils. "Put yourself in our shoes," says Alejandra Barrios, leader of a street-vendor association in downtown Mexico City. "You have six children and you lose your job. What would you rather do? Become a prostitute, a thief, or a street vendor?"

These kinds of choices for the growing legions of unemployed Mexicans have left the federal capital under siege. Nowhere is this homespun invasion more evident than in the historic center, where the number of sidewalk peddlers has jumped from 3,000 to 25,000 since 1990. Never mind that the colonial-period precinct encompasses a vendor-free zone established by law in 1993. Since the crisis broke, street vendors have laid claim to most sidewalks in the business district. More recently, with store owners fuming and a commercial situation bordering on chaos, things have got ugly.

Just last week, under pressure from the business community, the mayor ordered 3,500 policemen, most wearing full riot gear, to sweep the historic center clean of informal merchants. The motive was clear: as the holiday season begins, downtown retailers are banking on Christmas shoppers to boost their sagging sales. Tired of the underground competition, they lobbied harder than ever before and the authorities capitulated. Armed to the teeth, the police are now prohibiting street peddlers from setting up shop for the first time in recent memory.



Riot police sweep the historic center clean of street vendors.

"This is commercial war!" shouts Alejandra Barrios during a peddlers' protest march in the Zócalo on November 26th. While she rants before the TV cameras, women followers hold infants and placards reading "Let Our Babies Eat!" Three of them begin a hunger strike on the steps of city hall. "My people are desperate and no one — not the retailers, not the government — has the right to deny us a few extra pesos for Christmas."

## CHANGING MARKET PERCEPTIONS

Street vendors are as old as Mexico. Hernán Cortez marveled at the sprawling outdoor markets, called *tianguis*, of the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán. During colonial days, open-air bazaars underpinned the nation's regional economies. In the 20th century, despite the country's modernizing currents, street fairs have endured as cultural eddies of ancient Mexico. Pitched beside high-rises, highways and traffic jams, they hark back to bygone days, recalling Mexico's pre-Hispanic past.

In the 1980s, this market perception changed along with Mexico's troubled economy. When President Miguel de la Madrid came into office in 1982, he inherited the world's largest foreign debt, a huge government deficit, a battered peso, a recession, nearly triple-digit inflation and spiraling unemployment. Throughout the so-called "lost decade," Mexicans were forced to tighten their belts and endure an economic austerity program. Unemployment soared as the government downsized and the economy failed to keep pace with the million

1. *La Reforma*, Nov. 27, 1996

2. *La Reforma*, Sept. 24, 1996



*Old-fashioned sidewalk peddlers*

new persons entering the work force each year.

The informal sector ballooned. To make a living, out-of-work Mexicans took to the streets selling a dizzying array of consumer goods at street corners and in makeshift stalls. This came as no surprise. In a country like Mexico, with no unemployment insurance benefits, people are willing to work at lower quality jobs rather than be unoccupied. As Nora Lustig of the Brookings Institute writes: "To be unemployed is a luxury that most Mexicans cannot afford."<sup>3</sup>

Protracted recession, combined with massive urban migration, sparked fierce competition for sidewalk space. The poor hit the pavement, yet they couldn't set up shop just anywhere. Entry was highly controlled. The more remunerative the activity, the more difficult it was to break into. As one of the more profitable informal services, street vending required a license to avoid harassment by the authorities. To get one, especially in prime selling locations like Mexico City's historic center, newcomers relied on facilitators to penetrate the underground economy. These insiders, mostly former street vendors themselves, offered sidewalk access, police protection and cheap merchandise in exchange for commissions and loyalty. Known simply as "the leaders," they soon presided over sprawling vendor associations, ruling supreme over their informal ranks.

Their business has boomed. For the right to sell on a sliver of sidewalk, street vendors pay their representatives an initial sum of anywhere from 1,500 to 12,000 pesos (190 to 1,518 U.S. dollars). Additionally, their leaders collect a daily fee of 30 to 50 pesos from each

stall, keeping part for themselves and paying off the police and corrupt officials with the rest. Encompassing an estimated 1.5 million people in Mexico city alone, these 'protection rackets' have generated untold profits for the leaders while offering public servants cash as well as electoral support.

Over the years, the informal sector has become an important cog in the political machine of the PRI, Mexico's long-ruling "official" party. In the federal capital, street marketeers, shoe shiners, lottery ticket vendors, newspaper hawkers, mariachi musicians — all these groups are controlled by the authorities. Go-betweens make this possible. Acting as liaison between the government and these mushrooming interests, leaders of informal-service providers constitute a buffer between a burgeoning underclass and the political elite. Like union bosses, they help the PRI control the lives of millions of

Mexican workers — and they get rich in the process. Among them was a woman named Guillermina Rico, whose transformation from a dirt-poor fruit vendor into a powerful leader in Mexico City is the story of a life spent at the service of Mexico's economic and political underworld.

Born in 1934, Señora Rico grew up in La Merced, the old commercial district surrounding the seat of government in the Zócalo, the capital's central plaza. The narrow streets leading off the square are reminiscent of Mexico City fifty years ago, with restaurants, book shops, jewelers and tailors vying for space. A few blocks north lies Tepito, the famous Thieves Market, traditional home of Mexico's smugglers, and every imaginable item of contraband. Crime reigns in both neighborhoods, where chronic poverty has taught the locals to live by their wits. Guillermina was one of them. In the heart of Mexico's biggest black market, on a cobblestone street called Roldán, she rose to prominence.

When she was eight, Rico began hawking limes on a street corner with her parents. Over the next half century, she would become the most powerful leader of street vendors in Mexico City. Cultivating cozy relations with the authorities, she made friends and alliances with presidents, mayors and congressmen. With them she arranged a *quid pro quo*: in exchange for the unconstitutional right to rent public property to thousands of street vendors on dozens of downtown streets, Rico would help fortify the PRI's authoritarian control. That is, in addition to guaranteeing her followers' electoral support, she could summon tens of thousands of independent workers to the Zócalo for PRI po-

3. Nora Lustig, *Mexico: The Remaking of an Economy*, The Brookings Institution (1992), p.75.





*Guillermina Rico with Santiago Oñate, currently president of the PRI, Mexico's long-ruling "official" party*

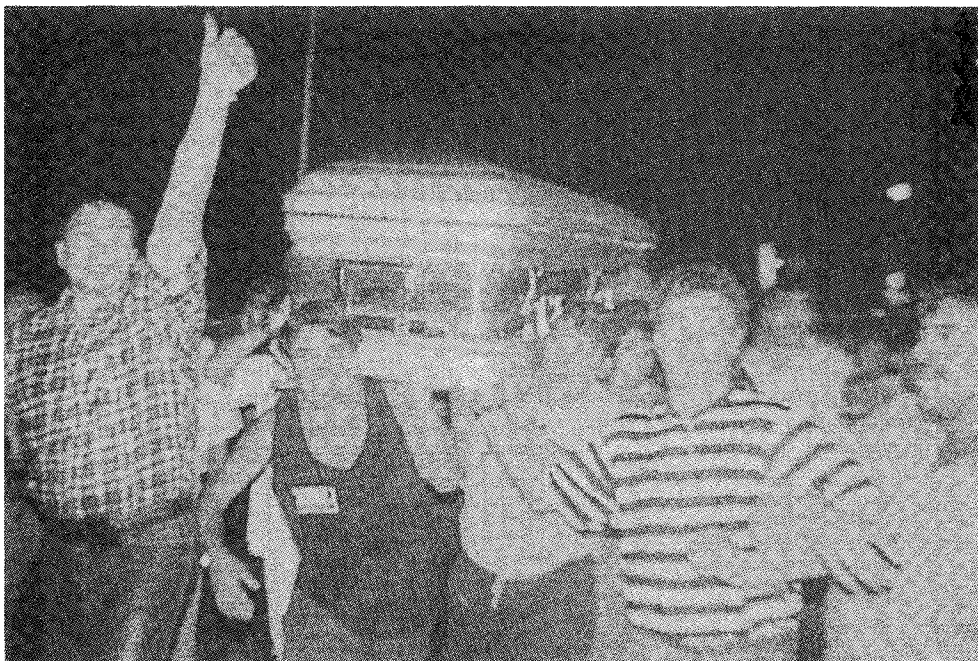
litical rallies in a matter of minutes.

"We call it the industry of marches and protests," said Treviño. "Leaders order their vendors to close shop and meet in the square — and bring along five or six relatives each."

Guillermina died on the night of September 4th, 1996. In an extraordinary demonstration of collective grief, the 6,000 or so members of her association took to the sidewalks under a torrential downpour. Carry-

ing her coffin through the streets, amid swarms of mariachi musicians and hysterical mourners, the vendors stopped off at PRI headquarters where a stream of officials paid their last respects to the lifetime party militant. From there the procession headed to the San Juan Cemetery where, for 24 hours, the sound of crying and guitars mixed with the call of peddlers hawking chewing gum and tacos amid the grave stones.

Today, eight leaders — mostly women — command the sidewalk marketeers in the historic center. Last fall,



*September 4th, 1994: Rico's followers carry their leader's casket through the streets of La Merced on the night she died.*

Guillermina's eldest daughter assumed control over her mother's association and, rumor has it, her fortune. While no official figures exist, rough calculations suggest that the leaders and their political cohort share astronomical profits. Considering that there are 25,000 street vendors in the historic center alone, each paying 30 to 50 pesos per day, that equals 274 to 456 million pesos on an annual basis, or some 35 to 58 million dollars!

Tales of legendary wealth abound. Luis Pazos, a well-known journalist in Mexico, recounted one last year. On a popular radio show, he repeated a story told by an American friend who owns a bank in Texas. In 1995, a Mexican woman arrived in Houston with 12 million dollars in cash to open an account. As required by U.S. banking law, the American checked her identity with the Mexican authorities. To his great surprise, the would-be client, a middle-aged grandmother with dollar-laden luggage, was a leader of street vendors in Mexico City.

### EVITA PERON OR AL CAPONE?

One night in the summer of 1993, while closing his imitation-jewelry store for the day, Guillermo Gazal was attacked and severely beaten by four unidentified thugs. He knew it was coming. As the founder of Procentrico, an independent association of retailers in downtown Mexico City, he had made many enemies in his fight to stem the tide of street vendors flooding the commercial district. After countless threats, he reckoned it was just a matter of time.

"Alejandra Barrios's people did this to me," states Gazal, displaying photos of his bruised face taken soon after he left the hospital. Sitting inside the small business he has owned for 39 years, he explains why he never pressed charges: "She's untouchable."

Alejandra Barrios, head of a large street-vendor association in the historic center, is the most outspoken and controversial representative of informal workers in Mexico City today. To her followers, she is a Mexican reincarnation of Evita Perón. A third-generation sidewalk peddler, she rose to power from abject poverty, as one vendor put it, "to give dignity to the downtrodden." Flush with cash generated by the informal trade organization she founded 14 years ago, she provides jobs and social services to thousands of grateful urban poor.

To local business leaders, Barrios is a dangerous gangster. They claim she runs an enormous protection ring and commands a veritable army of thugs who terrorize established retailers. A shrewd business woman, she makes huge profits through commissions col-

lected from thousands of associated vendors selling contraband and stolen property supplied by her organization. While investing a small percentage in benefits for her followers — "an effective public relations ploy," acknowledges Treviño — she keeps the lion's share for herself. An informal Empress of sorts, Barrios will go to extremes to protect her privileges.

"She's more like Al Capone than Evita Perón," quips Treviño, who recently stepped down as president of the Commerce Association of the Historic Center. Inside his swank, '50s-style diner, he explains how her influence extends well beyond the granting of licenses and greasing of official palms. With semi-trucks, warehouses and a fleet of smaller vehicles used to distribute illicit wares to her vendors, the leader's expanded network reflects a recent, drastic change in Mexico's underground economy. Unlike several years ago, when most street merchandise was contraband, 65 percent is now stolen property, according to Treviño. These illicit goods, sold at impossibly low prices outside stores offering the same



*Guillermo Gazal displays photos taken as alleged street vendor "thugs" attacked him in front of his store.*

products, are driving retailers out of business as never before.

If this is true, however, then why did most of the established merchants that I interviewed downtown claim the street vendors do not affect them? "Simple," Treviño replies. "They were probably scared that someone was watching."

Painting pictures of mob terror, he described how people like Barrios control the behavior of tax-paying businessmen. Through sidewalk lookouts, block informers and neighborhood delegates, the associations keep tight surveillance over the streets they control. Retailers rarely file complaints because, 1) they fear reprisals, and 2) the police who register their claims often appear on underground payrolls.

"If you so much as complain, let alone confront the peddlers," says Treviño, "they'll send their goons to beat you, rob your store, or attack your family."

Barrios claims nothing could be further from the truth. I visited her last week in her downtown offices, located in a renovated colonial building on the edge of Tepito, the smuggling zone. Late on a Friday afternoon, I lined up behind a dozen well-wishers and two local reporters. An hour and a half after our scheduled interview time, a heavysset "adviser" waved me toward the boss's office. Inside, two dozen wall photos remind visitors of the political connections: Barrios with former President Carlos Salinas, Barrios with slain presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio, Barrios with mayors, senators and police chiefs. I took a seat beneath her counselor's watchful eye, admiring the trophies sparkling all around, mementos of the vendor soccer teams she sponsors.

"The conflict between us and the store owners is artificial," said Barrios, a middle-aged woman of dark complexion dressed in high heels and a smart suit. I tried to imagine the street vendor behind the makeup. Pounding her fist, she accused the business leaders of manipulating the situation for purposes of self-aggrandizement. If there were problems, after all, wouldn't the retailers simply ask her vendors to leave? That they don't, Barrios reasoned, proves that the so-called conflicts are mere public relations ploys on the part of people like Guillermo Gazal, who has political aspirations.

"Not only are we on good terms," added Barrios, "but the vendors often become friends with their neighboring merchants. After all, we protect their stores from crime and, more importantly, attract clients."



*Alejandra Barrios, leader of a powerful vendor association, holds a picture of herself with slain PRI candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio.*

Changing the subject, Barrios spent the next half hour explaining the benefits she offers to her members: medical treatment, education, housing, funeral services. The next day, one of her assistants led me on a tour of their facilities. We visited the beauty school, located on the second floor of Barrios's offices: four teenage girls were practicing with curling irons. I saw no students in the high school class rooms — November is high vending season — yet the kindergarten across the street had 70 children inside, all dressed in cute karate uniforms. According to the director, their parents pay less than half the normal pre-school tuition and lunch is free.

As for housing, we visited three tumbledown buildings owned by the association. Called *vecindades*, where 40 or so families inhabit single rooms off a galleried inner courtyard, these types of dwelling were made famous in Oscar Lewis's classic 1961 study of urban poverty, the *Children of Sanchez*. Living conditions are poor: crumbling walls, putrid puddles of water, blaring ra-

dios. A tough ghetto spirit permeates the atmosphere of the overcrowded, inner-city community. I introduced myself to two residents, Jose Orozco and his wife Paula, whose story is a typical one in Mexico City's underground economy.

During the 1980s, the couple lived in Nezahualcóyotl, one of the sprawling slums located in the east of Mexico City. In 1990, the government confiscated their house after local authorities claimed the land had been illegally invaded. Soon after, Jose was fired from his job in a cardboard factory. In desperation, he and Paula followed a relative downtown to work as street vendors.

Acting on his cousin's advice, Jose visited the offices of Alejandra Barrios. Within days, they were selling toys and *quesadillas* on the sidewalk and had moved into their current apartment: one room, one bed, no windows. While cramped and dark, their place costs only 520 pesos ( U.S.\$66) per month, about half the average rent charged for low-end housing in the downtown area. In addition to paying for no services (water, elec-



*Jose and Paula Orozco, street vendors, pose on the steps inside the vecindad where they live in downtown Mexico City.*

tricity), all their rent goes into the association's housing fund. Started three years ago, the savings pool is used to buy and renovate real estate in the historic center to provide permanent housing for members.

"After four years of contributions, we should be moving into a brand new apartment next year," says Jose, visibly pleased. "Thanks to Doña Barrios, we're going to be home owners again."

Graciela Roca Martinez, a 33-year-old single mother, moved into one of those new apartments last year. Inside a handsomely-restored colonial structure, her two-bedroom flat is chock-full of furniture, stereo equipment and teddy bears that she purchased with soft loans provided by the association. Like the other 52 residents in the building — all Barrios devotees — she has a fixed-rate, 15-year mortgage of just 500 pesos (U.S.\$63) per month.

"What is so wonderful about our services," says Barrios, back in her offices, "is that we finance everything with resources generated by our federation." Eager to hear my thoughts on her programs, she regretted that too few people appreciate what she has done for her followers. What other organization, after all, provides so many benefits with so few resources to so many in need? Contrary to what critics say, Barrios claims she is bringing order to Mexico City. Indeed, she believes her association is one of the few things keeping this crisis-stricken capital from crossing the border into chaos.

"Wealthy Mexicans should thank us," she concludes, adding, "we deserve public-service recognition — not police repression."

## COMMERCIAL PLAZAS AND OTHER FIASCOS

In 1992, Mayor Manuel Camacho Solis set out to solve the street-vendor problem in downtown Mexico City. On one hand, he urged Congress to pass legislation establishing a vendor-free zone comprising much of the historic center. On the other, he launched a project to transform 27 derelict buildings inside the district into commercial plazas. These would serve to relocate the estimated 10,000 sidewalk peddlers occupying the area at the time. To draw them inside, city hall offered vendors private stalls, free public services, free T.V. and newspaper advertisements, and tax-exempt status.

The program didn't work. Street vendors cooperated at first, but as their sales began to plummet, they flooded back outside the plazas. In a matter of weeks the plan had backfired: Many peddlers now had one stall in a plaza and another road-side. In subsequent years, as 22 of the 27 plazas remained vacant, the number of vendors in the streets of the historic center has jumped to 25,000.

What happened? For starters, the plaza program was allegedly fraught with corruption. Consider the criteria for choosing market sites. Project managers are



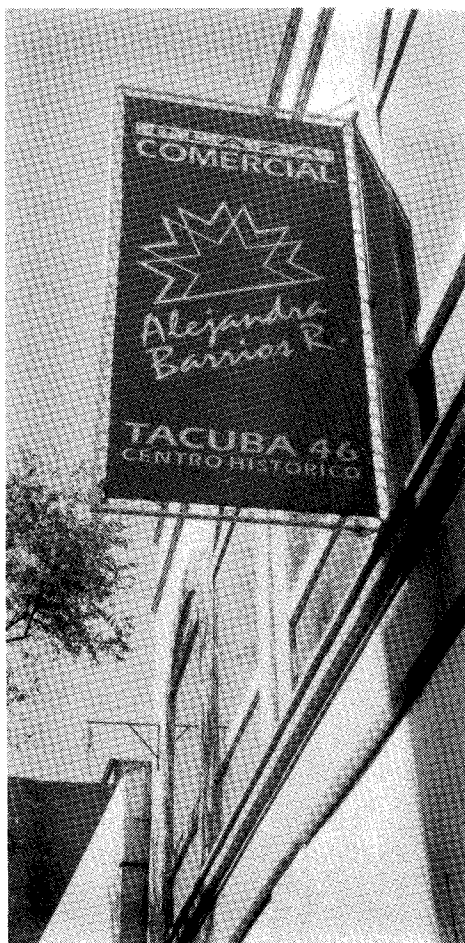
rumored to have ignored important commercial considerations like proximity to shopping traffic; metro stations, restaurants and busy streets. According to a city authority who requested anonymity, plaza sites were selected on the basis of whether corrupt officials — and some leaders of the street vendors — could purchase buildings at rock-bottom prices in order to sell them to the government at inflated values.

Bad planning also undid the relocation project. In addition to poorly-situated buildings, the plazas were neither designed nor regulated to accommodate customers. For example, they lacked separate sections for different goods. Dark and uninviting, the plazas discouraged browsing.

"I don't blame them for leaving," says Treviño, adding that "Camacho had a good idea. He just neglected the details."

So the project was a lemon, but was relocation really feasible in the first place? Some think not, arguing that the best plaza in the world would not have kept vendors off the streets. The advantages of their informal status — no taxes, no regulation, no accountability — are too great. Their leaders also stand to lose power and profits in proportion to the rate at which their rank-and-file become legitimate marketeers. No doubt the leaders enjoyed seeing their names on the plazas — one was called "Alejandra Barrios." Yet it is safe to assume that, with their support base at risk, they opposed the indoor economy.

Whatever the cause for failure, downtown business owners were furious over the botched project. This was understandable given the circumstances. The relocation initiative, it turns out, formed part of a larger, two-pronged strategy to restore the historic center after years of neglect.<sup>4</sup> On one hand, store owners had agreed to bankroll the renovation of sidewalks, street lamps and colonial facades. From 1990 to 1994, approximately 800 historic edifices were thus rehabilitated, helping to attract high-end retailers and restaurants to the district. On the other hand, in exchange for this private investment, the city government promised to resolve the vendor problem once and for all.



*"Commercial Plaza Alejandra Barrios."*

"We signed agreements, block by block," explains Treviño. "That they were not respected, in my opinion, was first-degree fraud."

For better or for worse, downtown looks great. Having sunk millions of dollars into the architectural makeover, business leaders refuse to write off their investment. Alternative strategies are under review. Among them is a plan to convert between 30 and 50 state-owned supermarkets scattered throughout Mexico City into commercial plazas for street vendors. Belonging to Conasupo, the government's notoriously corrupt food-distribution agency, the facilities were built to service the urban poor. In 1993, however, they were shut down due to internal corruption. Vacant ever since, each store has a parking lot, a loading zone, and at least 850 square meters of floor space.

"They're better than the current plazas," says Oscar Hidalgo, a small-business leader in La Merced. To finance the idea, he recommends that the authorities levy a daily tax of five pesos on all vendors remaining in the streets. "This could be the solution we're looking for."

Barrios disagrees. In her eyes, Conasupo stores are unsuitable due to their location in low-income neighborhoods: buyers are poor, transportation is bad, established outdoor markets already exist. While not theoretically opposed to relocation, she said it must meet her conditions: "If they want to herd us into a plaza again," she says, "it better be *Palacio de Hierro* [Mexico's fanciest department store]."

Short-term solutions are also afoot. The most memorable proposal came last October when a business leader demanded that store owners compete with the vendors on their own turf: in the street. Requesting that the city grant 3,500 December permits to his associates, Oscar Hidalgo argued that invading the sidewalks is the only way legitimate retailers can compensate for their losses from unfair sidewalk competition. During an interview in his downtown office, Hidalgo summarized his current philosophy: "If you can't beat them, join them."

4. In previous decades, the historic center of Mexico City had fallen into decay. Many attribute its steady deterioration to rent controls implemented in the 1950s, which attracted low-income residents and discouraged productive investment. In 1993, Congress revoked these regulations as part of Mexico's free-market reforms. That liberalization, which is proceeding on an incremental basis, catalyzed subsequent efforts to invest in and restore the historic center.



Most business people, however, staunchly oppose the idea. To become street vendors themselves they believe would simply ratify the law of the jungle. Chaos would follow. Guadalupe Gómez Collada, who replaced Treviño as president of the Commerce Association of the Historic Center, called Hidalgo's proposal ludicrous:

"It would lead to anarchy, absolute disorder," she said. "I can just imagine asking the owners of the jewelry store, La Princesa, to sell their diamonds on the sidewalk. It's absurd."

While agreeing with her, Treviño stressed that any solution to the street vendor problem, short- or long-term, must begin by jailing their leaders. Knocking out the kingpins would dismantle the protection rackets that make street vending lucrative. "We have a saying in Mexico," said Treviño to illustrate his point. "*Muerto el perro, se acabó la rabia* — When the dog's dead, the rabies disappears."

To date, the government has chosen to court rather than incarcerate the leaders. That said, during last

week's police deployment in the historic center, Alejandra Barrios's son was arrested for inciting violence amid his mother's followers. I visited the leader the next day, as riot patrols occupied her streets and her kid's mug shot plastered the newspapers. To my surprise, she seemed at ease.

"We will win this commercial war," said Barrios, leaving her offices *en route* to a protest in the Zócalo. Following her out of the colonial building, I noticed the wall murals painted on either side of the front hall. The left one depicted a pre-Hispanic street market, or *tianguí*, in the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán. The right side showed the same place, only five centuries later: the historic center of Mexico City with hordes of modern street vendors plying their trade.

"This isn't just about poor people making a living," the leader explained. "This is our cultural heritage, it's part of ancient Mexico." As we approached the great plaza, I noticed the stone-faced store owners as they recognized Barrios. Sensing their stares, she raised her voice to be heard. "We were here before the merchants came, and rest assured, we'll be here after they're gone." □



*Marching in the zócalo, street-vendor families protest the recent police crackdown on their informal trade.*



## Institute of Current World Affairs

# Fellows and their Activities

**Adam Smith Albion.** A former research associate at the Institute for EastWest Studies at Prague in the Czech Republic, Adam is spending two years studying and writing about Turkey and Central Asia, and their importance as actors the Middle East and the former Soviet bloc. A Harvard graduate (1988; History), Adam has completed the first year of a two-year M. Litt. degree in Russian/East European history and languages at Oxford University. [EUROPE/RUSSIA]

**Christopher P. Ball.** An economist, Chris Ball holds a B.A. from the University of Alabama in Huntsville and attended the 1992 International Summer School at the London School of Economics. He studied Hungarian for two years in Budapest while serving as Project Director for the Hungarian Atlantic Council. As an Institute Fellow, he is studying and writing about Hungarian minorities in the former Soviet-bloc nations of East and Central Europe. [EUROPE/RUSSIA]

**William F. Foote.** Formerly a financial analyst with Lehman Brothers' Emerging Markets Group, Willy Foote is examining the economic substructure of Mexico and the impact of free-market reforms on Mexico's people, society and politics. Willy holds a Bachelor's degree from Yale University (history), a Master's from the London School of Economics (Development Economics; Latin America) and studied Basque history in San Sebastian, Spain. He carried out intensive Spanish-language studies in Guatemala in 1990 and then worked as a copy editor and Reporter for the *Buenos Aires Herald* from 1990 to 1992. [THE AMERICAS]

**Sharon Griffin.** A feature writer and contributing columnist on African affairs at the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, Sharon is spending two years in southern Africa studying Zulu and the KwaZulu kingdom and writing about the role of nongovernmental organizations as fulfillment centers for national needs in developing countries where governments are still feeling their way toward effective administration. [sub-SAHARA]

**John Harris.** A would-be lawyer with an undergraduate degree in History from the University of Chicago, John reverted to international studies after a year of internship in the product-liability department of a Chicago law firm and took two

years of postgraduate Russian at the University of Washington in Seattle. Based in Moscow during his fellowship, John is studying and writing about Russia's nascent political parties as they begin the difficult transition from identities based on the personalities of their leaders to positions based on national and international issues. [EUROPE/RUSSIA]

**Pramila Jayapal.** Born in India, Pramila left when she was four and went through primary and secondary education in Indonesia. She graduated from Georgetown University in 1986 and won an M.B.A. from the Kellogg School of Management in Evanston, Illinois in 1990. She has worked as a corporate analyst for PaineWebber, an accounts manager for the world's leading producer of cardiac defibrillators and manager of a \$7 million developing-country revolving-loan fund for the Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH) in Seattle. Pramila is tracing her roots in India, and studying social issues involving religion, the status of women, population and AIDS. [SOUTH ASIA]

**John B. Robinson.** A 1991 Harvard graduate with a certificate of proficiency from the Institute of Kiswahili in Zanzibar, John spent two years as an English teacher in Tanzania. He received a Master's degree in Creative Writing from Brown University in 1995. He and his wife Delphine, a French oceanographer, are spending two years in Madagascar with their two young sons, Nicolas and Rowland, where he will be writing about varied aspects of the island-nation's struggle to survive industrial and natural-resource exploitation and the effects of a rapidly swelling population. [sub-SAHARA]

**Teresa C. Yates.** A former member of the American Civil Liberties Union's national task force on the workplace, Teresa is spending two years in South Africa observing and reporting on the efforts of the Mandela government to reform the national land-tenure system. A Vassar graduate with a *juris doctor* from the University of Cincinnati College of Law, Teresa had an internship at the Centre for Applied Legal Studies in Johannesburg in 1991 and 1992, studying the feasibility of including social and economic rights in the new South African constitution. [sub-SAHARA]

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