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THE AMERICAS

## Cronicle of a Vote Forsold

BY WILLIAM F. FOOTE

MEXICO, Morelia

November 30, 1995

### Election watching in Morelia, Michoacan

On the bandstand before me stands an aging diva wearing a green sequin dress, belting into the microphone the last verse of "*Navidad Triste*" (Sad Christmas). Behind her, a dozen *mariachis* strum a final chord on amplified guitars. High walls of speakers flank center stage. "*Muchas gracias*," says the singer, her words echoing off colonial facades that line Madero Avenue, main street in the city of Morelia. The crowd roars as her arms thrust upward toward an enormous political emblem hanging across the backdrop. It reads, P.R.I. the Spanish initials for Mexico's ruling political organization, the Institutional Revolutionary Party. "*Te quiero familia*," she shouts.

Standing on the press mezzanine, I nudge forward, bumping television cameras and zoom lenses, poking my head around cheerleaders shaking pompoms colored green, white and red. Madero Avenue stretches across town toward the gray Sierra Madres beyond. A river of straw cowboy hats flows down street, undulating under coiling confetti. As the sound system buzzes back to life, wooden noise makers stop spinning, thrusting placards fall still, and seventy thousand *priistas* hush.

"This is the moment you've all been waiting for," an official bellows. Dignitaries climb the bandstand steps. "Let's hear it for the next governor of the state of Michoacan! Let's hear it for Victor Manuel Tinoco Rubi!"

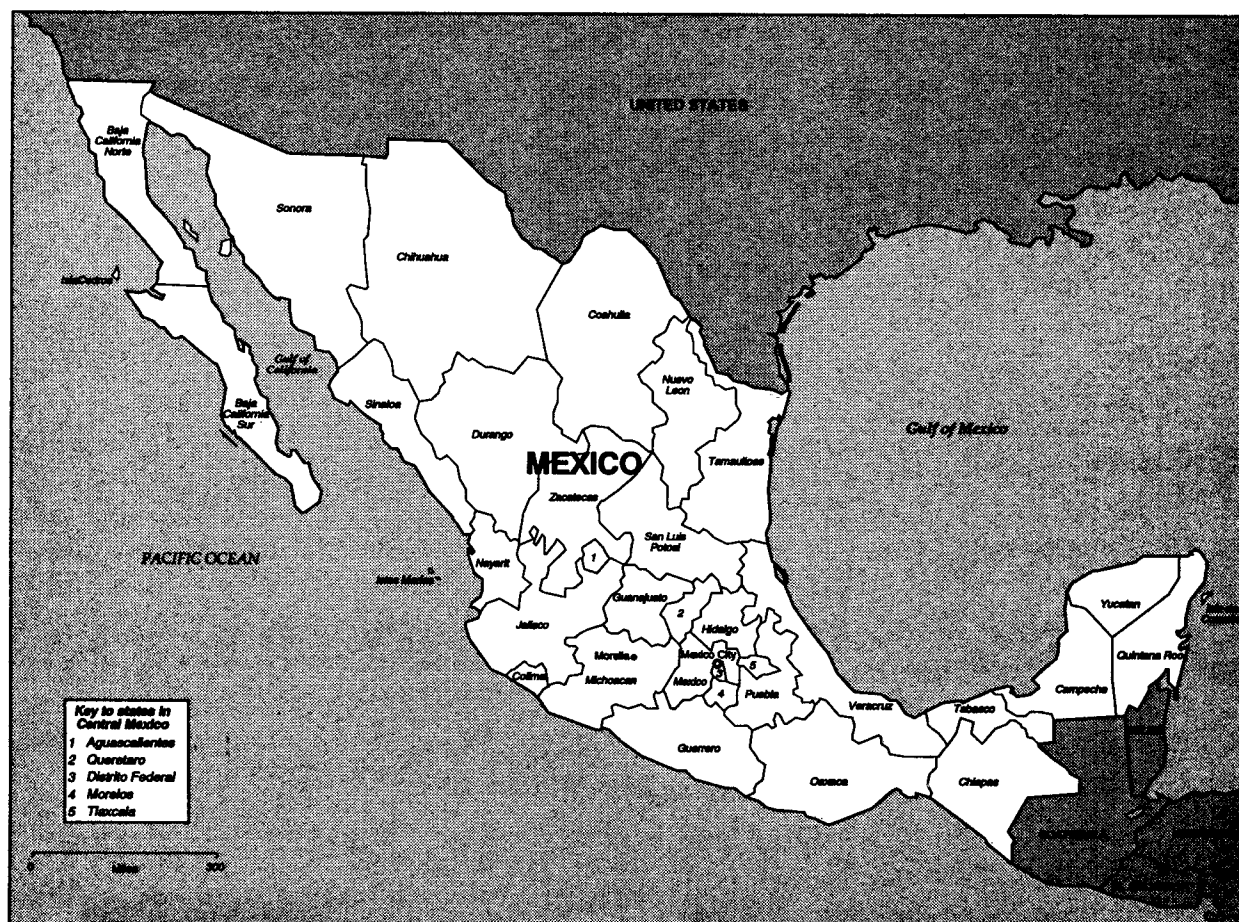
The candidate steps to the podium. "We've carried out an intense campaign from door to door, town to town..." Applause follows, then promises. I scribble the last one down: "I'll fight for new federalism and decentralization, to ensure the autonomy we need, the fiscal powers we deserve, the regional development we demand."

It's local election time in Mexico. On November 12th, the Pacific coast state of Michoacan was scheduled to join the states of Tlaxcala, Oaxaca, Tamaulipas, Puebla and Sinaloa, as well as the Federal District, to choose 6,257 new local officials. Some had new local attitudes; all understand the electoral appeal of Mexico's favorite political buzzwords: federalism and decentralization.

On the heels of unprecedented state-level electoral victories by the center-right party, the P.A.N., (e.g., Baja California, Chihuahua, Guanajuato, Jalisco), Mexico has hit a high-water mark in state-rights activism. Listening to Tinoco Rubi's stump speech, which closed his gubernatorial campaign in Michoacan, you can't avoid feeling that the P.R.I. is following the tide.

Or is it? How serious is the ruling party about devolving power to

*William F. Foote is an Institute Fellow examining the economic substructure of Mexico.*



## Current Fellows & Their Activities

**Hisham Ahmed.** Born blind in the Palestinian Dheisheh Refugee Camp near Bethlehem, Hisham finished his A-levels with the fifth highest score out of 13,000 students throughout Israel. He received a B.A. in political science on a scholarship from Illinois State University and his M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of California in Santa Barbara. Back in East Jerusalem and still blind, Hisham plans to gather oral histories from a broad selection of Palestinians to produce a "Portrait of Palestine" at this crucial point in Middle Eastern history. [MIDEAST/N. AFRICA]

**Adam 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's regional role and growing importance as an actor in the Balkans, 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]

**Cynthia Caron.** With a Masters degree in Forest Science from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, Cynthia is spending two years in South Asia as ICWA's first John Miller Musser Memorial Forest & Society Fellow. She is studying and writing about the impact of forest-preservation projects on the lives (and land-tenure) of indigenous peoples and local farmers who live on their fringes. Her fellowship includes stays in Bhutan, India and Sri Lanka. [SOUTH ASIA/Forest & Society]

**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. She plans to travel and live in Namibia and Zimbabwe as well as South Africa. [sub-SAHARA]

**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 and an accounts manager for the world's leading producer of car-

diac defibrillators, but most recently managed a \$7 million developing-country revolving-loan fund for the Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH) in Seattle. Pramila is spending two years in India tracing her roots and studying social issues involving religion, the status of women, population and AIDS. [SOUTH ASIA]

**Cheng Li.** An Assistant Professor of Government at Hamilton College in Clinton, NY, Cheng Li is studying the growth of technocracy and its impact on the economy of the southeastern coast of China. He began his academic life by earning a Medical Degree from Jing An Medical School in Shanghai, but then did graduate work in Asian Studies and Political Science in the United States, with an M.A. from Berkeley in 1987 and a Ph.D. from Princeton in 1992. [EAST ASIA]

**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. While with the ACLU, she also conducted a Seminar on Women in the Law at Fordham Law School in New York. [sub-SAHARA]



*Belting it out for Tinoco Rubi at P.R.I. campaign closing rally in Morelia.*

states like Michoacan and its municipalities? While I plan to focus on this question in my newsletters over the coming months, I don't have the answer yet. The first step toward getting there, however, is to watch the P.R.I. closely as Michoacan elects a new governor, 30 state congressmen and 113 mayors in as many municipalities. The official party covets its current hold on the governor's office, especially this year when, as a result of economic suffering combined with corruption and violence within the P.R.I., it has lost voters by the drove. How the official party conducts itself *vis-à-vis* Michoacan's 1.9 million registered voters seems as good an acid test as any of the political will to change.

Yet cause for skepticism abounds. Until the 1980s, Mexico's political system was highly centralized and authoritarian. The P.R.I. stage-managed noncompetitive elections. Opposition parties were closely circumscribed or outlawed altogether. Patronage, intimidation, and occasional repression enabled the ruling party to win 85 percent of the total vote on a regular basis.<sup>1</sup> Today, despite Mexico's political opening, electoral practices are still more widely questioned here than anywhere else in Latin America.

More importantly, nasty electoral habits appear to be more embedded in Michoacan than anywhere else in Mexico. After several weeks of scratching around Morelia, I now understand why, when five other states and the Federal District also cast ballots on November 12th, Mexican newspapers and television were obsessed with Michoacan.

#### MEXICO'S POLITICAL "CESSPOOL"

"We have become the country's political cesspool, the state most closely associated with electoral abuses and political violence," said Jaime Rivera, professor of economics and philosophy at the University of Michoacan.



*P.R.D. supporters crowd Madero Avenue during a relatively subdued campaign closing rally two days before the P.R.I.'s.*

1. Victoria E. Rodriguez and Peter M. Ward, *Opposition Government in Mexico*, University of New Mexico Press, 1995, p.3

can here in Morelia and an expert on the state's electoral process.

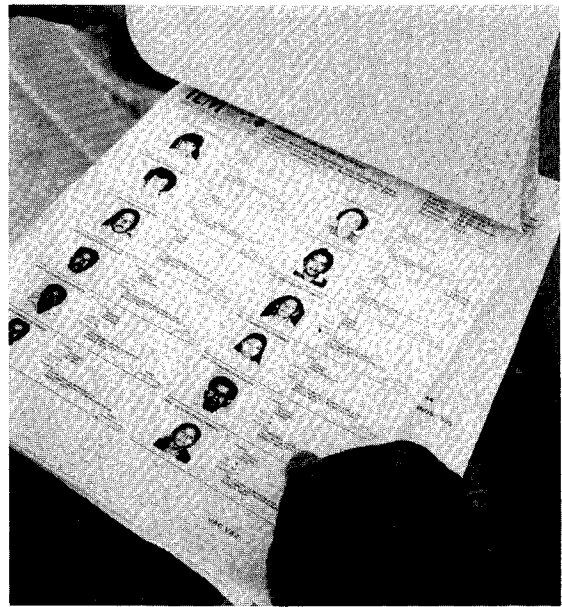
Since 1988, conflicts and political vendettas have plagued the region, Rivera explained. During that year's presidential race the P.R.I. allegedly massaged the results to ensure an outright victory for Carlos Salinas de Gortari. Significantly, the loser was a former governor of Michoacan, Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, who had just left the P.R.I. to found the leftist Revolutionary Democratic Party (P.R.D.).<sup>2</sup> Claiming massive fraud, Cardenas summoned his followers to civil protest.

Michoacan erupted in the heady aftermath. Demonstrations would continue through most of the Salinas *sexenio* (six-year cycle). Twice in four years the P.R.D. forced the resignation of newly "elected" P.R.I. governors—once in 1988, and then again in 1992, when current interim Governor Ausencio Chavez replaced Eduardo Villasenor. All told, Michoacan's protracted political violence claimed 115 lives over a period of 88 months, on average one every 23 days.<sup>3</sup>

"We simply cannot afford any more chaos," said Alfonso Alvarez Miaja, president of the Coordinating Board of Chambers of Commerce of Michoacan. Political problems have virtually crippled business here, he explained. "In the nineties, as investments poured into neighboring states of Jalisco, Guanajuato and Mexico, we were sidelined. Take Lazaro Cardenas (a west coast city), for example, one of the most important ports in the country, virtually forgotten, still waiting for investors to arrive."<sup>4</sup>

According to Rivera, however, in late 1993 "riot fatigue" set in, giving way to a growing spirit of reform.<sup>5</sup> As evidence, he pointed to a new electoral code passed in May, 1995. It promises to reduce technical fraud through a photographic voter registry and sets limits on campaign spending. Furthermore, all competing parties acceded to nominations of nonpartisan members of the Electoral Institute of Michoacan (I.E.M.), which oversees the electoral process. In turn, the I.E.M. accredited 648 independent electoral observers.<sup>6</sup> For these reasons, Rivera predicted "the elections will mark a democratic normalization in Michoacan."

Juan Molinar Horcasitas is even more upbeat. A professor of political science at the Colegio de Mexico, he suggests that Michoacan's elections embody one of the most noteworthy trends in Mexico of the late eighties and early nineties: the coexistence of competing political parties that run different levels of government.



*Michoacan's new photographic voter registry.*

"We're seeing the genesis of a true three-party system here. This is the only state in the federation where all three principal political forces are represented in relatively equal proportion. The results could map the probable course of national politics in the coming years."

Lolling around downtown Morelia after the Tinoco Rubi's closing rally, one might agree: opposition publicity competes with P.R.I. campaign posters for wall space; a pluralistic barrage of recorded campaign slogans blares from passing Volkswagen minivans; blue and white pennants (P.A.N. colors) crisscross with the Aztec sun, emblem of the P.R.D. On Madero Avenue, *panistas* assemble a bandstand for their closing rally the following day, as workers sweep up hundreds of P.R.I. placards and other partisan litter.

## HEMORRHAGING MONEY ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

"I think the money spent on campaigns today is insulting. Considering we're in severe economic crisis, it's unforgivable," said a bristling Mario Enzastiga Santiago, director of the Center for Municipal Services, Heriberto Jara A.C., a nongovernmental organization (N.G.O.) based here in Morelia. "The legal limit agreed upon by the state parties of nine million pesos (U.S.\$1.2 million) is bogus and everyone knows it. I don't think

2. Scholars also suggest that Cuauhtemoc Cardenas broke from the official party and founded the PRD because he was angry at having been snubbed by the so-called Dedazo, the "big finger" that taps PRI presidential successors.

3. La Reforma, Nov. 4, 1995.

4. Alvarez spoke at a press conference in this city inaugurating the Regional Reactivation Fund, launched with a paltry 2 million pesos (U.S.\$267,000) of seed capital from the federal government, meant to recapitalize viable companies in the state's major urban centers.

5. According to Rivera, the P.R.D. in Michoacan, under the leadership of Cristobal Arias, has finally adopted a moderate policy of dialogue, rejecting the strategy of radical confrontation espoused by Cuauhtemoc Cardenas since 1988.

the campaign managers themselves even know what they spend."

According to P.R.I. officials, the party's total campaign expenses in Michoacan this year were 4.5 million pesos (U.S.\$600,000). Yet local sources suggest they blew over half that amount on their closing rally alone. According to the Mexico City daily *La Jornada*, to ensure a packed crowd, the P.R.I. paid two million pesos (U.S.\$267,000) to transport 70,000 people using 2,000 buses to Morelia from the state's 113 municipalities. Furthermore, to keep the herds chipper, 20,000 baseball caps reading "Tinoco for Governor" and as many tee-shirts were given away. The cost: 400,000 pesos (U.S.\$53,300). Not to mention six musical groups that played all day, 200 full-time campaign employees, thousands of complimentary placards; and, of course, expenses incurred on *fiestas*, parades and travel over the previous four months.<sup>7</sup>

"What really gets me is that Mexicans don't know they're the ones paying for this hemorrhaging," said Jesus Ramirez Lopez, a reporter covering the elections for *Excelsior*, another Mexico City paper. According to a survey *Excelsior* conducted with a group of academics from around the country, 87% of the people questioned were unaware their tax dollars went toward financing the costs of all political parties in Mexico.

Once informed, 93% expressed their disapproval, said Ramirez.

*Alianza Civica*, Mexico's independent electoral watchdog movement, laments the misguided nature of campaign expenses. In its 1995 report on the electoral process in Michoacan, the national coalition of N.G.O.'s writes: "The political parties seem to have ascribed a mercantile value to the citizens' vote, hence their strategies are more techno-market oriented than political or ideological. But the enormous expenditure on posters, slogan-painted walls, human resources, etc., appears to have contributed little to the political education of the citizenship."

If the past is any indicator, the real total for P.R.I. campaign expenses could approach tens of millions of U.S. dollars. In 1992, an independent estimate of the P.R.I. governor's election campaign expenses in Michoacan that year topped U.S.\$30 million. That's over \$70 per vote officially cast for the P.R.I.!<sup>8</sup>

Jaime Rivera argues such profligacy was unique to the Salinas *sexenio*, however. "The P.R.I. has much less money today. In 1991, the year of the P.R.I.'s spectacular electoral comeback, they were flush with cash from the privatized companies. But now we're in a recession.... I'm not saying they wouldn't spend more on



*Partying with the P.R.I. on Madero Avenue at taxpayers' expense.*

7. *La Jornada*, Nov.7, 1995.

8. "Pluralism and Anti-Poverty Policy," J. Fox and J. Moguel, *Opposition Government in Mexico*, p. 194.

Michoacan if they could, or that the P.R.I. has changed their ways. They've just scaled them back."

Wait a minute, something does not add up here. Why spend so much on a relatively small population (3.5 million out of a 91 million total), a largely rural economy dwarfed by neighboring states (Jalisco and Mexico)?<sup>9</sup>

"It's bulging with electoral symbolism, that's what," said professor Molinar. "The P.R.I. claim powerful ideological and political inheritances in Michoacan through Lazaro Cardenas, Mexico's most cherished president and a former governor of Michoacan. He revived the dreams of the revolution. He redistributed 46 million acres of land to Mexico's peasants. He nationalized the oil industry. Michoacan is important P.R.I. patrimony.

"Ironically," he continued, "the P.R.D. claim Michoacan through his son, Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, governor of Michoacan from 1980 to 1986 [and aforementioned founder of the P.R.D]. Thanks to a complex regional support network he developed while in office, the P.R.D. enjoys hardcore popular support here. Cuauhtemoc wields a powerful political machine that the P.R.I. would love to break."

I learned of the P.A.N.'s crush on Michoacan through our landlord. "My friend Gomez Morin and I formed Accion Nacional right here in Morelia back in 1939," said Don Gabriel Perez Gil Gonzalez, 78, wearing a communicative smile and his family ring. "It was a reaction to what Lazaro did, really. We were all so mad at him for destroying our economy," added Don Gabriel, who inherited his two-story colonial house just off Morelia's *zocalo* (main plaza) from his grandfather, a powerful landowner in Michoacan before the Mexican Revolution.

Adolfo Ponce Magana, 27, a P.A.N. activist and salesman for Mexico's cellular phone company IUSACELL, was thrilled about our living arrangements. "Oh yes, I've heard about Mr. Perez Gil, and you know Gomez Morin was our ideological grandfather." Don Gabriel flashed Adolfo a "V" for victory when the two met, saying "We're finally going to win, sonny, aren't we?"

## MANIPULATING POVERTY PROGRAMS AND THE PRESS

Sitting amidst *Alianza Civica* colleagues on a threadbare couch in a tin-roofed warehouse near Morelia's Rio Chiquito, Javier Reyes Ruiz chews a wedge of sugarcane, his beard pressed against a IUSACELL phone. I have arrived early at *Alianza's* makeshift headquarters, owned by the Center for Liberation Theology of Morelia, to meet Mario Enzastiga, also a member of *Alianza*. He had offered to line me up with an official observer for next Sunday's elections. Reyes, who is coordinator of 100 observers, appears to have tired of tag-along reporters.

"I'll tell you something," he says, phone pinned between ear and shoulder. "You foreign journalists have got the wrong idea, descending on Mexico, expecting to see commando units swipe ballot boxes, things like that. It's not like that any more. The clientelistic controls for electoral manipulation are far more sophisticated," adds Reyes, who normally works as a researcher at the Center of Social and Ecological Studies (C.E.S.E.) in the town of Patzcuaro, an hour away in the highlands of the Puerepecha Indians.

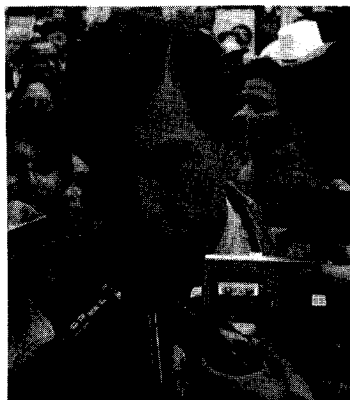
He's right. An important distinction exists between blatant electoral or technical fraud (e.g., ballot stuffing, destruction or pilfering of electoral documents, computer shutdowns) and political clientelism. Reporters sometimes catch the former, but seldom the latter. This is no surprise, since it would be impossible

for the international press corps to arrive months in advance, when the coercion begins. But if it could, the world might better appreciate the P.R.I.'s greatest talent, if not the very secret of the party's longevity: the art of taking control out of the voters' hands and influencing an election's outcome before the polls even open.

In a word, this involves the illegal practice of using government programs and public works to favor the image of P.R.I. candidates. Michoacan is no stranger to this. Jonathan Fox, an M.I.T.-trained expert on opposition government in Mexico, writes of how the P.R.I., following the P.R.D.'s resounding electoral triumphs in



Michoacan's political titans: Lazaro Cardenas (left) and his son Cuauhtemoc Cardenas (right).

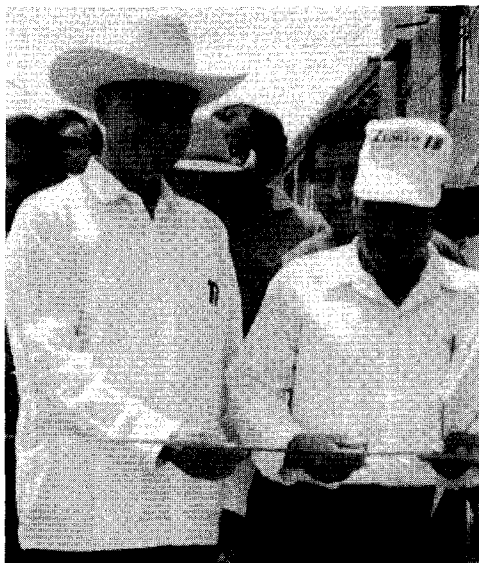


9. Jalisco state, northwest of Michoacan, has the third largest and most technologically advanced economy in Mexico, with major industries generating a combined total of U.S.\$1.49 billion a year. Mexico state, east of Michoacan, contributes more to the country's GNP than any other state, generating 20% of the nation's industrial production, or approximately U.S.\$3.94 billion. While Michoacan claims the most modern iron and steel mills in Mexico (SICARTSA) and is the second-largest timber producer, its leading industries generate a combined total of U.S.\$666 million. Anita Windsor, *The Complete Guide to Doing Business in Mexico*, (1994).

Michoacan in 1988 and 1989, pulled off an astonishing comeback just two years later.

"In the 1991 midterm federal elections, the P.R.D. vote [in Michoacan] fell to such a degree that many considered it a complete debacle.... PRONASOL [a federal anti-poverty program begun under the Salinas government] was key to the government's effort to win back the state. For example, 12 percent of PRONASOL's entire 1992 national budget went to the relatively small state of Michoacan, the main base of the center-left P.R.D., timed to fall just before the heated gubernatorial elections. One-fourth of the twenty-five hundred PRONASOL promoters nationally were deployed for the Michoacan governor's race."<sup>10</sup>

In their 1995 report on the electoral process in Michoacan, *Alianza Civica* asserts that vote-buying continued in Michoacan this year, but to a lesser degree than previous years. "PROCAMPO [a federal program that helps farmers buy seeds and fertilizer] and PRONASOL were the programs most used to secure votes," wrote *Alianza*.



P.R.I. interim Governor Ausencio Chavez inaugurating potable water system in Morelia in mid-October, 1995, one month prior to elections.

Mario Enzastiga said that manipulation of these federal development programs is easiest to detect in smaller municipalities, which depend largely on discretionary revenue-sharing from above. "In the 63 municipalities the P.R.I. controls in Michoacan, electoral coercion is not a problem. But where there's opposition, these programs act as spearheads to penetrate the community and undermine local officials through competing development projects. Sure, the municipal authorities complain, but what can they do? Local police

aren't going to deny entrance to a vehicle of the state or federal government."

A week before the elections, the opposition accused Michoacan's state government of dispatching PRO-CAMPO checks and PRONASOL school scholarships in two rural municipalities, eight days after the official pre-electoral suspension. They claimed that interim Governor Ausencio Chavez and Mayor of Morelia Vallejo Figueroa campaigned beyond the cut-off date, inaugurating potable-water, drainage, public-lighting and road-paving programs.<sup>11</sup>

In late October, 43 mayors of the P.R.D. in Michoacan accused the state government of inflicting "budgetary punishment." In a letter addressed to President Zedillo, they claimed that by October 25th, their municipalities had yet to receive budgetary allocations that, in years past, had always arrived by August. "Withholding municipal budgets clearly serves to weaken the presence of the P.R.D. during the current pre-electoral stage."<sup>12</sup>

Local newspapers opine on such crooked behavior only in slender back-page columns. In fact the general media consensus is that major irregularities have not marred the 1995 pre-electoral process. To explain this, politicians extol the scrupulous preventative measures taken. T.V. newscasters gush over the "electoral maturity" of Michoacan's voters, forged in the crucible of recent turmoil. Other election watchers, however, suggest pre-electoral tranquility reflects the P.R.I.'s iron grip on the press.

"An opposition victory is our only hope of liberating the press," said Jaime Rivera, who also founded the center-left newspaper, *Cambio de Michoacan*, Morelia's only opposition paper. "*La Voz de Michoacan* and *El Sol de Morelia*, the two papers with by far the largest circulation in the state, survive on government subsidies. Their withdrawal would change conditions for the competition and free the press to undertake more realistic, fruitful dialogue."

A study published by the Interdisciplinary Dialogue Group of the University of Latin America on the behavior of the news media in the run-up to Michoacan's elections verifies local media biases. The report covers the period from September 21st to October 31st. It states that of the total number of articles published in *La Voz de Michoacan* about gubernatorial candidates, 89%, 8% and 3% corresponded to the P.R.I., P.R.D. and P.A.N., respectively. Regarding stories that featured mayoral candidates for the city of Morelia, the P.R.I. nominee logged 25, versus two for the P.A.N. and one for the P.R.D.

The opposition claims the P.R.I. campaign payroll

10. "Pluralism and Anti-Poverty Policy," J. Fox and J. Moguel, *Opposition Government in Mexico*, p. 194.

11. *Cambio de Michoacan*, Nov. 11, 1995.

12. *El Financiero*, Oct. 26, 1995.

sprinkles journalists. Said Alejandro Ruiz Lopez, a *panista* state congressman from Michoacan: "We know perfectly well that the reporters collected their boodle from Tinoco Rubi's people in a house on Galeana Street in this city [Morelia]," said Ruiz, as quoted by Mexico City daily *La Reforma*.<sup>13</sup>

## SHADOWING ALIANZA CIVICA ON ELECTION DAY

Peering through a schoolhouse window in *colonia* Francisco Javier Clavijero, a poor community straddling the eastern hills of Morelia, I spot the photographic voter registry. The kindergarten is small and simple inside: tiny worn-out desks, narrow benches, an alphabet chart on the far wall. Squeezed into Lilliputian chairs, two grown men munch steaming *tamales* ten feet away from the ballot boxes and a voting booth. At the teacher's desk, a rickety old wooden table, three administrators register an old man wearing a cowboy hat. I withdraw from the glass as the men with the *tamales* glower in my direction.

"What you just saw in there was a clear example of electoral fraud," says Jaime Martinez Rosilez, 41, an *Alianza Civica* election observer, as we return to his car parked on the steep dirt road out front. "The people inside the voting station are all leaders of *Antorcha Campesina* (a radical peasant group affiliated with the P.R.I.) in this *colonia*. They're party representatives and should not be inside," he adds, closing the door of his 1972 Volkswagen bug.

Jaime starts the car and explains that Michoacan's 1995 electoral code established a selection process by lottery for voting-center administrators. To reduce the candidate pool, only people born during the last two months of the year could participate. "Hard to believe," he says, edging towards sarcasm, "that all the *Antorcha* leaders' birthdays fall in November and December and that every one of them won the lottery, too." Navigating past a pothole, he points to our right, saying, "I live in that neighboring *colonia*, so I know



*A woman casts her ballot under watchful eyes.*

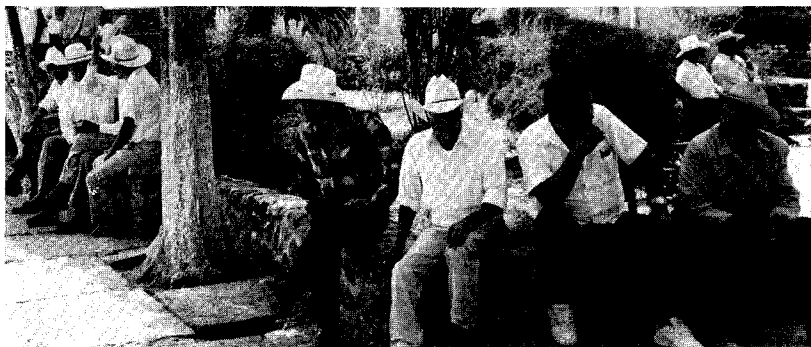
these people. Their mere presence will influence the vote."

Rattling up the steep hill, we climb a road cutting through tiers of primitive brick and adobe houses, passing open sewers and shoeless children. Approaching the hill crest, I peer through the back window: a magnificent view of the city sprawls across the valley. Distant steeples and red-tiled roofs mark the colonial district of downtown. At its edge, a 17th-century aqueduct draws a straight line east in our direction. Its ancient arches traverse modern suburbs, passing shopping centers and office towers, eventually burying themselves near these foothills.

On top of one, Jaime brakes for two braying mules, saddled down with their owner's sugarcane. Behind them, rural Michoacan of the postcards is on full display: *campesinos* bend in a patch of blue violet and amber wildflowers; saguaro cacti stand as high as trees;

cornfields ripple east toward the horizon, where dormant volcanoes lie under jagged swatches of sky. A winding road carries us 15 kilometers to the rural municipality of Charo.

"You see those guys?" says Jaime, pointing at eight men reposed on a stone bench across from the voting center off Charo's central plaza. "During the last elections, several ballot boxes were stolen here. They're making sure it doesn't happen again."



*Watching out for ballot box thieves in Charo.*

13. *La Reforma*, Nov. 23, 1995.



Jaime Martinez Rosilez (left) asks a friend in Charo if everything is tranquilo on election day.

Around the corner from the voting center five men huddle furtively around a vehicle. One scribbles on paper as we roll by. I recall Professor Rivera's advice: "Look for the person standing 10 or 20 meters from the voting center, someone taking down names. They're called *promotores del voto* (vote promoters). They usually work for the P.R.I. Later they'll distribute rewards and punishments, accordingly."

The *Alianza* observer corroborates: "Everything is closed down today: no government activities, no public events, no business to conduct. Are they registering the names of people that voted? No way to know, but it's a logical deduction." As he gets out of the car to take a picture, they disperse.

In La Goleta, a roadside community of 300 people half-way between Morelia and Charo, Mr. Leo Polo whiles the afternoon away on the sun-washed stoop of his family kiosk. The store sits on the only street in town, across from a dusty plaza of gravel and newly-cut tree stumps. I buy a Sprite and he talks.

"Last week, the [P.R.I.] municipal government came and knocked down all the pomegranate trees on that lot, promising to build a new basketball court," said Polo, 48, a paunchy man of swarthy complexion and a silvery mustache. "You see down the street there, that's where they promised to build a cement plaza before the 1992 elections. They cut the trees down then, too, but the cement never came. We call it the *plaza fantasma* [ghost plaza]. Looks like we'll have two now."

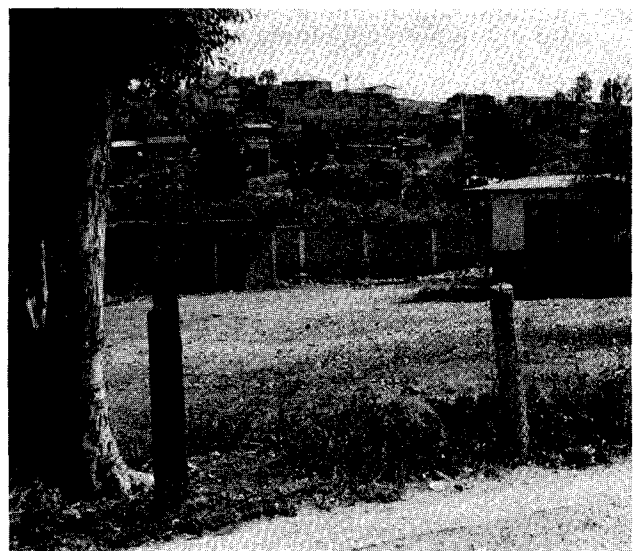
Polo's friend, an elderly gentleman slender as a pixie, points across the highway at a hilltop settle-

ment. "After two years of petitioning," he says, "the folks there just received 40 tons of cement from the municipality to build drainage canals [six weeks before the elections, to be exact]. There are lots of votes up on that hill, you see. Problem is, the people down by the highway [sparsely populated], they didn't get cement pipes. So, *aguas negras* (black waters) of the neighbors above empty in front of their houses."

Waving Michoacan's new electoral code booklet in my face, Epifanio Garibay, president of the P.R.D. in Morelia, rants over alleged P.R.I. violations. We have returned to the city, to the anxious cadence of modern life. "Normally we win in the rural areas, but this is how the P.R.I. tries to kick the trend," says Garibay, whose natty appearance clashes with the peeling paint of an abandoned house, the P.R.D.'s makeshift vote-counting headquarters. "The law says that in the rural electoral regions, the voting center should be located in areas of dense population. Well, we've detected more than 50 cases in rural districts of Morelia where the P.R.I. clustered multiple voting centers in sparsely populated *priista* neighborhoods, while more densely populated areas nearby—P.R.D. territory wouldn't you know—have none!"

## LOOKING BEYOND THE ELECTIONS: FEDERALISM VS. CENTRALISM

Notwithstanding this anecdotal evidence of electoral skullduggery in Michoacan, little question remains that the political system in Mexico is becoming more open and democratic. The genuine multi-party competition described earlier attests to this transformation. Since the mid-1980s, opposition parties have won at the state and municipal level. Once in power, however, politicians like the former P.A.N. governor of Baja California, Ernesto Ruffo Appel, have had difficulty delivering on campaign promises and dealing with the old regime at the same time. "If I stepped out of line, my



The Ghost Plaza in La Goleta.

public-works budget dried up," said Ruffo. Fed up with centralist controls, opposition governments across Mexico have converged in a vociferous demand for federalism: the devolution of decision-making power, responsibilities and resources to states and municipalities.

But these are nascent demands, and the P.R.I. is a 66-year-old centralist juggernaut. How much change could an opposition victory really bring in Michoacan? In early November, a star-studded cast of P.A.N. politicians and academics gathered here in Morelia to discuss this very question. Federalism and decentralization were the conference watchwords at the National Forum on Municipal Management and State Development. For three days, *panista* officials called for immediate, sea-change decentralization, while professors afforded judicious perspective.

"Don't expect the federal government to decentralize tomorrow," said Merino, President of the College of Political Science and Public Administration of the Colegio de Mexico. "The P.R.I. is only the latest version in a long series of centralist control mechanisms in Mexico, political apparatuses created to resolve regional-center conflicts."

Merino cited first the Catholic Church, the colonial structure that legitimized Mexico's centralist authorities for three centuries. Next, the 19th-century liberals (e.g. Porfirio Diaz) successfully substituted the Church

with a system of consistent and permanent electoral fraud that legitimized authorities of the center. So there is a strong historical tendency of the federal government to choose who governs states, how to centralize resources, manipulate electoral support, etc. "The P.R.I. is merely the latest manifestation of a longer line of central control apparatuses in Mexico," the professor concluded.

Dwelling on 19th century legacies, another panelist suggested that Mexico's government operates like Victorian industry. "The evolution of modern bureaucracy came with the application of 19th century industrial principles to government: division of labor, fractionalization of tasks, pyramid control structures," said Carlos Arce, political adviser to Guanajuato Governor Vicente Fox Quesada. "A hundred years later, industries have changed, decentralized, modernized for the 21st century. It's time for our government to follow suit by relinquishing its centralist controls."

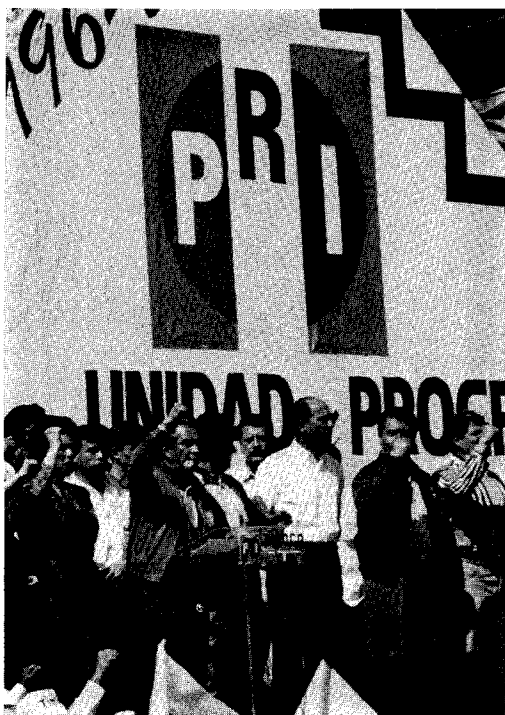
Ironically, the wizard behind the switches, President Zedillo, pushes the decentralist button frequently. In March, 1995, in Guadalajara, Zedillo proclaimed that "centralism is oppressive and backward, socially insensitive and inefficient." He promised to pursue a "new federalism" by transferring more tasks carried out by the central government, and by channeling more resources to state administrations and municipalities.<sup>14</sup>

Humberto Rice Garcia, former P.A.N. mayor of Mazatlan, Sinaloa, called Zedillo's words empty promises. "Federalism is either fiscal federalism or it is simply not federalism," said Rice, currently the national coordinator of the P.A.N.'s municipal authorities. "Today, the central government collects 98% of the taxes in Mexico, while the states and municipalities collect 1.5% and 0.5%, respectively. Furthermore, of the nation's total resources accumulated, 80% remain in the center, 16% go to the states, and 4% to the municipalities. What, I ask you, can 2,400 municipalities hope to achieve with such paltry resources?"

Rice went on to advocate the adoption of the Spanish system, where central government keeps half of fiscal revenues and the rest is shared among autonomous state administrators and municipalities.

But once again the academics demurred, raising the bogey of local *caciquismo*. "I actually think there is real conviction in the Zedillo government to advance federalism," said University of Guadalajara Professor Jaime Sanchez. "The more important question is, to whom are we decentralizing? Centralism in Mexico isn't just federal presidentialism. It reproduces itself at all levels of our political system."

Sanchez argued that constant pressure from the opposition has accelerated the time frame for healthy fed-



*Tinoco Rubi pledging to fight for federalism before 70,000 supporters in Morelia .*

14. Segment of president Zedillo's speech given at the inauguration of the National Forum "Towards an Authentic Federalism" held in Guadalajara, Jalisco, 29 March 1995.

eralism within the structure of the Mexican political system. He explained: "Take the municipality, for example. Its history is one of relative economic misery and lack of political participation which has produced a lack of professionalism amongst local administrators. This has translated into *caciquismo*, corruption and a squandering of resources. Re-educating local officials must be considered a long-term process."

People agree at the Municipal Support Coordination (M.S.C.), a government organism in Morelia. "We're here to instruct local leaders in resource management, to act as facilitators for new federalism," said Renato Ferreira Lopez, M.S.C. administrative training coordinator.<sup>15</sup> "Zedillo's Development Plan will strengthen the basic cells of our federation *via* administrative decentralization. My job is to help them learn to absorb resources efficiently, just as the government provides municipalities with greater institutional capacity. But this is, of course, a gradual process of maturation."

Mario Enzastiga objects to that attitude: "Municipalities are not little kids!" A growing number of Mexico's mayors have gone to extremes to make his point. Francisco Villarreal, mayor of Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, went on a hunger strike last summer, demanding that more proceeds remain with his municipality from federal tolls collected on the U.S. border. In October his counterpart followed suit in Cuautitlan, in the state of Mexico, insisting that resources promised by the state government be paid.<sup>16</sup> Last week Guanajuato Governor Vicente Fox Quesada of the P.A.N., together with the state's P.R.D. mayors, ordered the federal government to increase allocations to municipalities by 100%.<sup>17</sup> According to Mario Enzastiga, similar rumblings stamped the pre-electoral process in Michoacan.

Do such rumblings, however, register with Mexico's ruling party? Tinoco Rubi's stump speech in Morelia suggests they do. His federalist promises before 70,000 *priistas* at the closing rally described earlier was, I think, the P.R.I.'s way of saying "bear with us, we're flexible."

But what does that flexibility imply? In his book, *Twentieth Century Dictatorships: The Ideological One-Party States*, Paul Brooker suggests the P.R.I.'s longevity is largely a function of elastic ideology (i.e., a group of flexible ideas that afford the absence of commitments and principles.) He writes that it is precisely this flexibility that has enabled the "revolutionary family" to successfully transform itself for 66 years, from Car-

denas's quasi-socialism to Salinas's neo-liberalism. So should we assume that Tinoco Rubi speaks in earnest about federalism? That he understands the need for decentralization? Sure, in his own flexible way.

On November 17th, front page headlines in Morelia announced final election results: "Tinoco Rubi Triumphs!" exclaimed *La Voz de Michoacan*. And so it went, the P.R.I. held on to the governorship with 39% of the vote, dodging a loss that would have capped a truly devastating year, claiming rights to the symbols of the Lazaro legacy for six more years.

That evening, however, thousands of *panistas* flocked to Morelia's central plaza to celebrate. Why? Because the P.A.N swept every major city government in the state, including Morelia. Starting January 1st, 1996, *panista* mayors will govern over 40% of Michoacan's population. More importantly, in Mexico at large the party now controls virtually every major urban center in the country: Guadalajara, Monterrey, Leon, Merida, Veracruz, Tuxla Gutierrez. With governors, legislators and mayors governing over 35 million people in the country—one in every three Mexicans—the P.A.N. is in an advantageous position for the important 1997 midterm elections and then the presidential race in the year 2000.

At the same time, the P.R.D. won a majority of Michoacan's municipal governments, increasing their number of mayors from 42 to 53. Significantly, the center-left party has yet to resort to the civil disobedience of recent past. While numerous incidents of electoral fraud were reported, the P.R.D leadership appears to agree with *Alianza Civica* that "these irregularities did not materially impact the general results."<sup>18</sup> It seems that the battered leftist party has taken some solace in having thwarted once again the P.R.I.'s attempt to break their local political machine.

Still, the ruling party clung to the governor's office, and that was more than reason enough for Tinoco Rubi to throw another *fiesta*. On November 22nd, he invited all the local reporters who covered his campaign to accompany him and the P.R.I. campaign team on a three-day holiday, all expenses paid, to the wavy beaches of Michoacan's Pacific coast (reported only by *La Reforma*, a Mexico City paper—surprise, surprise).<sup>19</sup> Their swimming party would suggest that, despite the rip tides of pluralism engulfing this state following the November 12th elections, Tinoco Rubi and the P.R.I. have no fear of drowning...yet. □

15. The M.S.C. is a liaison organism between Michoacan's governor and the state's 113 mayors that administers Michoacan's federal revenue-sharing programs, like PRONASOL and PROCAMPO.

16. *El Financiero*, Nov. 8, 1995.

17. *La Reforma*, Nov. 16, 1995.

18. *Voz de Michoacan*, Nov. 16, 1995.

19. *La Reforma*, Nov. 23, 1995.

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