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TO : Department of State

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FROM : Amembassy Mexico

DATE: November 24, 1969

SUBJECT : Political Change in Mexico

REF :

Summary.

1. As Mexico progresses economically and socially the political consensus (in large part apolitical) that has permitted one party semiauthoritarian government for forty years is eroding. The proportion of Mexicans who are politically aware and desirous of influencing political decisions, although still small, is increasing. Those Mexicans who no longer find the PRI a satisfactory channel of political expression demonstrate their discontent by dissent within the official party, by voting for opposition parties (principally the PAN), or by simply abstaining from political processes. Ignoring the totalitarian fringe groups, the demands of the dissatisfied for political change in Mexico fall into five major categories: 1) A changed power relationship between the branches of the federal government; 2) A changed relationship between the federal, state and municipal governments; 3) A changed relationship between the official party and the government; 4) A larger and more accepted role for opposition; and 5) Changes within the PRI, both structural and procedural. In common, the dissatisfied seek a more open and democratic political system. However, most informed Mexicans, including many dissidents, doubt that their country is ready for thoroughgoing democracy. They fear political instability. They would prefer to see gradual evolutionary movement away from one party guided democracy. While PRI-Government leaders at times pay lip service to this goal, there is little indication as yet that they are committed to it, willing to work toward it, or even to permit it. We judge that during the Echeverría administration (1970-76) the PRI-Government will continue to stress economic, social and administrative reforms over political. PRI-Government willingness

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to permit political change is not likely to keep up with demands for change, and the proportion of Mexicans in opposition or dissent will increase.

2. Some of the political system changes demanded are unrealistic at this stage of Mexico's history and development. Quite apart from the sectarian interests of the PRI we do not foresee in the near future any significant changes in the first two relationships listed above. Third category change is almost equally unlikely. Fourth and fifth category changes are possible during the next few years, but will involve political risks as well as benefits.

3. Two highly speculative, but perhaps potentially important, secondary conclusions emerge from this analysis. If demands for political change, expressed by an increasing proportion of Mexicans, exceed change, then the overt use of force in support of and against the established political system may play a greater role in Mexican political life in the early seventies than in recent past decades. The United States, which is the prime inspiration for those Mexicans who seek political change and at the same time is closely linked with what many consider the political status quo, may be increasingly vilified by both sides.

Mexico's Political Culture

4. Robert Scott has estimated that in 1910 90% of Mexico's population were parochials (persons unaware of or rejecting the national political system); perhaps 8-9% were subjects (affected by government services and demands but exercising no control over policy); and no more than 1-2% were participants (those exercising some influence or control over policy). By the early 1960s he thinks these proportions had changed to 25,65, 10.* A Mexican political scientist recently told the reporting officer that his estimate of the number of Mexicans who are "politically aware" is 10%. Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba in The Civic Culture present a wealth of survey data which tends to confirm this low incidence of political participant attitudes and awareness. For example: 66% of the Mexicans interviewed said that the national government had no effect on their daily lives (vs. 11% in the U.S.); 44% never follow accounts of political and governmental affairs (vs. 19%); 53% could name no party leader (vs. 16%); 50% do not expect equal treatment from the governmental bureaucracy (vs. 9%); 45% pay no attention to election campaigning (vs. 12%);

*Mexican Government in Transition (Revised Edition), p. 317

only 6% have attempted to influence local government (vs. 28%).*

5. For the purposes of this airgram we may conclude that a substantial majority of Mexicans are politically unaware or politically disinterested. National voting figures are not themselves an adequate indication of the number of politically concerned Mexicans. In the two most recent presidential elections (1958 and 1964) 49.4% and 54.0% of persons over 20 were recorded as voting. This was not a great deal less than the U.S. percentages of 63.5 and 62.0 in 1960 and 1964. However, it is generally assumed that Mexican voting figures (for the PRI) are padded. The Mexican political scientist, referred to above, suggests that actual voting may be no more than 50% of the recorded vote. Even if we assume that 35-40% of eligible Mexicans vote, we must still make allowance for that substantial fraction of citizens who vote mainly, or only, because they are told to or paid to. In this respect Almond and Verba report that only 34% of the Mexicans who do vote feel satisfaction when going to the polls (vs. 71% in the U.S.).

6. Critics of Mexico's political system assert that voter disinterest is attributable to the hegemonic position of an official party. Why bother to vote when the outcome is a foregone conclusion? Some support for this thesis can be found in a 1967 paper by José Luis Reyna.** Expecting to find a positive correlation between socio-economic development and electoral participation, he found just the reverse. The Mexican states (including the Federal District) which scored high on development (circa 1960) ranked relatively low in electoral participation (1958 figures). The poorest, most agricultural states tended to rank highest in participation, as measured by voting statistics. Reyna avoids one possible conclusion-- that voting statistics in poor areas are grossly

* The Civic Culture presents comparative survey data for the U.S. Great Britain, Germany, Italy and Mexico. The Mexico sample (of 1007 persons) differed from the others in that it did not include anyone in towns of less than 10,000 population. A fully representative sample, giving due weight to the small town inhabitant and isolated campesino, would make the disparities between the U.S. and Mexico even greater. The survey dates from 1959.

** "Desarrollo Económico y Participación Electoral", Ciencias Políticas y Sociales, No. 5, Oct.-Dec. 1967 (UNAM)

distorted. He attributes the high vote in these areas to the personalistic nature of politics (la política de clientela); and the low vote in developed areas to political apathy in the face of extreme centralization of power. However he also notes that despite the relatively low electoral participation in developed areas, the percentage of the vote won by opposition parties is much higher there than in the backward states.

7. Perhaps a more basic explanation of the political disinterest of the average Mexican is that political culture changes very slowly. In 1920 when there was no official party, and a heady revolutionary euphoria, only 34.8% of eligible Mexicans (males) voted. Ernest Gruening writing in the late 1920s commented on the "utter failure to date of any growth of democratic practice."* Many Mexicans fail to vote because they have little conception of the relationship between voting and public policy, much less any perception that they themselves might influence policy. The same may be said of many who do vote. Numerous observers have commented upon the identity, in the minds of more humble Mexicans, between the official party and the government. If they have heard of an opposition party at all it is probably only through the condemnatory propaganda of the PRI. There is little realization that the heart of political participation involves choice (unless, with the Partido Acción Nacional, we can interpret the large abstention percentage as a negative choice against the PRI and the government).

8. The slow growth of political awareness, and particularly of participant attitudes, is an important contributing factor to Mexican political stability over the past forty years. At least equally important was the fact that Mexico's leaders were able to coalesce into one political party which has: appropriated to itself the mantle of the Revolution, generally prevented issues of public policy from becoming matters of public debate, and effectively restricted the access of opposition groups to the electorate. That the PRI is the party of the Revolution and that the majority of Mexicans cannot yet conceive of any alternative are still of paramount, if diminishing, importance in Mexican politics.

9. The key question, asked by many and for a long time, is how much longer this state of affairs will or can continue. There is a tendancy, when confronted with the facts of overwhelming PRI electoral victories and near monopoly of office holding, to locate significant change in the Mexican political system at some far distant date. On the other hand, it may be more important to disregard the apolitical mass and concentrate our analysis on the politically participant minority.

* Mexico and Its Heritage, p. 393

10. If we assume that Scott's estimate of 10% political participants is reasonably accurate, we may estimate that 30-40% of this group is composed of oppositionists or dissidents. Here we are not talking about those who disagree with one or another social or economic policy but rather those who are in disagreement, to varying degrees, with the political system. Approximately 6% of all eligible voters supported the PAN in the 1964 presidential election.* Many of these voters, especially rural clerical elements within or on the fringes of the PAN, are no more participant in their political orientations than their opposite numbers in the PRI. But the PAN is primarily an urban middle class party and it seems certain that its ranks contain a much greater proportion of politically aware citizens than is true of the PRI. Within the PRI there is a small but probably increasing number of dissidents who, while they vote for and may even work within the party, are there in good part because they do not yet see a preferable or viable alternative. Some students and intellectuals fall in this category. Perhaps the bulk can be found in that portion of the socially and economically integrated urban population which abstains from voting. These persons are not politically disinterested in the same sense as an illiterate peasant. In sum, a substantial proportion of politically aware Mexicans are actual or potential oppositionists.

11. As Mexico progresses socially and economically the proportion of citizens with participant orientations will increase. Within this group the proportion of oppositionists may also increase because, for one reason, aspiring politicians will begin to see more viable alternatives outside the official party.

12. The ways in which social and economic progress affect political culture are multiple. Almond and Verba examine one facet, the effect of education, in their survey. The number of Mexicans who follow accounts of politics (regularly or from time to time) increases from 51% among those with primary education or less, to 76% among those with some secondary education, to 92% among those with some university education. Membership in voluntary organizations increases from 21% to 39% to 68% (according to educational level). Urbanization and industrialization are other trends which tend to support participatory political attitudes, in part because they bring people together in situations in which group decision-making, aggregation of interests and conciliation of differences begin to be important, in part because people

* The Partido Popular Socialista (PPS) and the Partido Auténtico de la Revolución Mexicana (PARM) supported the PRI candidate. The PPS and its supporters are disregarded in this airgram because they have little interest, certainly not sincere, in democratic political change; it is not clear how the PARM differs from the PRI except in desiring more patronage and offices for its own members.

learn that organized political behavior can produce results, and in part because they become exposed to opposition or dissident political voices, perhaps for the first time. Urbanization is proceeding at a rapid rate in Mexico. According to one projection Mexico will be 59.5% urban (towns over 2,500) by 1970 (vs. 35.1% in 1940). Perhaps more important, 45.3% of the population will live in cities of 10,000 plus inhabitants by 1970 (vs. 21.9% in 1940). Urbanization, of course, increases access to education. The proportion of the work force in the industrial sector is increasing slowly but steadily -- from 13.8% in 1940 to 15.5% in 1960.

13. The expansion of communications and transportation networks, apart from contributing to urbanization and industrialization, may have a more direct impact on political attitudes. Whereas in 1940 there were only 10,000 kilometers of improved roads, in 1965 there were 58,300 kilometers. The transistor radio has become a common sight in the Mexican countryside and there is now a national television network.

The Proponents of Change

14. Political change is being advocated by the PAN, by a small minority of priistas and by a number of intellectuals. The student population might be considered a voice for political change, but its demands to date have not been well focused.

The PAN. The current theme of the Partido Acción Nacional is "Democratic Change of Structures." In its platform approved at the 20th National Convention last February (see A-166 of March 31, 1969) and on frequent occasions since the PAN has advocated directly, or implicitly through its criticisms, reforms of every type discussed in this airgram (see Summary, or next section). That the PAN should be such a strong advocate of political change is not surprising. As the largest opposition party it could reasonably hope to gain most from changes in the direction of a more open and democratic political system. The institutional interests of the party complement the political beliefs of some of its members.

PRI Dissidents. The best known and most influential of the PRI dissidents, until his death last June, was Carlos A. Madrazo. During 1965 Madrazo was president of the PRI. He attempted to vitalize the party by initiating primary elections at the municipal level, by giving the rank and file a voice in the selection of party leaders, and by a massive program of individual re-affiliation. He foresaw the eventual disappearance of the sectoral form of party organization. He urged the party to play a more vigorous role in proposing and pushing social and economic legislation. Madrazo's efforts to alter the structure and workings of the PRI, and its relationship to the government, led to his ouster. However, he continued to advocate these political changes until his death. (See Embassy memcon of March 20, 1969.)

15. Some persons question Madrazo's dedication to democratic political change, except insofar as this increased his own power as PRI president. Regardless, he gathered around him a group of younger political aspirants who sincerely believed in his professed goals. While some lost or resigned their party positions when Madrazo departed, others have continued in the PRI or government. Most remain convinced that political changes are necessary. Symptomatic of the views of these younger PRI dissidents are the opinions expressed by Luis Macías Carbone in his licenciatura thesis (Sociología y Política de la Juventud Mexicana) completed in March of this year. Macías views the student movement of last year as a "social reform phenomenon, carried out by middle class portions of the youth population, supported by some worker sectors," aimed at mobilizing popular political consciousness against "the monopolistic character of political power, against social and educational control systems, and against the economic disequalities existent in our society." He describes the PRI as going through "a profound crisis owing to its corrupted systems." He views government tactics to "conciliate, constrain or divide the student sector" as only temporarily effective. In the long run they will "produce an accumulation of disagreements that ... will explode violently."

16. The chief public spokesman for PRI dissent during the past year has been ex-Senator Manuel Moreno Sánchez. Since July, 1968, he has written an article per week for Excélsior, criticizing the excessive concentration of power in the federal executive and in the federal government vis-a-vis the states and municipalities, the subservient position of the official party to the government, the internal workings and structure of the official party, and the reluctance of Mexico's leaders to permit the growth of a strong opposition. (See A-191 of April 9, 1969.)

17. Recently the ranks of the dissidents have been joined, albeit in a milder manner, by Luis Encinas Johnson, the Governor of Sonora from 1961 to 1967. In his book, La Alternativa de México, Encinas Johnson acknowledges that until recently political reform has had to take a back seat to economic and social changes, but that the time has now come in which Mexico can safely proceed toward a more democratic and open political system. He suggests that a great deal can be accomplished simply by a changed attitude on the part of Mexico's leaders, a determination to respect the will of the people and to eliminate electoral fraud and the use of unfair advantages by the official party. He hints at structural and procedural changes within the PRI and comes close to urging the selection of party candidates by means of primary elections. He recommends government electoral subsidies to all parties based on the percentage of vote obtained.

18. Yet another dissenting voice is that of Roberto Casillas H., a professor of law at UNAM and author of the recently published Crises en Nuestra Estructura Política. Casillas begins with a long discussion of articles of the Constitution which are consistently violated or ignored. He examines the weakness of the legislative and judicial branches of government and the breakdown of federalism. He criticizes the PRI for having become no more than an electoral appendage of the government and for failing to reflect or represent the interests of its members. He draws hope from a perceived 50-60 year cycle in Mexican politics: the last positive transformation occurred in 1917 and therefore the next may be approaching. He calls for political change in the direction of effective democracy.

Other Critics. A number of writers, primarily academics, touch at times on the need for political change. The historian, Daniel Cosío Villegas, also writing in Excélsior, has been the most persistent during the past year. Another is the philosopher Leopoldo Zea (Novedades) who in the late 1950s was head of the PRI's Institute of Political, Economic and Social Studies (IEPES). Cosío Villegas professes to see a dire similarity between Mexico of today and that of 1910 in the degree to which power has become concentrated in the federal executive. He attributes the declining influence and attraction of the PRI to its subordination to the government. Zea views the manner of selecting political leaders as Mexico's greatest problem.* He believes that the tremendous demographic and economic growth of Mexico in recent decades threatens to burst asunder political institutions devised for a much simpler era.

Varieties of Political Change

19. In reviewing Mexican political history of the past forty years one can easily come to the conclusions: 1) That nothing basic has changed; and 2) The trend has been toward more centralized, authoritarian control of political decision-making. On the other hand, loyal priistas never tire of enumerating the political system changes that have occurred: the various transformations of the

* "The alternative is no longer between local bossism (caciquismo) and centralism, but between centralism and citizenship [i.e. popular participation]. (Zea)

official party, the electoral law of 1946, the franchise for women and the impending vote for 18 year olds, the diputado de partido procedure for giving minority parties larger representation in the Chamber of Deputies, numerous changes in PRI statutes, and a variety of experiments with different means of choosing party officials and party electoral candidates. Vicente Fuentes Díaz, now the semi-official PRI historian, argues that "the history of the PRI, in a certain sense, is a history of permanent and realistic adjustment of its internal procedures to the needs of the party and to the civic evolution of the country."*

20. The critics of Mexico's political system sometimes ignore the fact that the present system is the product of Mexico's history and underlying political culture. From this point of view many of their demanded or desired political changes appear highly unrealistic, at least for the indefinite future. Changed relationships between the branches of the federal government, between the federal, state and municipal governments, and, to a lesser extent, between the government and the official party, fall in this category. Although to some degree straw men, they are still worth discussing. Changes in the PRI-Government's attitude toward opposition and dissent, and in the internal structure and workings of the PRI seem to offer more possibilities in the years immediately ahead.

A Changed Power Relationship Between Branches of the Federal Government

21. The government of Mexico is the executive branch. This is true at both the state and federal levels. It is safe to say that the federal congress (Chamber of Deputies and Senate) never takes any action that is not agreeable to the president. Some might argue that it never does anything unless first told to. Congressional approval of the budget is a formality. Not since 1938 has the approved budget differed by more than 0.2% from the budget presented by the executive branch. In recent years, more often than not, there have been no changes. Furthermore, many budgetary items are approved at nominal amounts, subject to automatic increase by the executive. The approved budget bears only limited relationship to actual government spending.

22. The President has a number of means of ensuring congressional docility. He, or his predecessor, has the deciding voice in

* Los Partidos Políticos en Mexico (2nd Edition), p. 244.

determining who will be offered legislative seats. Once nominated and elected, congressmen are rewarded financially on the basis of their loyalty and usefulness to the party. The basic salary is minimal (1,000 pesos per month in the Chamber). Much more important are the various allowances and subventions distributed largely at the will of the majority leader in each house. Because congressional service has come to be primarily a way station en route to executive command posts, or a reward for loyal service, PRI politicians are quite unlikely to step out of line.

23. We know less of the judiciary, but there is little reason to think that it exercises any more political independence than the legislature. The Supreme Court has constitutional authority to declare laws and acts unconstitutional, but almost never intrudes in this area. It is empowered to investigate and decide electoral disputes, but the decision to do so or not (there are regular requests from opposition parties and dissident groups) is uniformly made by the President and his closest political advisers.

24. While critics see executive concentration of power as the prime manifestation of what is wrong with Mexico's political system, it seems likely to be one of the system's more enduring features. A recent apologist for "el sistema presidencialista mexicano" claims to find a similar tendency toward centralization of power in other advanced or modernizing countries.* In Mexico the problems of nation building and development are still so vast that it is difficult to foresee a situation in which one final and supreme arbiter of national policy would no longer be needed. This certainly will not come to pass so long as the PRI remains united and in hegemonic control of the nation's political life.

25. Executive dominance is in some respects the natural product of all the other political ills from which Mexico is said to suffer: a one party system; the structure and methods of that party; the limited and closely controlled role of the opposition; ineffectual federalism. Some token gestures could be made now toward strengthening other branches of government: immediate reelection for congressmen, permitting the development and accumulation of legislative expertise; higher fixed salaries, thus eliminating one form of executive coercion. But diminution of executive (i.e. presidencial) control

*Manuel Bartlett in Pensamiento Político, September, 1969

of Mexico's politics is more likely to be the long term result of lower level political system changes, discussed in some of the following categories.

A Changed Relationship Between Federal, State and Municipal Governments

26. For practical purposes federalism does not exist in Mexico. Despite formal separation of jurisdictions there are few, if any, things the federal government cannot do at the state and local levels it if so wishes. Normally, of course, there is no question but that state and local officials will follow instructions from the center. If municipal leaders get out of line they can be removed by the governor. If governors get out of line they can be removed by the President through the thinly veiled intermediary role of the Senate. (Article 76 of the Constitution empowers the Senate to declare that "the constitutional powers of the state have disappeared." The Senate then selects a new governor from a list of three names submitted by the President.) In recent years the removal of governors has become infrequent (the last time in 1966) and it is normally for incompetence or to mollify disgruntled citizens, not because the governor in question has challenged federal authority.

27. The states and municipalities are highly dependent on the federal government for almost everything beyond the payment of their own bureaucracies and basic maintenance. Federal government revenue in 1962 was 76% of total revenue at all levels (vs. 64% in the U.S. in 1963). However, of the 24% corresponding to the states and municipalities, 11% was collected by the Federal District (Mexico City), only 10% by all the other states combined, and only 3% in the approximately 2,300 municipalities. 1969 budget data provide another way of viewing the concentration of wealth in Mexico. No less than 60.2% of federal revenue is to be collected in the Federal District. On the expenditure side only 24% is to be spent in the Federal District. The difference, presumably, constitutes the amount to be spent by the federal government elsewhere in Mexico, either directly or through grants to states and municipalities.

28. As with executive dominance over the legislative branch of government, the federal control of the states and municipalities is facilitated by the PRI's centralized selection of office holders. The President has the final say in picking governors. Once installed, a governor has considerable power within his state, but subject to continuing federal overview. He normally determines who is to get municipal posts. But here too PRI central headquarters can step in by naming state or special delegates, responsible directly to PRI leaders in Mexico City.

29. A reversal of the trend toward centralization of political power in the federal government is not imminent. Regional disparities are still too great to permit each state and municipality to go its own way. Advocates of functioning federalism argue that the states and municipalities should be given assured access to larger amounts of tax revenues. But this ignores the fact that most are very poor and are net recipients of resources. If the federal bureaucracy is at times corrupt and incompetent it is a good bet that the state and local bureaucracies are even more so. Large scale distribution of federal revenues would be of questionable wisdom.

30. Added to practical considerations there is an historical argument worth noting. Federalism has traditionally been the cry of the opposition. During the last century it was advocated by the Liberals as a means of reducing the power of the Church and Army. Porfirio Díaz was at one time a federalist. Once in power he found other interests. The new liberals of the Mexican Revolution again raised the banner of federalism. But federalism became an early casualty of the consolidation of political power into an official party. Now, ironically, it is the moderately conservative PAN, with its clerical ties, which is calling for functioning federalism (as are some dissident priistas). After so many attempts and failures there are good reasons for thinking that federalism (which was copied almost in toto from the U.S. political system) is not appropriate to Mexico's conditions and problems.

31. This does not, of course, rule out administrative decentralization. As Mexico becomes more complex and developed we would expect to see more delegation of administrative authority, most probably within federal government entities but perhaps also working through state and municipal organizations. The problem of who is to control the bureaucracy, which also disturbs many people, relates back to the question of congressional subservience to the executive and, in part also, to the evolving and future role of the opposition in Mexico (see below).

A Changed Relationship Between the Official Party and the Government

32. The symbiotic relationship of the PRI and the government is an established fact of Mexican political life. The politically unsophisticated, who are many, probably consider them one and the same.*

*Moreno Sánchez describes an inventory ordered by the Government of Aguascalientes which was found to include the offices and furnishings of the local PRI committee -- located in the government constructed Casa del Pueblo.

Political historians like to argue that at first the party was the dominant element in the relationship, but that gradually and inexorably it has lost power to the formal government structure. Many critics now profess to view the party as little more than an electoral appendage, perhaps with some slight role in the selection of candidates, but most important as an instrument for mobilizing the masses on election day.* They argue that the PRI should set itself apart from the government, suggesting that the party itself become the voice for change and reform -- not simply, as at present, an echo or sounding board for policy decisions already taken or planned by the executive branch of government. This was the point of view of Madrazo. It is the position put forth by Moreno Sánchez, Cosío Villegas and others. The idea receives lip service on a continuing basis from party and governmental leaders. And, in a sense, this is the formally structured role of the PRI's Institute for Political, Economic and Social Studies (IEPES), of which there are dependencies in each of the states and major cities.

33. There is a real question how much can be done in this direction. The PRI, as presently constituted, is more an instrument of political control than of leadership. It can hardly be otherwise so long as the party aspires to embrace an overwhelming majority of the nation's citizens, not simply on election day but year-around as party members. (In this respect Mexico contrasts sharply with other one-party states, mostly communist, in which official party membership is restricted to an elite.) The price of universal support is pervasive blandness; in practical terms it means that the party itself does not and cannot make any important decisions. These are left to the President, who has the prestige, patronage and resources to keep dissident factions in line and to bring their leaders to his point of view. The idea of rank and file revolt against party leadership, such as occurs from time to time in the U.S., is almost inconceivable. What we would in fact be talking about would be a split within the PRI which would lead to the formation, at least temporarily, of a new party.

34. Recently PAN leaders have seemed to be approaching from a different angle the problem of separating official party and government. PAN President Manuel González Hinojosa suggested that the next administration should include members of other parties (presumably, even in cabinet positions). Although there is no substantiating data, it may be

*Frank Brandenberg (The Making of Modern Mexico) argues that the real power structure of Mexico focuses on the President without the intermediary of the party.

that the dominance of the government over the party has already progressed to the point where PRI activism and loyalty is no longer an absolute requirement for government position. As governmental needs become more technical and complex more and more positions may be filled by men who are priistas only post facto, if at all. But this is still a long ways from opposition participation in government.

35. The most effective means for reversing the present subordination of the official party to the government would be to invert the present procedures for selecting party candidates and officials -- i.e. to allow rank and file membership to exercise an effective voice rather than the present system of imposition from above. In many cases the results might be the same. But the change would be basic. And, as PRI leaders discovered at the time of the Madrazo experiments with municipal primaries in 1965, it could open a political Pandora's box.

A Larger and More Accepted Role for Opposition

36. There are two ways for the PRI-Government to approach this variety of political change. The first might be termed the laissez-faire approach: let opposition groups organize at will, remove present controls from the press and other media, attempt to ensure electoral honesty. In other words, allow opposition political activity the freedom which official rhetoric already ascribes to it. A change of this sort in the attitudes of PRI-Government leaders would have some immediate effects. The opposition parties, particularly the PAN, could win a considerable number of seats, including the occasional governorship and senate seat. On the other side of the ledger, one of the prime reasons for dissent from the PRI would be eliminated. However, a change of this sort, in what is often openly acknowledged as a guided democracy, is quite unlikely. First and foremost, the nation's political leaders would fear for the continued viability of the PRI coalition. It would be difficult to take the wraps off the opposition without undermining discipline within the official party. Second, there is the possibility, voiced optimistically by the PAN, that once it was demonstrated that opposition parties could win elections and take important office the numbers of their supporters would swell dramatically.

37. It is much more probable that the PRI-Government will continue to opt for the second course, that of graduated concessions to the opposition. In effect, this is what Mexico has had for the past forty years. The Electoral Law of 1946, which spelled out electoral procedures and gave minority parties representation on the Electoral Commission, was one such concession. The diputado de partido system for giving minority

parties larger representation in the Chamber of Deputies may also be viewed as such. A number of others are already in the realm of public discussion. The PAN has proposed senador de partido representation for minor parties in the Senate. And it would favor changes in the present diputado de partido arrangement to make it easier for opposition parties to exceed the present limitation of 20 seats (now only possible if all seats are won outright). In 1967 the PRI Governor of Michoacan, Agustín Arriaga Rivera, proposed the extension of the diputado de partido system to state legislatures, in which, at the present time, there are no minority representatives. In his recent book Encinas Johnson came out in favor of campaign subsidies for all registered parties, graduated on the basis of size. Presumably the PAN would be the chief gainer not only because it is the largest opposition party but also because it is generally assumed that the PPS and the PARM already receive official funds; and the PRI has many semi-official channels of enrichment.

38. Alternatively, if the PRI-Government does not want to institute further formal mechanisms for encouraging the opposition, it could view the problem on an ad hoc basis: a few more federal deputies elected outright, perhaps a senate seat or two, even a governorship. This would be a modified laissez-faire approach and might well involve one step backwards for every two forward.

Changes Within the PRI, Structural and Procedural

39. Although it is fashionable to scoff at the real power of the party (as opposed to that of the government), the PRI remains the foundation stone of Mexico's political system. A changing PRI-Government attitude toward the opposition, and graduated increases in its role, may eventually bring about significant change in Mexican politics. Change could come much more quickly by altering the structure and procedures of the official party. Paradoxically perhaps, there is more willingness on the part of political leaders to juggle with the PRI, than to manipulate some of the other relationships discussed in this airgram. They reason that if the PRI is losing support it is because it is no longer responsive to popular demands and aspirations; and that this can be remedied by structural and procedural changes. There is a long history of actual or attempted adjustments. The two reincarnations of the official party, from the PNR to the PRM in 1938 and then to the PRI in 1946, are examples. Throughout its forty years the official party has experimented with a variety of techniques for choosing its leaders and internal representatives. In 1959 and again in 1965 there were experiments in the manner of selecting electoral candidates. Since 1945 there have been a number of efforts to reduce the importance of the sectors in the party organization. Except for a period during the 1930s the efforts of the reformers have been in the direction of making the official party more open and democratic. In restrospect the judgment may be that they failed. But intentions may count for more than

results and new pressures for change may surface when the next President takes office.

40. The problem that all reformers have faced is that significant change, even of the most incremental variety, immediately challenges vested political interests and raises the threat of still more upsetting changes to come. Madrazo's experiments with primary elections at the municipal level provide a good example. Not only did this invade upon the previously accepted "right" of governors and jefes políticos to pick city leaders, but it was seen as the first step toward similar primaries at higher levels and toward the elemination of the traditional division of offices between the sectors. The selection of candidates and leaders from above and the sectoral form of organization are two very basic features of the Mexican political system. In the last analysis most reformers are attempting to reverse the one and eliminate the other, and this has proved very difficult (impossible?) to do in graduated steps.

41. Perhaps the best hope of the political change advocates is that the sectors will eventually prove incapable of performing their present aggregating and disciplinary functions on a sufficiently wide scale. If, for instance, the labor and campesino sectors had not stayed solidly behind the government in last year's student crisis, or if there had been sectoral splits over the recent choice of Echeverría as the PRI presidential nominee, then many political leaders would have begun to question the raison d'etre of the sectoral form of organization. This is not an imminent prospect, but neither should the status quo be taken too much for granted. The campesino sector, in many ways the most neglected, has spawned a number of semi-political movements protesting the dilatory and "too-conservative" PRI-CNC approach to problems of the countryside. To date, except in very limited areas, they have not constituted a major threat to PRI control of the peasants. The labor sector consists of a substantial number of confederations and federations united loosely in the Congress of Labor. All attempts to form a more powerful administrative and coordinating apparatus have failed. The most powerful element in the labor sector, the Confederación de Trabajadores de Mexico - CTM, suffers from aging and, many would say, discredited leadership. A major reason why the same men have been allowed to dominate the CTM and the labor sector for the past thirty years is that there is real doubt whether any of the possible successors could hold the various labor organizations together. The popular sector (CNOP) is even more heterogeneous. It is the acknowledged catchall for anyone who does not fit into either of the other sectors. Observers have wondered for years how interests that range from those of small farm proprietors to those of

urban poor to those of commercial groups to those of professionals could all be harmonized under one umbrella organization. The truth, in all likelihood, is that they are not. Except for the powerful civil servants organization (FSTSE) party discipline in the popular sector is probably much weaker than in the other two sectors. Many interest groups probably have channels of communication to the President or to members of his cabinet that depend little, if at all, on the intermediary role of the party. Many persons, who by occupation are ostensible members of the popular sector, are outright adherents of opposition parties. The danger for the PRI with regard to the popular sector is probably less that it will split (although there has been occasional discussion of a student or youth sector) than that it will effectively control a lower and lower proportion of those groups it is supposed to represent.

42. A major reason why many critics object to the sectors is that they, like the party more generally, are controlled from above. The most apparent manifestation of this is in the selection of leaders. Furthermore, so long as the sectors persist most party assignments to elective or appointive position must go through the sectoral bargaining process, which tends to insulate such decisions from a more generalized popular will. At present the PRI has distinct, but generally similar procedures for selecting: sectoral leaders; other party leaders (e.g. the heads of PRI sectional, district, state and national committees); and PRI candidates for publicly elected office. All three selection processes are ostensibly democratic. What happens, however, is that the PRI hierarchy at a next or higher level decides beforehand whom it will support. Once that decision is made the contest is over. Backing, sought and granted, from politicians higher up the ladder is a common feature of any political system. In Mexico it is carried to an extreme and the nonfavored generally see no alternative route to success. Presumably PRI leaders could refrain from making their wishes known, leaving the choice up to rank and file membership. (There is some indication that this is occasionally done, especially when a lower level organ (e.g. a sectional committee) is being formed.)

43. Initiatives in the direction of more democratic methods of selection seem less likely with regard to internal leaders (sectoral or party committee) than with regard to candidates for publicly elected office.

44. In 1959 the PRI experimented with a procedure whereby any 200 members could present a petition nominating a candidate for municipal office. In 1965 Madrazo instituted party primaries to determine the municipal candidates for office. In both cases there were provisions for screening nominations at the state and national levels. Alfonso Martínez Domínguez, since he became party president in 1968, has laid heavy stress on visiting states with gubernatorial elections and carefully sounding public opinion (the auscultaciones) before naming the

PRI's candidate. In the past few months, before the choice of Echeverría as PRI presidential nominee was announced, there were frequent demands for public debate over the relative merits of the various precandidates. The word imposition is used liberally in describing the PRI technique for choosing an electoral candidate, and it is not simply a sour grapes expression on the part of unlucky aspirants. In short, there is a growing popular demand for a greater voice in the selection of electoral candidates, and the PRI is aware of it. The party cannot be defeated (although it might split) in internal elections. In municipal, state and national elections the attempt to impose an unpopular candidate can result in defeat.

45. Having experimented with municipal primaries in the early part of this administration, it is unlikely that the PRI will return to that gambit in the next. Perhaps a less drastic step would be to permit, even encourage, more open prenomination campaigning by candidates. The norm at present is for aspirants to say little until the PRI has made its decision. Often they feign disinterest. It is a minor sin to encourage public manifestations of popular support. Open competition for the party nomination would constitute some threat to party unity and would encourage unrealizable promises. But the PRI hierarchy would retain the final decision and would have a firmer basis on which to judge the relative popularity of candidates (not in itself always a major consideration). However, if opinion is sharply divided, or if the party's final decision seems to go against majority sentiment (as apparently happened with the gubernatorial selection in Sonora in 1967), then this loosening of the reigns might quickly prove unworkable.

46. A further refinement would be to limit such open campaigning to positions with little real power -- i.e. seats in the state and federal legislatures. But popular selection, even in this modified form, would make legislators less dependent on executive favor, and would threaten in some limited measure the centralization of political power in Mexico.

Conclusion

47. It should be apparent from the preceding analysis that significant political change is not a high probability expectation in Mexico of the next six years. For every suggestion as to how the system should or might change there are counterarguments (convincing, we believe, to many Mexicans) why: 1) the change would not work in practice; or 2) would be dangerous and undesirable. Mexican leaders are well aware of the unhappy experiences of most Latin American countries with multi-party democracy. But perhaps the root problem is that most PRI-Government leaders, however much they may speak of multi-partyism and

democracy, have not really accepted the possibility that an opposition party might someday share power or even replace the PRI in power. Being inconceivable, it is difficult to work towards it in a systematic fashion. A changed attitude in this regard would probably have to come from the President, and he would have to be willing to buck strenuous opposition from important members of his own party.

48. There is little reason as yet to think that Luis Echeverría is going to play this role. His political career, and he has had no other, is one of steadfast party regularity. He is known to be a firm believer in institutional continuity. He and Carlos Madrazo did not see eye to eye and there has recently been an indication that the PRI will eliminate certain statute changes that Madrazo pushed through but which have been largely ignored since he left the PRI presidency. Panistas are pessimistic about their party's prospects during the next administration and claim that in a conversation with ex PAN President Christlieb Ibarrola during last year's Baja California electoral crisis Echeverría intimated strongly that the only way the PAN would get the kind of political system it wanted (or achieve power) would be by armed revolution.

49. Until now Echeverría has not been his own man; there is some possibility that he will change his perspective once he is in office. The political change optimists see his youth as a favorable factor and think he will be more open to new ideas. Amconsulate Hermosillo reports a rumor circulating in Sonora that Luis Encinas Johnson (the previously mentioned author of La Alternative de Mexico) is a likely prospect for Government Secretary in the Echeverría cabinet. It seems improbable, but the mere fact of the rumor is of some interest.

50. Even if there are some gestures and efforts toward making the Mexican political system more open and democratic we doubt that they will keep pace with demands for change. In this situation the Government may find itself relying more heavily on the police and the army to maintain PRI political domination. It is unlikely that the new administration will allow future student demonstrations to develop to the point they did last year in Mexico City. The incipient violence in Yucatán, which could become much more serious if a PRI victory in next month's gubernatorial election is seen to be clearly fraudulent, may be a straw in the wind. In this respect a PAN spokesman reports that the party has begun to receive attention from radical elements who now view the PAN as a possible instrument for their own violent objectives. Obviously one cannot push this line of speculation too far, since most advocates of democratic political change are inclined toward peaceful methods. But the possibility of violence, occasioned by increasing political frustration, exists.

51. In the next few years the U.S. may come to play an increasingly ambiguous role vis-a-vis the Mexican political system. Advocates of democratic political change tend to view the U.S. model with admiration. And the U.S. example exercises subtle influences on the political ideas and aspirations of millions of Mexicans, perhaps most notably along the border. Those who oppose political change will not find it hard to blame pressures in that direction on the U.S. example. At the same time, the repeated affirmations of excellent relations between our two countries, our known preoccupation with problems of security, and the disposition of many Mexicans to believe that our only other foreign policy concern is the protection of U.S. investments, lead some persons currently in opposition or dissent to view the U.S. Government as the chief bulwark of the political status quo in Mexico. We may find ourselves condemned by both sides. This is not a problem which we can or should do very much about at this time. But the question of our relations with and attitudes toward democratic political opposition in Mexico will probably assume greater relevancy within the next ten years.

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