

# Historical Roots of the Authoritarian State in Mexico

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On February 5, 1975, Jesus Reyes Heróles, the President of the National Executive Committee of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) and a historian, made this statement: "Mexico arrived late to the twentieth century. The Porfirian dictatorship not only interrupted the ascent of our social liberalism, but initiated a regression and led Mexico into the path of false development and economic dependency for the benefit of a privileged few." The fact that such a statement was made before the President of the Republic on the anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution of 1917 gave an official character to its view of Mexico's recent political history.

It has long been commonplace to use the Porfirian system as the background of any analysis of Mexico's present political system. For those committed to the official view, the Porfiriato, as Reyes Heróles stated, was only an unfortunate parenthesis in the democratic progress of the country. The alleged march toward a modern and mature democracy supposedly began in the early nineteenth century with the achievement of independence from Europe and was consolidated half a century later with the triumph of the liberal party over foreign invaders, the Church, and other reactionary forces. Historians of the left also consider the struggles of the nineteenth century and the 1910 Revolution as positive contributions. Although they did not result in liberal democracy, they did destroy the feudal structures that had inhibited the development of Mexican capitalism and therefore subsequent socialism and they did give to the masses a limited place in the political arena. Both traditional and leftist historians, then, have viewed modern Mexico as the negation of its past. Only a few marginal spokesmen of the old right dare to question the

importance of the change brought by the Revolution to the political life of the country.

It is time to submit this orthodoxy to a more rigorous examination, time to ask: To what extent have the years since the promulgation of the Plan de San Luis in 1910 represented a negation of the old system of political control? No one can deny that important changes have taken place, but of what nature? By now, there is more than enough distance and historiographical material to reappraise the Mexican Revolution. The light that we can cast on these questions has more than historical interest, because with its help we can arrive at a better understanding of the nature of the present political structure and process of Mexico, as well as the possibilities for change. It is the theme of this chapter that the changes were less significant than the continuities. The Mexican Revolution did not destroy the authoritarian nature of Mexican political life, it modernized it.

### *Political Control in the Old System*

Among the most important means of political control during the Porfiriato, the first and most obvious was the removal of content from the electoral process. Elections were not held to give those who had the right to vote a chance to choose between two or more political organizations of the elite. By the time General Porfirio Díaz presented his nomination for a third term to the presidency in 1888, the meaning of the electoral contest was completely lost: there was no contest. The last remnants of parliamentary opposition had disappeared and Díaz won the election with 98 percent of the votes. From that moment on, no governor, representative, or senator came to power without the authorization of the President. For a long time, cooptation, fraud, and a limited use of force inhibited the formation of a political organization that could offer a real alternative to Díaz's hegemony. When, in spite of everything, such an alternative appeared, first in the form of the Partido Liberal Mexicano and later in that of the Maderista movement, the central and local governments made it impossible for them to show their strength at the ballot box and they had to resort to rebellion.

It would be wrong, however, to conclude that the electoral ritual, during the Porfiriato served no purpose. It performed a very different but important function from its role in Western democracies. The aim of the campaign was not to confront Díaz or Díaz's followers with their political opponents but to renew the loyalty of the people to their leader, and to affirm the fidelity of the leader to the ideals of material progress, order, and independence.<sup>1</sup>

The lack of content in the electoral process facilitated the emergence of a second important characteristic of the system of political control: centralization. Since independence, fragmentation had been one of the main characteristics of Mexico's political life. After Díaz's seizure of power, however, a rapid process of political centralization began. At the national level, Congress and the Supreme Court lost all capacity to act as checks on executive power, especially after 1888. Instead, they became mere appendages of it, always giving their seal of approval to decisions previously taken by the President. At the same time, they were useful to Díaz as a means to reward the services of many local loyal *porfiristas* without giving them any real participation in the shaping of political events at the national level. The other side of the coin was centralization in Mexico City, no matter what the Constitution of 1857 may have intended to the contrary. The net effect of these tendencies were the emergence of a very powerful presidency whose great capacity to control political events was to a certain extent the result of an expropriation of the powers of the legislative, judiciary, and local government. The only limits to presidential power were socioeconomic and geopolitical realities—the geographical isolation of many communities, the backwardness of the economic system, and the dependency of the country on the United States and Europe. Legal limits were almost nonexistent.

The gradual elimination of the old local "strong men," a product of the long period of civil war after independence, was an important step in this process of concentration of power. The most important obstacle for Díaz was the presence of General Manuel González, who had been his loyal collaborator at the time of the 1876 coup. Once González was discredited after his presidency from 1880 to 1884, Díaz's followers had little trouble neutralizing his bid for re-election. The elimination of such strong first followers of the Plan de Tuxtepec as generals Jerónimo Treviño and Francisco Naranjo was a little easier and unavoidable. After this, the remains of federalism presented almost no problem to Díaz.

Side by side with elimination of political opposition and the centralization of power in the hands of the President, a third characteristic of the system began to emerge: the cult of personality. By the end of his third presidency, General Díaz had become the "irreplaceable leader of the nation" and the embodiment of its destiny. Internal stability and the continuity of the modernization process were guaranteed by the sheer presence of Díaz. The constant pitting of one group of political followers against another helped the President in his quest for irreplaceability. After a while, there was no other political leader of national importance. But if this practice gave Díaz much room for political maneuvering, it also prevented the institutionalization of the system and the peaceful transmission of power. This personalization of political power was very useful at its

beginning, when it facilitated the concentration of power, but at the end it constituted the most vulnerable aspect of the system. Mexico's political stability became linked to the survival of the charismatic leader.

The personalization of power brought with it a certain kind of pater-  
nalism. This was not new; its roots were in the relationship established between the Spanish Viceroy and the Indian population during the colonial period. For all practical purposes, the President could dispose of all public resources at will, and to some extent he could do the same with the lives and fortunes of individual citizens. The real discretionary powers of the President were formidable, notwithstanding the formal limits specified by the Constitution. Of course, the closer the individual to the upper levels of the social structure, the less he had to fear those powers, but no one—except, perhaps, some foreign entrepreneurs—was outside their reach. Díaz could undo the fortunes of even the very powerful, as he certainly did from time to time to those of some of his associates. The power of the State was his power.

The use of this power, however, was far from irrational. As a matter of fact, Díaz tried to be predictable to the point that, for the first time in independent Mexico, public expenditure was programmed and became the tool of the regime's policies.<sup>2</sup> Díaz himself cannot be accused of illicit enrichment or capricious acts, but the same cannot be said of many of his collaborators—the *científicos* for example. To a great extent, it became functional for Díaz's purposes to permit a certain amount of corruption among his inner circle. It was a simple but effective means to ensure their loyalty; to fail the President would have meant to endanger a very attractive political as well as economic position.<sup>3</sup> There is, for example, little doubt that at the beginning of the century Olegario Molina was in control of the political and economic destiny of Yucatán. Molina made his great fortune by using his position as governor of the state first and Minister of Fomento later to ensure his monopoly of the henequen trade, the main product of Yucatán and very much sought after by American agriculture. Molina had been able to monopolize this and other collateral activities because Díaz permitted it and for no other reason. Therefore, when the President ordered Molina to cut away Quintana Roo from Yucatán and let the federal government administer it directly, the governor obeyed without hesitation. All the protests and riots in Mérida had little effect on Molina because his interests lay in complying with the President's will and not his state's. It is possible to find other examples like this all over the country.

A fourth characteristic of the Porfirian system, and to a certain extent a product of the previous ones, was that with the passing of time the political elite became an integral part of the economic elite.<sup>4</sup> Because of the presence of a foreign entrepreneurial group, it is not possible to state

categorically that the politically and economically dominant groups were identical, but if foreigners are taken out of the picture we can state that there *was* a power elite, as the concept was defined by C. Wright Mills. The equivalence of political and economic hegemony emerged in a context in which almost all the rest of society was excluded from meaningful political participation. The landless peasantry had no political representation and very little capacity to make successful demands on the government. A typical example is provided by the useless efforts of the communities and towns of Morelos to defend themselves against the encroachment of the big haciendas of the Escandón, the García Pimentel, the Amor, the Araoz, and some other families. The same encroachment affected the Yaqui and Mayo tribes in Sonora, among other examples. If whole towns had no rights, even less did individual peasants and workers; politically they were nonentities. The industrial worker had no right of association to defend his interests; at the most, he could enlist the benevolent intercession of the authorities on his behalf. What help he received was a grace, not a right.

While even the middle class was without proper channels of representation, in contrast to the other sectors it had a much wider capacity to formulate demands, and after a while its resentment began to show in political terms. The growth of its frustration was related to the way in which economic development began to increase its ranks. A sizable proportion of the 15,000 lawyers, 5,000 medical doctors and civil engineers, and even more numerous schoolteachers and agronomists who existed by 1910 felt very little loyalty toward a system that had kept them outside the decision-making process. Social mobility was very difficult in the Porfirian system and, as a result, a good many leaders of the Revolution were to rise from the middle class.<sup>5</sup>

The dominant position of President Díaz was not maintained by the use of force or corruption alone. Equally important was the ability of the President to remain the ultimate arbiter of all political contests of the establishment. He did this by creating and maintaining in every state two or more rival political groups who were loyal to him. The everyday political struggle took place among these small cliques and in this way was kept within very clearly defined boundaries. Díaz was the final arbiter of such struggles and his decisions could not be appealed. For instance, at the beginning of the century in Yucatán, Olegario Molina, in spite of his immense local power, had to live with several enemies. Conspicuous among them were the former governor, Colonel Francisco Cantón, Joaquín Baranda, a member of the Supreme Court, and General Guillermo Palomino; even the governor of the state of Veracruz, Teodoro Dehesa, was among his enemies. All had credentials as good *porfiristas* and for that reason had to accept the leadership of Molina, but their displeasure with

him was well known. If for some reason Díaz had wanted to destroy Molina's position, he could always have counted on these people. In Jalisco in the 1880s, Díaz at first supported General Francisco Tolentino as governor of the state in order to end the *cacicazgo* of Ignacio Vallarta, but later on he decided to give his blessing to General Ramón Corona, an enemy of Tolentino, to succeed him as governor. In this way, the President created two parties and divided the political elite of Jalisco, but this was not all. He also created a desire for power in the military commander, Pedro Galván, the governor of Mexico City, José Cevallos, and a local politician, Luis Curiel. They served as a kind of "third force" in Jalisco. These examples of "divide and rule" could be repeated in all the other states and at the national level. Such was the case of Bernardo Reyes, the strong man of Nuevo León and Minister of War, and José Yves Limantour, the aristocratic minister of the treasury and leader of the *científico* group. In the first decade of this century, the struggle among them to succeed Díaz almost got out of hand, and a high political price was paid for it. The very overthrow of Díaz can be linked to the fragmentation of the elite produced by the Reyes-Limantour struggle. Control through the systematic fragmentation of the elite was very successful while the caudillo was in complete command of his mental and political faculties. However, when signs of old age began to emerge, the struggle among the several porfirista factions began to rip the system apart, so that the regime was in a poor position to confront the Maderista revolt successfully.

According to the historical school that prevailed after the victory of the Revolution of 1910, the single most important element of political control in the old regime was the use of force, and it is true that violence was a very common response of the Porfirian system to opposition from the lower levels of the social structure. The stories of the rebellion of the Yaqui Indians in Sonora, the Mayan Indians in Yucatán, the textile workers of Río Blanco in Veracruz, and the miners of Cananea are too well known to be retold here. However, when the opposition came from groups such as students, the intelligentsia, and the middle class in general, the response was much less violent and repressive. With the upper classes, cooptation and negotiation were the most common responses, not force.

The Porfirian army had about 20,000 men. The most professional and mobile security force was the *rurales*, numbering about 3,000. This would hardly have been an impressive force had it been the main basis of support of a bloody dictatorship. But, through cooptation and compromise in the 1870s and 1880s, Díaz was able to overcome the old antagonism of the members of the clerical party as well as that of former followers of Lerdo and Iglesias. These methods of confronting political opposition brought good results with some ambitious young professionals and politicians. The constant criticism from the press, which was a per-

manent headache of the regime, was met not only by an enormous number of arrests but also by hiring sympathetic writers and generously supporting friendly newspapers. When Camilo Arriaga began to form the radical Liberal Party, Díaz's response to this very well-known member of the old liberal elite was mild indeed. For a long time, Madero, too, was free to agitate, and after his arrest in San Luis Potosí in 1910 he was permitted to escape to the United States. But if the old regime was not particularly prone to use force against the opposition, when force was used no legal or political barrier could protect the victim. The State was supreme.

The main political problem of the old system was not so much its authoritarian character as its resistance to depersonalization, and depersonalization would have been the only way to handle the transmission of power in an orderly fashion. The presence of Díaz as the charismatic leader was necessary at the beginning, but his resistance to leaving or sharing power inhibited the formation of structures that could have ensured the maintenance of the system after Díaz. The constant re-election of the President, as well as many of the governors, made it difficult to renew political personnel and closed off the careers of many young and ambitious people. The aging of the leadership and the systematic exclusion of the majority of the population, the middle class included, was the result of the inability to transform an authoritarian situation into an authoritarian system.

### *The New Regime*

The structure of political control that replaced the one destroyed by the Revolution took form slowly through a process of trial and error. Only after ten years from the start of the Revolution did politics begin to substitute for mere force as a means to gain and retain power; the movement of Agua Prieta in 1920 was the last successful military revolt. After the civil wars between Villa and Zapata on the one hand and Carranza on the other, the increasing power of the central government was able to handle the rebellious actions of De la Huerta, Serrano, Gómez, Escobar, and Cedillo in the 1920s and 1930s. By the 1930s local strong men did not even attempt direct action. Adalberto Tejeda, Joaquín Amaro, Garrido Canabal, and Juan Andreu Almazán knew quite well when their causes were lost and accepted almost without resistance the destruction of their local bases of power by the central government. Even Calles, the "Jefe Máximo," did not try very hard to confront President Cárdenas with a military upheaval in 1935. The most important political struggle of the 1930s—the confrontation of the *agraristas* and *veteranos* with opposing agrarian reform policies—was resolved mainly by political means. The new

regime was entering a new stage of its development. Discipline arose from the chaos of the Revolution.

By about 1940, the central government had enough control over political forces that a minimal set of rules institutionalizing the exercise and transmission of power superseded the period of turmoil and uncertainty in the political arena. From the Presidency of Ávila Camacho (1940-46) to the present day, the system of political control in Mexico has changed very little and has proved its ability to maintain the political discipline necessary to encourage economic growth. Mexico has become a unique case in Latin America of stability and development.<sup>6</sup> We can thus return to our original question: To what extent is the new system different from the old one?

In socioeconomic terms, Mexico today is very different from the Mexico Díaz left in 1911. The country is now almost an urban society in the process of industrialization. The State, grown stronger, has many more responsibilities than in the past. More important, all the former political outsiders—peasants, workers, and middle class—have their own political organizations and have rights guaranteed by the 1917 Constitution. But is the manner in which political control is exerted very different from the past? In order to give a satisfactory answer, let us examine each of the central elements of the Porfirian system and see if they are still present today, if they have been modified, and if new ones have been added.<sup>7</sup>

In theory, the system through which today's leadership is selected is democratic, but the reality is very different. Since the creation of the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR) in 1929, the Mexican party system has had a purpose that is not democratic. The official party—the PNR and its successors, the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (PRM) and the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI)—was not created to win elections but to maintain a permanent campaign of propaganda in favor of the revolutionary leadership and to enforce the necessary amount of discipline among the “revolutionary family” and the organizations that support it. According to Moreno Sánchez, the PRI is only a branch of the government, its electoral agency.<sup>8</sup> In the new regime the opposition parties have never been able to win a governorship or a place in the Senate, to say nothing of the presidency. Their only victories have been very modest, a few representatives at the National Congress and in a few municipal governments. In order to receive the *registro* that enables them to appear on the ballot and to use free time on radio and television, opposition parties have to prove that they will behave more or less as a “loyal opposition.” They must shy away from attacking the bases of legitimacy of the system, they must not endanger the hegemony of the PRI, and they must not represent a real alternative.

The electoral campaign is still a formality. In some places, the electoral triumphs of the PRI are in the 90 percent range, not very different from those of the Porfirian era. In several states, PRI candidates do not even have a symbolic opposition. Because electoral campaigns are only a period in which the official rhetoric gets more inflated but nothing important is in question, urban voters are becoming more rebellious. During the federal elections of 1973, 36 percent of all registered voters did not bother to register their vote in spite of specific sanctions against abstention. (In Mexico, voting is at the same time a right and an obligation.)<sup>9</sup>

Electoral fraud and manipulation of the vote have been difficult to prove but are nevertheless facts since the beginning of the dominant party system. Vasconcelos was said to receive only 5.32 percent of the national vote in 1929 and Almazán, 5.72 percent in 1940. These figures are suspiciously low for two movements that were obviously popular, at least in the urban areas. With the passing of time, the government has been more generous with the opposition; in 1946 Esequiel Padilla was assigned 19.33 percent of the vote, and General Miguel Henríquez Guzmán, 15.87 percent in 1952. The new electoral law permits the opposition parties to oversee the voting process, but they do their job only in the most populated areas.<sup>10</sup> Suspicious figures are still coming from the marginal areas. In 1973, the PRI's victory in Chetumal was an extraordinary 98.2 percent of the vote, and in Comitán, Chiapas, 98.6 percent. The weakness of the organized opposition thus makes the electoral process meaningless.

Let us examine another characteristic of the present system, political centralization. The predominance of the executive power over the judicial and legislative did not change with the Revolution. In order to avoid being alone in Congress, the government has given a few places to the official opposition parties according to the total vote they received at the national level. They are not there as a result of a direct victory at the ballot box, however, but because they are *diputados de partido*.<sup>11</sup> In spite of the presence of this limited opposition, the great majority of the resolutions passed by the Legislature are still presented by the executive branch and the day that one of them is voted down is still in the future. Even PRI legislators have places in Congress not because they won an election but because they have the confidence of the President. They are his extremely loyal collaborators. As Pablo González Casanova has demonstrated, the Supreme Court has contradicted the President only in a few instances, always in areas related to the defense of private economic interests.<sup>12</sup> This opposition has been functional to the system, because it recognizes the real power of wealth without forcing the President to bow before it.

The geographical division of powers is similar to the functional. For many reasons, federalism is still as weak as in the past. The federal government has control of about 80 percent of all public resources (as com-

pared with about 60 percent at the end of the Porfiriato). All important investment projects at the state level are dependent on federal support. However, the strong men of the past, the *caciques*, are still with us. Examples of the recent past are Leobardo Reynoso of Tamaulipas, Gonzálo N. Santos of San Luis Potosí, and Manuel Sánchez Vite of Hidalgo. But the fates of these men demonstrate that when the federal government considers their presence a problem they cannot survive.

Generally speaking, the state governors are the center of the local political system, but all their important decisions are made in consultation with the President and some of his ministers. The entire political life of a governor is controlled by the center, from his nomination by the Party to the selection of his successor.<sup>13</sup> On the few occasions when local power has clashed with the central government, there is no "federal pact" that can protect a state governor from a decree of the National Congress dissolving the local government. The presence of the federal army is a guarantee that such a decree will always be effective. President Cárdenas used this procedure ten times to eliminate governors still loyal to Calles; as recently as 1975, Echeverría used it against the governors of Guerrero and Hidalgo when they showed a lack of discipline.<sup>14</sup>

The personalization of power is very different from that of the Porfiriato. For a time, the Revolution reinforced the *caudillista* nature of Mexican political life—Obregón is a case in point—but after the PNR and especially after Cárdenas, the charisma of the leader was transferred to the office.<sup>15</sup> This was a help to, as well as a result of, institutionalization. Today, after a very well-organized public relations campaign, the presidency always seems to be occupied by a person who, like Don Porfirio, has all the best qualities of leadership: wisdom, intelligence, honesty, patriotism, and magnanimity. He is the very incarnation of the national interest, and for that reason he is almost infallible. However, after six years his term in office is over, and it is then possible to admit some of his shortcomings. In this way, the head of the new government always represents a step forward in the path of the Revolution.

These changes in the charismatic character of the presidency, however, have had very little impact on the paternalistic way in which the incumbent uses his power. There is no national plan or institutional check that can control the decisions of the President in regard to the use of government resources. No matter how irrational a project may be in the eyes of specialists, if the President approves it, it must be carried out. Outside the public sector the tremendous power of the President can also still be felt. If, for some reason, he decides to act against a group or an individual citizen, there is little they can do to protect their position and, in some instances, their lives. There is still truth in the popular view that the President can do as he wishes.<sup>16</sup> The President's enormous freedom of

action—Díaz Ordaz admitted only history as a judge after the violent and bloody suppression of opposition in 1968—is also the source of the great discretionary powers of his ministers.)

One of the most notorious effects of this power is corruption. Corruption has many faces in Mexico. Perhaps the least important is the direct use of public funds for private purposes. More important are useless projects, inflated costs in their execution, the unwillingness of the government to act on vital matters because special interests are affected, and so on. From the political point of view, perhaps the most difficult problem is the limitless corruption of the judicial process. Corruption of everyday justice produces more frustration and alienation in the common citizen than the waste and irrational use of public resources.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, as Peter H. Smith demonstrates in his essay in this volume, it is precisely this illicit enrichment that makes it possible for many members of the political elite to leave power without causing any problem to their successors. This renewal of the elite, so vital to the maintenance of the system, is something the old regime was unable to achieve.<sup>18</sup>

It has been argued that it is time to put an end to corruption, that it is becoming dysfunctional. One of the chief complaints in official technocratic circles is that special interests have often impeded the implementation of government orders. One suggested solution is the creation of a true civil service and the elimination of the spoils system. However, the sexennial reward in the form of thousands of public jobs to the faithful militants of the PRI is one of the most powerful glues that keeps the Party—and the political machinery as a whole—in one piece. Besides, the fact that a great many of the top politicians and administrators have indulged in corrupt practices gives the President an additional weapon to keep them in place. To expose a dishonest politician is not a common practice, but everyone knows that if the President considers it necessary someone will present the mass media with adequate information. The spectacular avalanche of accusations of corruption that preceded the fall of governors Israel Noguera of Guerrero and Otonial Miranda of Hidalgo in early 1975 is a case in point. In a clash with the President, politicians and administrators have a lot to lose and very little to gain.

[In the final years of the Porfiriato, the "political class" and the economically powerful became almost undistinguishable.] At a first glance, it appears that the Revolution put an end to this. Its first task was to eliminate completely the old upper class from all positions of power, and in due time, through agrarian reform, they lost their economic privileges too. Government became the dominion of the middle classes. Generally speaking, those who make a career out of politics today are not members of the upper class. As a result, some analysts of the Mexican political system have talked a great deal about the division between the politicians and

técnicos, on the one hand, and the entrepreneurial class, on the other. According to them, the divergence in their origins and interests constitutes one of the main characteristics of the system.<sup>19</sup> Spokesmen of the government have accepted this view because much of the regime's legitimacy derives from its claim that since the Revolution it has represented the interests of the so-called "popular classes," first against the reactionary *hacendados* and, these days, against unidentified but powerful capitalists associated with large foreign enterprises. According to this view, a revolution made in favor of peasants and workers cannot be led by capitalists.

The real situation is a bit different. From the very beginning of the Revolution, such important leaders of the movement as Alvaro Obregón, Abelardo Rodríguez, Aarón Saenz, and Juan Andreu Almazán, to mention only a few, joined the ranks of the entrepreneurs. Today the case of Miguel Alemán is paradigmatic. Thousands of politicians and upper-level administrators know that if, in the next presidential term, their political career is finished, they can switch from the public to the private sphere. Therefore, even if the top political personnel have no capital and no family connections with the business community, they cannot regard their interests as opposed to those of private enterprise; they need a strong business community as a personal safeguard for their own business. This fact blurs to a great extent the difference between the political and the economic elites.

Exclusion was a daily reality for the great majority of Mexicans during the Porfiriato, in politics as well as in many other things. One of the most striking changes from the old system to the new regime was the admission into the political arena of a vast number of people from the lower and middle classes. This incorporation occurred first in the overthrow of Díaz and in the civil war that followed. After Cárdenas, these masses were admitted as organized members of the dominant party. Their political rights were recognized and guaranteed by the Revolution. In theory, even if some groups find the PRI unsatisfactory they can take some action, such as forming their own parties. Therefore, political exclusion is not inherent in the new system. It might seem that we have here, at last, the real difference between the two systems, but the facts are not as clear as they seem. PRI's organizations have a membership of about 9 million, or about 56 percent of the adult population of Mexico. The other three registered parties are not mass parties, and their membership is very small. Around 40 percent of the voting population does not belong to any party or formal political organization. At the same time, this 40 percent has no other institutional channel through which to transmit its demands to the system. Even those who belong to organizations that are part of the PRI, such as CNC, CTM, or CNOP, can act politically only within limits. Their leadership represents the interests of the government as

much as the interests of the rank and file; when the two are in conflict, the interests of the government almost always prevail. Given the lack of substance in the electoral process, we must conclude that in Mexico today the majority of the population have no political representation. Their alternatives are resignation or violence.<sup>20</sup> It is no wonder that Almond and Verba have insisted on the parochial character of the great majority of the Mexican public.<sup>21</sup>

The systematic division of the political elite into antagonistic factions loyal only to the person of the President—as in the Porfirian system—is not entirely absent today. However, this is not the main form of political control over the elites. Here we have one of the most important differences between the Porfirian and the Revolutionary regimes: the formation of the official (and dominant) party. President Díaz rejected the idea of encouraging the institutionalization of his system of government through the creation of a real political party. The Unión Liberal, created in the last decade of the nineteenth century, could have been the beginning of such institutionalization, but Díaz rejected the idea because every step in this direction was a diminution of his personal power. Thus, when the time came to replace the head of the system, the institutions to permit a peaceful transition were not there. When the head of the "revolutionary family," General Alvaro Obregón, was assassinated in 1928, the Party was hurriedly created; the alternative was an internal struggle similar to the one that preceded the downfall of Díaz. The PNR was created at the beginning of 1929—in addition to all the small political parties then operating (there were several hundred)—and was able to conduct the presidential campaign of Pascual Ortiz Rubio the same year. By 1938, the old parties had disappeared and the PRM, a new and very powerful mechanism to keep all the members of the "Revolutionary family" in line, was born. In 1938, with the formation of the PRI, direct membership was replaced by affiliation through a national organization belonging to any of the four functional sectors: army, labor, the peasantry, and the so-called "popular," or bureaucratic, sector.

Since 1938, the most important political struggles have taken place within the Party and its organizational network. The problem of succession at any level of government—municipal, state, or national—or within the organizations that form the Party was finally institutionalized. The struggle within the establishment has very definite rules, and after it is over party discipline requires that everyone support the winner. The most important and decisive political battle takes place before the presidential nomination. The struggle between two or three factions—almost always headed by members of the Cabinet—involves the whole political class. To a large extent, this competition is conducted beyond the view of the general public, and all sorts of dirty tricks are used by the contestants to



discredit each other before the President and the general public. But once the President announces through the Party his choice of a successor, the entire leadership of the coalition that constitutes the dominant party—and even some of those outside it, such as the entrepreneurs—back the candidate. The exceptions are few, and in principle the divisions caused by the struggle are all but forgotten. Of course, the closest competitors of the candidate are relegated to political limbo, but six years later they may make a comeback.<sup>22</sup> The main difference between the old system and the new regime, therefore, lies not in the internal struggle of the elite but in the facts that this struggle does not destroy the governing coalition and that the divisions created by the infighting do not last. The depersonalization of the political process makes the persistence of old divisions unprofitable; the only path available to the losers is to join the winner. The motto of the dominant party is “Unity, Discipline.”

Institutionalization, continual renewal of the leadership, and the acceptance of new actors in the political arena have made it possible for cooptation to become one of the central elements of Mexico's present political system. Almost any person with a political vocation can be accepted by the regime and given a chance within the Party or the administration.<sup>23</sup> Failure to coopt political leaders of the middle and lower classes was one of the reasons for Díaz's downfall. An example may be found in the so-called “Sonora group.” The main link between rich *hacendados* like José María Maytorena, a small rancher like Benjamin Hill, and a small businessman like Plutarco Elías Calles was their political exclusion at the end of the Porfiriato. The closeness of the political group in Sonora, headed by such big landholders as Ramón Corral, Luis Torres, and Rafael Izábal, convinced these otherwise law-abiding citizens that their only chance to gain power was through revolution. In contemporary Mexico, the situation is quite different. The Party is open to all classes and ideologies; only the extreme right and left are excluded, not necessarily by the Party but by themselves. PRI has room for both Marxists and classical liberals who believe that a strict observance of the doctrines of Adam Smith or Milton Friedman is the only way out of underdevelopment. The thousands of jobs available—at national and local levels—in government agencies every six years provide adequate rewards for those coopted.<sup>24</sup> An example of this process is the way in which the intelligentsia—a possible source of conflict in any authoritarian regime—was neutralized after the governments of the Revolution made their peace with the universities in the 1940s. From its support of the Marxist “Mexican School of Painting” to its support of the universities, the State has provided a living for thousands of intellectuals, and its embassies are full of writers and social scientists.

Cooptation is not completely independent of the social structure. It is obvious that those who benefit most by it are the middle and upper classes. Young people from the laboring classes still have a much more difficult time achieving success. As a group, workers and peasants are underrepresented in PRI. This is one of the several reasons their demands are taken into consideration less frequently than they are ignored.<sup>25</sup>

The Mexican Revolution is frequently described as an anti-imperialist struggle. To a great extent this is true, but, in the final analysis, the nature of the relationship between Mexico and the outside world has changed very little. The weight of the American presence at all levels of Mexican life, from the economic to the cultural, is as great or even greater now than in the past. Mexico is now an undisputed part of the U.S. zone of influence, a fact that was not clear during the Porfiriato. The recent efforts of the Mexican government to neutralize this dependency with overtures toward Latin America, Europe, China, and Japan are even more useless than those of Díaz. In modern Mexico, it is the State and not foreign enterprise which controls such basic industries as oil, power, and railroads, and the financial sector is entirely Mexican. Foreigners have no agricultural land, and the mining industry is now mostly in Mexican hands. However, the most dynamic economic sector—the manufacturing industry that emerged from the economic conditions created by World War II—is becoming increasingly dependent on foreign capital and technology.<sup>26</sup> In general terms, foreign capital accounts for less than 10 percent of the gross national product, but if we look at key sectors the situation is different. In 1970, about 70 percent of total manufacturing output came from the approximately 800 enterprises in which foreign capital was present. In sectors such as the automobile industry, the capital-goods industry, or the chemical industry, foreign participation is around 100 percent. The rate of growth of foreign vis-à-vis national enterprise is astonishing—60 percent higher or more. The picture is completed when we consider that a good part of the investment made by the public sector is financed by capital borrowed from abroad.<sup>27</sup> It is now obvious that the struggle to lessen Mexico's economic dependency reached its height during the 1938 oil expropriation but was not a definitive victory; there was a regression after World War II.

The return of foreign influence stems to a great extent from the fact that the type of development sponsored by Díaz and his minister, Limantour, is not very different from that favored by Miguel Alemán and all his predecessors. To construct a “modern” capitalist society, Mexico had to be linked to the goods and capital markets of the United States. There is, however, a difference: in Díaz's time the participation of the State in the economy was mostly indirect. Since the Revolution, the new “active



State" has created a mixed economy in which public funds and enterprises have been used to support the very rapid development of private enterprise—both foreign and national—shielded behind a protective tariff barrier. Around 40 percent of federal expenditures since 1940 have been devoted to this type of direct support to economic development. As a result, industry has been growing at an average annual rate of 9 percent.<sup>28</sup>

The Porfirian type of development caused agricultural production to lag behind the rest of the economy. The same is true today, because the nature of Mexico's development is not very different. In the 1960s, the annual rate of growth of farm production was 3.6 percent; at some point in recent years, the increase in population became greater than the increase in food production.

One of the most frequent accusations against the Díaz regime was that it permitted the concentration of private wealth in very few hands. According to the industrial census of 1965, about 0.3 percent of all enterprises accounted for about 46 percent of the capital invested in the manufacturing sector. In the agrarian sector, about 0.5 percent of all private landholdings produced about 30 percent of the agricultural output. If we add income-distribution figures, the picture is not particularly bright. In 1968, the upper 5 percent of families were in possession of about 28 percent of disposable income. On the other hand, the 50 percent of families with the lowest income had only 18 percent of the total, a situation not very different from, say, the United States or Argentina, countries which have had no "social revolution" in this century.<sup>29</sup>

In spite of all the similarities between the old and new types of development, the Mexico of today is a country quite different from Mexico at the beginning of the century. Its social structure has undergone several dramatic changes as a result of economic and demographic growth. Modern Mexico now has more than 60 million inhabitants, in contrast with 16 million in 1910. The population explosion is linked in many ways to the social policies of the Revolution. The rural character of the old Mexico is disappearing very rapidly; today almost half the inhabitants are living in towns with populations of 15,000 or more. Urbanization and industrialization have increased the ranks of a social group that was very small during Díaz's days, the so-called "middle sector." The same thing can be said about workers; for the first time there is in Mexico a real urban proletariat. The emergence of these two classes plus the emergence of a native industrial entrepreneurial sector gives the political life of the country a much more complex structure than in the past. The political actors are more numerous, as are the demands channeled into the system.<sup>30</sup>

The creation of the official Party made it possible to confront the new political complexities of Mexico's economic and social life more or less

successfully, to handle them in a better way than the old regime. Through the Party, the actors created by economic growth initiated in the Porfiriato and accelerated by the Revolution could be incorporated permanently into the decision-making process. Large enterprise was left outside the discipline of the Party (but not of the system), and because peasants, workers, and the middle class were subject to it, rapid capitalist development of the Mexican economy took place in an environment of political tranquility. The authoritarian political system of the Porfiriato was not changed by the Revolution but given a new life that made its modernization possible.

### *A Final Consideration*

If our analysis is correct, the Mexican Revolution is not a negation of the political past but rather an impressive step forward in the modernization of the Mexican authoritarian state. Nevertheless, the new regime has some weaknesses. Potential sources of instability can be found in the increasing demand for effective participation by some social and interest groups. Indeed, the process of economic growth encourages such demands. The fragmentation of the governing elite is therefore not impossible.<sup>31</sup>

Any consideration of the present political system of Mexico must take into account that authoritarianism in Mexico has deep roots that have proved very difficult to extirpate. The pre-Hispanic past and three centuries of Spanish colonial domination were not an ideal preparation for democracy. When the Mexican State was born, the Mexican nation was still in the making. The social environment left by the eighteenth century as its heritage to the new republic was extremely hostile to the installation of a liberal democracy. The nineteenth century was the century of liberalism, and it was at this crucial moment that democracy failed to take hold in Mexico. About 80 percent of the population at that time were Indians and *mestizos*, who had no political significance. The liberal institutions created by Juárez and his followers in the second half of the nineteenth century had no citizens to give them flesh and blood. The Porfirian dictatorship signified the recognition of this fact. Institutional exclusion was again accepted as the main ingredient of political control. The Mexican Revolution confronted this situation and, in 1917, Mexico gave itself one of the most advanced sets of political rules at that time, but the raw material for democracy was still absent. Perhaps the time lost could not be regained. The Revolution, struggling for survival, had no time to create the necessary social and political preconditions for democracy. Expediency and social inertia led to the adaptation of the authoritarian system of the past to the conditions of the present. President Calles

made the crucial decision in this respect.<sup>32</sup> After a while, privileges and a powerful set of vested interests flourished in a system hostile to democracy, and the beneficiaries are now its most dedicated supporters.

Has democracy—any kind of democracy—a place in Mexico's present political system? The answer is at best uncertain.

## Notes

1. The bibliography on the Porfirian period is considerable. Among the general works that can be useful are: Daniel Cosío Villegas, *El Porfiriato: vida política interior*, published in two volumes as part of the larger work *Historia moderna de México* (Mexico, D.F.: Editorial Hermes, 1972); Ralph Roeder, *Hacia el México moderno: Porfirio Díaz*, 2 vols. (Mexico, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1973). An interesting case study of the relationship between the federal government and the states is Gerald D. Barber, "Horizon of Thorns: Yucatán at the Turn of the Century" (unpublished manuscript).

2. For a brief but interesting discussion of the nature of the Porfirian administration, see the second section of Wendell K. G. Schaeffer, "La administración pública en México," *Problemas agrícolas e industriales de México*, vol. 7, no. 1 (January–March 1955).

3. Francisco Bulnes gave first-hand testimony in regard to the enrichment of the Porfirian political elite in *The Whole Truth about Mexico: President Wilson's Responsibility* (New York: M. Bulnes Book Company, 1916).

4. A useful case study of the relationship between the political and economic elites of this period is contained in James Cockcroft, *Precursores intelectuales de la Revolución Mexicana* (Mexico, D.F.: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1971; there is also an English version).

5. Besides Cockcroft's work, this lack of social mobility and the political marginality of the middle class are very well presented in Hector Aguila Camín, "La revolución sonoreña, 1910–1914" (tesis doctoral, El Colegio de México, 1975).

6. The role of the foreign enterprise in Mexico during the Díaz era can be examined in Cosío Villegas, chapter ten of *La vida económica*, which is part of *Historia moderna de México*. See also José Luis Ceceña, *México en la órbita imperial* (Mexico, D.F.: Ediciones "El Caballito," 1970), pp. 49–101; Gerald Theisen, "La Mexicanización de la industria en la época de Porfirio Díaz," *Foro internacional*, vol. 12, no. 4 (April–June 1972): 497–506.

7. Among the most important studies of the contemporary political system of Mexico are: Pablo González Casanova, *La democracia en México* (Mexico, D.F.: Ediciones Era, 1965); Daniel Cosío Villegas, *El sistema político mexicano* (Mexico, D.F.: Cuadernos de Joaquín Mortiz, 1972); Arnaldo Córdova, *La formación del poder político en México* (Mexico, D.F.: Ediciones Era, 1972); Robert E. Scott, *Mexican Government in Transition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1964); Vincent Padgett, *The Mexican Political System* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966); Roger D. Hansen, *The Politics of Mexican Development* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971); Martin C. Needler, *Politics and Society in Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1971).

8. José Luis Reyna briefly discusses political control in modern Mexico in "Control político, estabilidad y desarrollo en México," *Cuadernos del CES*, no. 3 (1974).

9. Manuel Moreno Sánchez, *La crisis política de México* (Mexico, D.F.: Editorial Extemporáneos, 1970), pp. 51–63 and 136–65.

10. An interesting analysis of opposition parties in Mexico is Antonio Delhumeau et al., *México: realidad política de sus partidos* (Mexico, D.F.: Instituto Mexicano de Estudios Políticos, 1970); see also Soledad Loaeza, "El Partido Acción Nacional: la oposición leal en México," in Luis Medina et al., *La vida política en México, 1970–1974* (Mexico, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 1974), pp. 101–26.

11. A good study on the nature of Mexico's electoral system is Rafael Segovia's "La reforma política: el ejecutivo federal, el PRI y las elecciones de 1973," in Luis Medina et al., *La vida política*, pp. 49–76.

12. González Casanova, *La democracia*.

13. An interesting analysis of the control of the federal government over state governors can be found in Sánchez, *La crisis política*, pp. 160–65.

14. See the reports on the dissolution of the local powers of the state of Guerrero in *Excelsior*, February 1 and 2, 1975.

15. An example of the institutionalization of charisma in the case of Luis Echeverría can be found in Daniel Cosío Villegas, *El estilo personal de gobernar* (Mexico, D.F.: Joaquín Mortiz, 1974).

16. Such a view of the presidency is presented in Cosío Villegas, *El sistema político mexicano*, pp. 22–35. The apparently limitless power of the President to deal with the opposition is well illustrated in Carlos Fuentes, *Tiempo mexicano* (Mexico, D.F.: Joaquín Mortiz, 1971), pp. 109–22.

17. There is not a single good work that explores the problem of political and administrative corruption, but some insights can be found in Rosario Castellanos et al., *La corrupción* (Mexico, D.F.: Editorial Nuestro Tiempo, 1969). In regard to political alienation, see the chapter on Mexico in Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963).

18. Peter Smith, "La movilidad política en el México contemporáneo," *Foro internacional*, vol. 15, no. 3 (January–March 1975): 379–413.

19. Raymond Vernon, *The Dilemma of Mexico's Development* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 123–53.

20. There are very few studies on violence, but some facts are presented by Jaime López in *10 años de guerrillas en México (1964–1974)* (Mexico, D.F.: Editorial Posada, 1974).

21. See Almond and Verba, *The Civic Culture*, chap. 14.

22. Interesting views about the cliques within the establishment are found in Kenneth F. Johnson's *Mexican Democracy: A Critical View* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1971), pp. 59–84, and Daniel Cosío Villegas, *La sucesión presidencial* (Mexico, D.F.: Joaquín Mortiz, 1975).

23. Bo Anderson and James D. Cockcroft, "Control and Cooptation in Mexican Politics," in Irving Louis Horowitz, Josué de Castro, and John Gerassi (eds.), *Latin American Radicalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), pp. 366–89.

24. The nature of rotation among the Mexican political elite is well described in the work of Peter Smith, "La movilidad política." See also Frank R. Brandenburg, *The Making of Modern Mexico* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), pp. 156–62.

25. Political exclusion is analyzed by González Casanova, *La democracia*, pp. 89–126. See also Arturo Warman, *Los campesinos, hijos predilectos del régimen* (Mexico, D.F.: Editorial Nuestro Tiempo, 1972); Roger Bartra et al., *Caciquismo y poder político en el México rural* (Mexico, D.F.: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1975).

\* 26. The nature of the foreign presence in modern Mexico is explored in Lorenzo Meyer et al., *La política exterior de México: realidad y perspectivas* (Mexico, D.F.: El

Colegio de México, 1972). See also Bernardo Sepúlveda et al., *Las empresas transnacionales en México* (Mexico, D.F.: El Colegio de México, 1974).

27. A good analysis of the expansionist nature of transnational enterprises in Mexico is the work of Fernando Fajnzylber and Trinidad Martínez Tarragó, "Las empresas transnacionales: expansión a nivel mundial y proyección en la industria mexicana" (unpublished manuscript circulated by COMACYT and CIDE, 1974).

28. An analysis of the economic model of Mexico's development since the Revolution is presented by William Glade, Jr., and Charles W. Anderson, *The Political Economy of Mexico* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968). See also Leopoldo Solís, *La realidad económica mexicana: retrovisión y perspectivas* (Mexico, D.F.: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1973); Clark Reynolds, *The Mexican Economy: Twentieth-Century Structure and Growth* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970); Timothy King, *Mexico: Industrialization and Trade Policies since 1940* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970).

29. Banco de México, *La distribución del ingreso en México* (Mexico, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1974), p. 17.

30. A general view of Mexico's social structure is presented in Joseph A. Khal (ed.), *Comparative Perspectives on Stratification: Mexico, Great Britain, Japan* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1968), pp. 1-82.

31. Samuel P. Huntington, "Social and Institutional Dynamics of One-Party Systems," in Clement H. Moore (ed.), *Authoritarian Politics in Modern Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), pp. 32-40.

32. This relationship between revolution and the increase of State power had been presented by Marx. A non-Marxist formulation is to be found in Bertrand De Jouvenel, *Du pouvoir* (Geneva: Constant Bourquin, Editeur, 1974), pp. 263-88.