

C O V E R S T O R Y

# Mystique meets reality

By Cindy Anders

**Z**ACAPU, Michoacan – An informal parade crushed in around Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and wound its way resolutely to the town plaza. A brass band blared, and jubilant supporters waved banners emblazoned with the Aztec sun and the initials PRD (Democratic Revolutionary Party). The plaza quickly filled with men in sombreros and women with children in tow – all gathered for the close of the campaign for municipal president in this small agricultural city three hours from Morelia, the state capital. The local PRD candidate was the first to speak. “The PRD is a party with many values,” he intoned, “and today I’d like to talk with you about those values. The first value we have is our national leader, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas.” The crowd roared and a chant, reminiscent of the 1988 presidential elections, erupted: “Cuauh-té-moc, Cuauh-té-moc.”

Cárdenas, however, was not campaigning for office – not that day, anyway. He was out stumping in his home state for the PRD, the party born out of his run for president in 1988, and for its mayoral candidates. On the whistle-stop tour through the Michoacan countryside, the PRD leader harped on a single theme: organization. Organization for the party, “ejido by ejido, town by town”; organization to get out the vote and

defend it; organization in workplaces and unions. But despite all the PRD banner-waving, there was no doubt about why people had come to the political rallies. They came for Cárdenas. “That Cuauhtémoc really pulls in the people,” said a taxi driver in La Piedad, Michoacan. “They’ve come from all over just to see him.”

There is no denying the Cárdenas mystique. The man, known affectionately to followers as simply

“Cuauhtémoc” or *el ingeniero* (“the engineer”), continues to draw crowds whenever he speaks, be it in Mexican town plazas or U.S. universities. A year and a half after he polled 31 percent of the official vote count in the federal elections and won four states – Michoacan, Guerrero, Morelos and the State of Mexico – and the Federal District, Cárdenas remains a hero to many Mexicans. “He didn’t go away, he didn’t give up, he didn’t cut a deal,”