

'Liberated mexicana' electorally repressed

Women find positions of 'real power' shut

Citizens of the Mexican state of Sonora, which borders Arizona, will vote July 7 to choose a new governor. The race could be the strongest challenge to Mexico's ruling party in more than five decades.

By Keith Rosenblum
The Arizona Daily Star

HERMOSILLO — She is, in many ways, politically liberated. But the Mexican woman, in what amounts to a major contradiction, is also electorally repressed.

This city, the capital of Sonora and by far the largest in the state, was run by a woman mayor from 1979 to 1982. Many people believe that the ruling party would have chosen

words of an ANFER member here. "We are supposed to concern ourselves with the domestic, charitable and mundane day-to-day matters."

In the nation's history, one woman has run for president (the leftist Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores, in 1982); one woman has been elected governor of a state (Colima); and only one of de la Madrid's Cabinet members is a woman.

When PRI announced its candidates for the nation's Camara de Diputados, or House of Representatives, three weeks ago, only 26 of the 300 candidates, all virtual shoo-ins, were women. (Two of 100 U.S. senators and 22 of 435 U.S. representatives are women.)

In Sonora, only two of 24 state deputies and two of 69 PRI candidates for presidencias of municipios similar to counties or townships, are women. (In Arizona, three of 30 senators and 14 of 60 representatives are women.)

"Only a few positions of real power are opening up for women," says Regina Cortina, a Stanford graduate student whose doctoral dissertation deals with power-gender correlations of teachers in Mexico.

"Participation in politics has not carried women into elected posts."

Irma Guadalupe Huerta, who represents women in the PRI's worker section, is more blunt:

"Men are absolutely afraid of sharing any power with us. By her nature, the woman is a better, more compassionate leader, harder to corrupt, more upstanding, more righteous."

Though women don't appear much on the ballot, history shows it would be wrong to attribute that to political apathy.

Latin American women have a greater legacy in the determination of their nationhood than American women do, scholars say.

Jean Jaquette, a political science professor at Occidental College in Los Angeles, says *mexicanas* fought alongside men in the country's various revolutions.

She added, "Most Latin American countries, and even European nations as well, have very dramatic chapters involving women to look back at. Who do we look back at from our Revolution? Betsy Ross, perhaps."

Women were active in founding PRI, often considered the envy of political parties throughout Latin America, 20 years before they had the right to vote. The women's section, *Asociacion Femenil Revolu-*



Women distribute clothing, blankets and construction materials in Guaymas following last January's flooding

Courtesy of El Imparcial

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sen the former mayor, Alicia Arellano de Pavlovich, as its gubernatorial candidate this year if President Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado had not personally intervened and selected a longtime Mexico City bureaucrat and Cabinet member.

In this state's border region, women from Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores, a Trotskyite party, dominate a unionization effort at owned assembly plants, or maquilas.

Statewide, as nationally, women in the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) are extremely well-organized. ANFER, the acronym for PRI's female interests section, brings together wealthy, U.S.-educated women and illiterate daughters of campesinos.

Women vote, and they vote in large numbers. In the last state election, women constituted 62 percent of the total turnout.

That would be a sizable vote in this year's election in which 600,000 to 800,000 persons are eligible to cast ballots.

Still, the accomplishments must be juxtaposed with some stark realities.

Women have been voting in Mexico for only 32 years and, in the

cionaria, continues today to be a vigorous propaganda organ of the 56-year-old party.

ANFER holds weekly ideology meetings throughout Sonora and the country, and also offers a series of cultural educational, and recreation workshops. While a "mixed" branch of the PRI will sponsor a karate championship or swap meet. ANFER holds sewing classes, nutrition seminars, and even hair-styling clinics.

Funding for such projects is never disclosed in any detail. Lorenzo Meyer, a Colegio de Mexico professor says, "Everyone knows the PRI uses the money of the *pueblo* (government revenues) to campaign and finance many party projects, but it is highly secretive."

Other parties as well have indoctrination classes specifically for women, but none begins to compare with PRI's.

Ernestina Quintero Armenta, a Partido Accion Nacional (PAN) candidate for a federal deputy seat from this region, says, "Women are the ones who say, 'I have more pesos this year but I'm able to do much less with them — and I have the responsibility to act on this.'"

Who are the five most powerful women in Mexico today?

The question is asked of 10 women of different political parties, and the following names are the remaining choices.

- Irma Cue de Duarte, PRI secretary general, the second most powerful position in the party. Her name is even mentioned as a presidential possibility for 1988.

- Hilda Anderson Nevarez, director of ANFER and a regional leader of the Confederacion de Trabajadores Mexicanos, the 5 million strong nationwide labor union.

- Griselda Alvarez, governor of Colima.

- Yolanda Senties de Ballesteros, secretary general of ANFER's national executive committee and a senator from the state of Mexico.

- Maria Lavalle Urbina, senator from Campeche and formerly a federal deputy

Mexican women have been guaranteed equal rights — something that has not happened as yet in the United States. But in practice, the woman who deviates from traditional roles faces a tough battle and may even be ostracized.

In keeping with traditions, the wife of whoever is chosen to be governor automatically becomes president of Desarrollo Integral de la Familia, a publicly funded social welfare agency. For the six year term of the governorship, she will be photographed extensively with children, invalids, and artists — not politicians, businessmen or union leaders.

Next Sunday. How to cover a Mexican campaign