

natural biosphere reserve. Nonetheless, these lands are once again threatened. A highway is being built that slices through the jungle from north to south, splitting the region and further facilitating the excesses of the hardwoods operations.

The jungle has eighty more years to live, before it is totally destroyed, together with the four Indian groups and hundreds of animal species which inhabit it. For more than a century now, the jungle has used its natural defenses against sophisticated forms of deforestation, but the toughest battles are yet to be fought. The death of the jungle would signify the loss of a part of our cultural heritage, the extinction of hundreds of plant and animal species and the

destruction of one of the country's most important "natural lungs," endangering adjacent areas of Guatemala and Mexico at the same time.

This is the imminent danger in the case of the ancestral Lacandon jungle. The situation demands that we develop a new consciousness of our relationship to nature: while it is true that people should take advantage of the environment for our own benefit and development, it is also true that we must do so in a programmed and responsible manner; if not, the environment will be ravished and the human species, too, may be threatened with its own extinction. ★

Ramsés Ramírez

Is All Quiet on the Chihuahua Front?

Contrary to all predictions, a tense calm reigns in the northern state following their recent elections

The first week in July some 300 local and foreign correspondents, along with political observers from all over the country and abroad, thousands of soldiers, policemen and plainclothesmen gathered in the state of Chihuahua. The press, political parties and authorities all believed the scheduled elections would have a tragic, violent outcome that would set Mexican politics on a new course. Both the main contenders, the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party, PRI, and the opposition National Action Party, PAN, stated that these elections would be a landmark event in the history of Chihuahua.

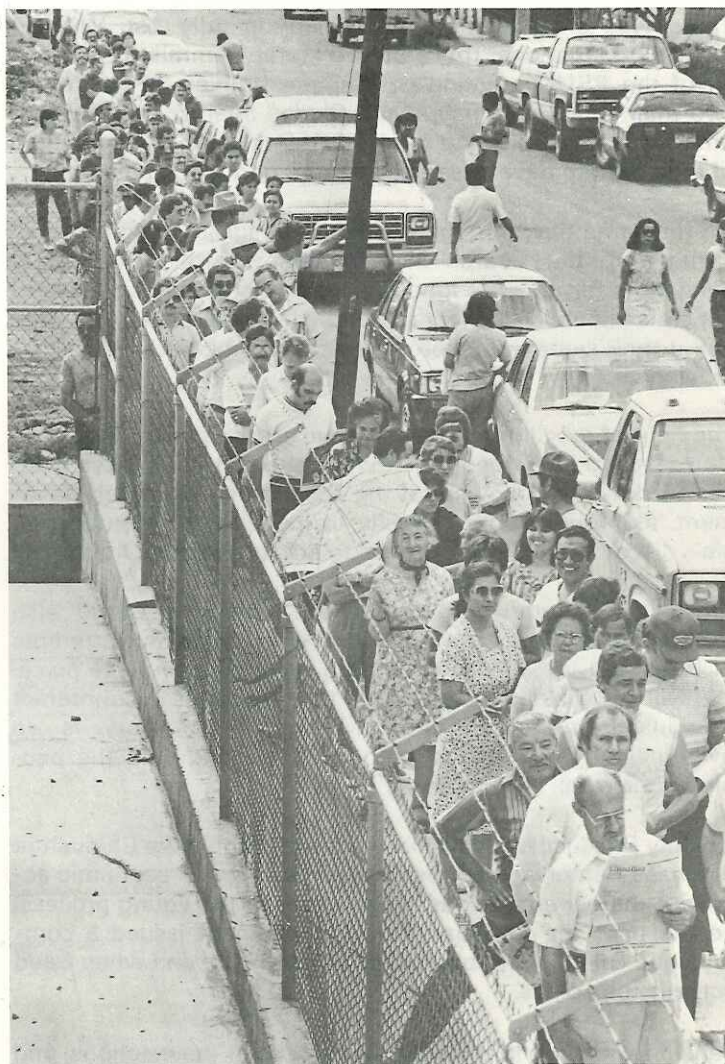
Yet these previsions failed because they never took into account the possibility of what actually turned out to be the key factor: the people of Chihuahua's civic maturity. Not a single person was killed, nobody was wounded, and the confrontation never went beyond words and into action.

But not all was Chihuahua on Sunday, July 6. Elections were held in six other states, with gubernatorial races in Chihuahua, Durango, Zacatecas and Michoacán, and the overall selection

of 109 mayors and 92 local representatives.

Despite opinions expressed after the fact, the PRI won all four races for governor, 106 of the mayor's positions, and almost all of the local representatives.

The opposition's complaints centered on Chihuahua, where the PAN, the Catholic Church and the organized business sector all demanded that the elections be annulled. The Mexican Unified Socialist Party, PSUM, and non-affiliated sectors belonging to the Democratic Electoral Movement, headed by a priest named Camilo Pérez, PSUM leader Antonio Becerra Gaytán and the mayor of Ciudad Cuauhtémoc, Humberto Ramos Molina, all made the same demand.



Voters in Chihuahua wait patiently to cast their vote.

Photo by Pedro Valtierra; Imagen Latina.

By the end of the campaign, both the PRI and the PAN anticipated a close vote with uncertain final results, with violence in the picture.

Both campaigns came to an official close on Monday, June 30th. PRI candidate Fernando Baeza Meléndez wound up in the state capital, while PAN's Francisco Barrio Terrazas did so in the border-city of Ciudad Juárez.

Facing a town square overflowing with sympathizers, Baeza insisted he would be the winning candidate because, "we have an historical project, we have the right political message, and we have deep moral reasons for aspiring to victory." In a fit of enthusiasm over the large attendance at his rally, Baeza took to the microphone to shout: "We will win, we will win..."

Francisco Barrio filled the square in Ciudad Juárez, and told his supporters that "nothing can take the certainty of victory away from me: we shall win." And he asked that his followers show "a noble and understanding conduct toward the PRI's people, they'll have enough with the weight of defeat on their shoulders. We should not be sarcastic, nor should we take revenge on the losers."

On the following day, PAN-member Luis H. Alvarez, at the time still mayor of the city of Chihuahua, began a hunger strike. His reasons were to "exert legitimate pressure so that all abuses against the citizenry come to an end, and so that the people's will is totally respected during the elections. I mean to appeal to the people to fulfill their duty by voting and guaranteeing that their vote is respected, despite all that has been said and done."

22

There was an additional bad omen on July 1st. Without further explanations, the State Electoral Commission ousted all of the PSUM's voting-poll representatives in the state's two main cities, Chihuahua and Ciudad Juárez. The measure affected 400 people, and the Unified Socialists were deprived of their right to have observers present during the balloting.

On the same day, through its bishop, Msgr. Manuel Talamán Camandari, the Church in Chihuahua warned that "It is dangerous for rulers to ignore the sign of the times. The people are anxious for democracy, and who knows what will happen if their signs are ignored. The final demonstration will be rebellion."

The hour of rebellion seemed to have arrived on July 3rd. Tension reached its highest point when the state-highways were closed down by followers of the Democratic Electoral Movement, as proof of "our capacity to mobilize around the people's discontent and their refusal to accept electoral fraud."

Speaking to some 200 journalists, Francisco Barrio also raised fears. "We are convinced there will be serious attempts at fraud, but we cannot be certain it will actually take place. We will mobilize the people during the elections to counteract (fraudulent intentions), and so that our victory is so overwhelming that any attempt of tampering with the people's choice will be impossible."

On July 5th, just two days before the elections, the Chihuahua Business Center agreed they would paralyze all economic activity if there were serious irregularities in the voting process. For its part, the Christian Family Movement issued a communiqué calling for public, collective protest if and when fraud actually took place.

Tension was high in the state on the eve of the elections, and each of the contenders insisted he would be the victor. Baeza based his campaign on images, few words and a lot of pictures. His campaign-speeches evolved around the promise of an all-out fight against corruption, and on how a vote for his party meant a vote for a political program. The PAN centered on denouncing corruption and the system's decay. They accused Baeza of being part of being an accomplice to corruption because he belongs to the ruling party.

But violence failed to materialize on election day, and both candidates cautioned their followers against anticipated triumphalism.

That same afternoon, Manuel Gurría Ordóñez, the PRI's general delegate in Chihuahua, announced total victory for his party. But a couple of hours later Fernando Baeza held a press conference in which he said: "I have not come to proclaim

victory. I want to be careful, and let the polling authorities say the final word." He asked that his followers abstain from public demonstrations, to avoid incidents.

PAN candidate Francisco Barrio, also refused to declare victory, "because we don't have enough facts to go on." And he asked the same of his followers: no public demonstrations.

But events took a different turn on July 7th, when Barrio announced that there had been generalized fraud during the elections, and that his party would demand an annulment: He also said the PAN would unleash a civil disobedience campaign against the PRI's pretense of having won all of the posts disputed on July 6.



Guarding the border crossing at Ciudad Juárez.

Photo by Andrés Garay; Imagen Latina

On Tuesday the Chihuahua business community voiced their support for the annulment petition and announced a shut-down. The Catholic Church acted in kind, and decided to close all church doors on the 20th, suspending religious services.

The two business shut-downs were failures, since 80% of the affiliates ignored the measure. The caravans of vehicles waving PAN flags, which at one point seemed to dominate the streets, slowly disappeared.

Thus, calm returned to Chihuahua. The PRI was declared the winner with 401,905 votes, against 223,063 for the PAN

The certainty exists, though, that soon the elected representatives will set themselves up as the Electoral College, and will proceed to analyze any and all proof brought before them, of anomalies in the electoral process.★

Pablo Hiriart