

OUR VOICE

When this issue of *Voices of Mexico* goes into circulation, the results of the July 2 elections will already be known. Regardless of who wins the presidential race, the important thing for the country will be that the elections have been transparent, well organized and the results, rooted in democratic practices, accepted by everyone. These, the first elections of the new millennium, are a confirmation of the path Mexico has followed in recent years toward the consolidation of democracy. The changes have been slow and difficult, of course. That can be seen in the emergence of the Zapatista National Liberation Army in 1994 and other armed groups in later years and the political assassinations of hundreds of activists and sympathizers from different political parties, but particularly of Luis Donaldo Colosio and José Francisco Ruiz Massieu in 1994. Interpreting all this is not an easy task. What is clear is that Mexican society is moving toward greater political participation and a democratic culture.

Things have changed in the country since 1994. Although it is still unacceptable that 40 million Mexicans live in poverty and the country's wealth is concentrated in very few hands, the economy may well now be able to change that. Unemployment is at its lowest in many years. However, increasing numbers of our countrymen and women continue to emigrate to the United States. One of the possible explanations is the enormous wage gap between Mexico and the U.S., the world's leading power. Undoubtedly, an upward shift in wages will be one of the new president's most important challenges.

Today, a great many municipalities, state congresses and governors' chairs and even the Chamber of Deputies are in the hands of the opposition. We have advanced in creating a culture of negotiations and pacts characteristic of pluralistic societies, and when agreements cannot be reached, the players involved pay a political price. We have moved forward in the construction of an institutional framework that impedes imposition; the next president will not be able to ignore the other two most influential political forces, their impact and representativeness in society give them the legitimacy needed to participate in all matters of national interest. Their positions and demands will have to be seriously considered and included in the design of public policy to guarantee governability and the effectiveness of federal programs. The next step is the perfecting of our systems for accountability. Government actions and resources should be absolutely transparent. Only that will enable us to say that our transition to democracy has concluded.

The way the political campaigns ended leads us to reflect on the transformation they have gone through in modern democracies: they have changed from campaigns of ideological persuasion based on concrete governmental programs in direct contact with people to campaigns waged mainly in the media, using marketing techniques, in which the voter is seen as a consumer of a particular product: a candidate's charisma. In our "Politics" section, José Buendía and Nicolás Alvarado take a look at the Mexican elections, presenting us with a rigorous analysis of each of the six presidential campaigns. In the same section, internationalist Edmundo Hernández Vela offers our readers a panorama of recent changes in international relations from the viewpoint of globalization and the end of the Cold War. The current model of multilateral international relations embodied in the United Nations has become ineffective and no longer guarantees justice and stability internationally. We need, then, a new model that can break out of the hegemony imposed by the United States, a model fostered by countries like Mexico that find themselves at a disadvantage in the dynamic of globalization.

In this issue of *Voices of Mexico*, our “Science, Art and Culture” section presents our readers with the work of Mexican painter Mario Palacios, an artist who has surprised critics and the national artistic circles alike with his most recent proposals. In his article, poet Eduardo Milán asks himself, “How does one build in a universe whose most evident symptom is deconstruction, not only in social terms and human values, but also with regard to the meaning of art?” Art critic Sylvia Navarrete offers us a review of the different stages in his artistic growth and a direct exchange of views with him. She says that Palacios’ work is in a certain way ahistorical since it situates itself outside the main currents of national visual arts and the Mexican social and political events to embody a spiritual, philosophical proposal that has produced works based on research into universal, archetypical symbols.

This section also includes a piece by curator and art critic Judith Alanis about installation art in Mexico. She brings us a fascinating conversation with Guillermo Santamarina —director of the Ex-Teresa, Mexico’s cultural space most specialized in avant garde art— dealing with the development of concept and object art in Mexico, as well as the work of important installation artists.

Our “Economy” section begins with a balance sheet of the first six years of the North American Free Trade Agreement by economist Carlos Arriola. For Arriola, the effects of NAFTA on the Mexican economy have been positive, particularly if we take into account the negative results of previous protectionist policies. In his article, he looks at different economic indicators like job creation, exports, imports and foreign investment, among others, and finds that the results are generally positive since the treaty came into effect. He does acknowledge, however, that these benefits have not translated into higher wages, or, in general, a better living standard for most Mexicans.

This section concludes with an article by researcher Elizabeth Gutiérrez about —appropriately— productivity and competitiveness in the era of globalization. In her opinion, both phenomena have become key for attracting international investment; in fact, she sees productive investment as part of an overall redefinition of economic frontiers. Proof of this is the recent increase in intraindustrial and intrafirm trade in the three countries of North America.

Since February 1999, the National Autonomous University of Mexico has been fraught with the most serious conflict of its history; two of the most negative consequences of this conflict have been the shut-down of academic activity for almost 10 months and the temporary jailing of many university students. Today, university functioning is practically normal and all the students have been freed. The conflict itself, however, is far from over. The “Society” section of this issue includes an article by UNAM researchers Hugo Casanova and Roberto Rodríguez analyzing the conflict giving its history and presenting their critique of the positions of everyone involved.

Undoubtedly, one of the main concerns of both political actors and society itself in both Mexico and the world is corruption. Our “Society” section continues with an article by Antonio Santiago Becerra about the institutional, legal measures Mexico has taken to fight it. Arguing that it is neither new, nor a problem limited to a single country or region, he begins by accepting that the problem does exist and requires changes both in individual value systems and in public policy to solve it. Mexico has recently undertaken important changes to fight this scourge, such as the creation of the Federal Controller’s Bureau. At the same time, argues Santiago Becerra, it is necessary to consolidate a culture of accountability so that public spending and accounts are truly public.

In the “United States Affairs” section, we include two articles about the on-going drug trafficking problem, both analyses of U.S. government policy, focusing on recent legislation like the Money Laundering Abatement Act, the International Emergency Economic Powers Act and the Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act, and how it affects the future of certification. Researcher Silvia Vélez presents a critique of

the new laws, pointing out that they have not really been effective when applied in Colombia despite being touted as successful. More than attaining their goals, such as the lessening of drug trafficking and of the violence associated with it, she maintains they have been used with political intent in the current U.S. presidential races. For specialist Miguel Angel Valverde, certification by the U.S. Congress is wearing out its usefulness given its unilateral, extraterritorial character. This is borne out, he says, by the new strategy reflected in the legislation designed to seek out individuals responsible for drug trafficking and not blame entire countries. These measures continue to be risky for countries involved, however, he says, since the laws can be applied without due process and used politically.

Our “Canadian Issues” section is made up of a very well documented article about the Canadian publishing industry written by specialist Graciela Martínez-Zalce. This industry, like its counterparts the world over, has gone through enormous changes due to globalization. In the case of Canada, the problem may be magnified if we consider that it is a bicultural and bilingual society. Martínez-Zalce looks at the translation of Canadian literature into Spanish, alerting us to the need that the translation be done in Mexico and other Latin American countries given that many expressions used by Spanish translators are strange or incomprehensible for Latin American readers.

The “History,” “The Splendor of Mexico” and “Museums” sections are all dedicated to the state of Hidalgo, rich in tradition, history and culture. Hidalgo’s cultural wealth goes back further than the colonial period. Osvaldo J. Sterpone and Juan Carlos Equihua offer us an evaluation of the growth of the city of Tula, built by the Toltecs during the first millennium of our era, based on recent stratigraphic findings by different archeologists working in what are today the ruins of one of ancient Mexico’s finest old cities.

Famous from colonial times for its mineral wealth, Hidalgo was the preferred seat for Spanish colonizers, attracted by its natural resources and nearness to Mexico City. For these reasons, many religious orders began their missionary efforts there, leaving behind them an impressive number of monasteries and other colonial monuments. Víctor Ballesteros writes about Hidalgo’s marvelous monasteries, as well as about the monumental architecture of the *pulque*-making haciendas of the Apan Plains, an area known for the production of this, one of Mexico’s traditional alcoholic drinks.

Belem Oviedo explores the intimate relationship between the mines and the inhabitants of the region and their culture in her article about one of the state’s most beautiful towns, Real del Monte. Oviedo also contributes a piece on the Mining Museum located in the state capital, Pachuca.

Gerardo Ceballos fills our “Ecology” section with his article about western Mexico’s Chamela-Cuixmala Biosphere Reserve, covering more than 13,000 hectares. Ceballos’ description of the yearly drought-rain cycles in this area vividly explains why the reserve should be expanded and biological corridors established connecting to other reserves in order to preserve biological diversity.

The “Literature” section delves into Mexican theater, with an article by director Rodrigo Johnson Celorio reviewing the development of stage productions in Mexico from the colonial period to today, centering on the work of playwright David Olguín. The section’s center piece is a play by David Olguín himself, *International Airport*, which, as usual in his work, presents us with unsettling dialogue and moral problems with no easy out.

Our “In Memoriam” section is dedicated to playwright and director Héctor Azar, the founder of many of the Mexican theater’s existing institutions, and the representative of a great tradition in both university and extra-university theater.

Paz Consuelo Márquez Padilla
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