

OUR VOICE

The surprising, contradictory events of the U.S. elections are a lesson for all the world's champions and architects of democracy: no matter how solid a democracy seems to be, it is never exempt from threats and risks. Democracy and its institutions are not indestructible. Even if people think a single vote does not seem to have a real impact on an election, the U.S. experience of last November 7 teaches us that every vote counts, and it is responsible citizens who, individually, define the course of democratic government. November 7 also showed that confidence in the electoral process is essential in building a democracy.

The electoral machinery cannot be allowed to rust. Although infrastructure for organizing elections is expensive, efficient mechanisms and clear rules for voting without confusion are indispensable, as are the scrupulous organization of elections and their ample monitoring, just as occurred in Mexico's elections of last July 2.

Every actor in the electoral process must comply with his/her responsibilities seriously and professionally. Having rights also means meeting obligations. While it is true that the ballots caused confusion in Florida, it is also true that they were approved by representatives of all the parties. In this case, confidence was undercut because of electoral officials' ineffectiveness.

The deeper meaning of the lesson that we have all learned is that we must be increasingly alert to holes in the democratic process. In the case of the United States, the negative effects of this much-talked-about election will probably be felt even after the January 20 inauguration and, of course, will also have an impact on other democracies in the rest of the world.

The right to information guaranteed by U.S. law will surely prompt different civic and interest groups to organize a continued recount of the votes, even though this will not have any legal ramifications. The obvious question is, then, what would happen if in six months, with President Bush in office, information comes out showing that Albert Gore won Florida and, therefore, both the Electoral College and the popular vote?

Our "United States Affairs" section deals with this polemical election in two articles. Gabriel Guerra Castellanos' article ponders not only the post-electoral uncertainty, but also takes a look at the apparently "normal" aspects of the process, like the indirect election of the president and the influence of big capital and special interests in deciding candidacies, an influence heartily rejected by the public.

In the other article, I venture my thoughts on the problems and conflicts that arose out of the elections, as well as the unprecedented action of the Supreme Court which finally made the definitive decision.

On the complex bilateral relations between Mexico and the United States, internationalist Alejandro Becerra has contributed an article for the "Mexico-U.S. Relations" section. In it, he seeks an explanation of the frequent controversies and conflicts between our two countries, finding it in our different religions, political ideas and cultural traditions, which influence the perception that each people has of the other. It is precisely these different histories and feelings that delineate the problems.

In this issue, our “Politics” section is dedicated to two fundamental topics in our foreign policy. On the one hand, Roberta Lajous, Director of the Foreign Relations Ministry’s Matías Romero Institute of Consular and Diplomatic Studies, delves into Mexico’s diplomatic asylum policy. Traditionally, ours has been one of the nations which has most often opened its doors for those persecuted for their ideas and political activities, a humanitarian practice and political principle that must be maintained. Lajous exemplifies this policy with the cases of the Spaniards and Latin Americans who have found in Mexico a refuge that has allowed them to continue to develop. Analyst Bibiana Gómez Muñoz’ article deals with the diversification of our foreign policy. While pointing out that the Mexican government has always been interested in diversification, she also concludes that the different attempts to achieve it have not been very effective. The proof is the enormous weight that bilateral relations with the United States retain in every area: the economy, politics, society and culture. The author predicts that Vicente Fox’s new administration will try to turn to Latin America more than to Europe –as did Zedillo before him– and alerts us to the need for closer ties with Canada. It remains to be seen whether this new attempt will be successful.

With the victory of Vicente Fox and the coalition formed by the National Action Party (PAN) and the Green Ecologist Party of Mexico, some analysts and political players have begun to voice concern about a possible political resurgence of the Catholic Church, particularly because of its historical and ideological proximity to the PAN. It is still too early to predict the outcome, but we do think it is important to begin the discussion on the issue.

In our “Society” section, specialist Oscar Aguilar contributes an article about the new power of the church, saying that the fears of a political resurgence of the church hierarchy with Fox taking office are exaggerated. In his opinion, the existence of a plural society, a divided government and three large political forces strongly rooted in the population would make it very difficult to implement a conservative Catholic agenda. He also thinks that this same pluralism will of necessity give the church a stronger voice, requiring both religious fundamentalists and Jacobin anti-clericalists to moderate their positions and learn to establish a dialogue in the new democratic context.

In our “History” section we present our readers an article by Texas scholar Christopher Ohan about the role of the Catholic Church in the Mexican Revolution and the Cristero War that followed it. Contrary to the vast majority of interpretations of the revolution, Ohan presents us with an audacious hypothesis about the “revolutionary” role of the church, which mobilized masses against the state in an eminently subversive movement.

Job opportunity gender inequality in Mexico motivated four well known Mexican economists to propose a full employment program for women. Alejandra Arroyo, Eugenia Correa, Alicia Girón and Patricia Pérez Licona conceived of their program as a strategy to fight inequality and substantially improve Mexican women’s condition at the same time that it would promote a reactivation of the economy as a whole. The program would be implemented gradually and would include fiscal measures to make it viable. But above all it requires a radical change in the way public policy about women is made. We printed it in this issue because we consider it an original proposal and a possible way out of this age-old problem of Mexican society.

Watercolor painting, despite its beauty, has been largely forgotten in favor of other genres. In Mexico, work by people like Alfred Guati Rojo has contributed to its being disseminated in all its richness and splendor. Our “Science, Art and Culture” section includes an article by Guati Rojo about the Watercolor Museum and the most recent biennial celebrated there. We continue with an unorthodox article about an unorthodox Mexican artist: Angélica Abelleyra

writes about Gabriel Orozco's very personal aesthetic proposal. The section concludes with an article on a topic that has inspired a certain amount of polemics and caused concern in some sectors of society: genetically modified plants and crops. In her article, Yolanda Massieu Trigo considers that they should be scrupulously regulated because they can generate negative as well as positive effects in agriculture and the food supply, and since little is known about their long-term effects, more should be invested in researching them.

In "Canadian Issues," Athanasios Hristoulas presents his conclusions about changes in Canadian foreign policy in recent years. Hristoulas considers that Canada's move toward centering its international policy on human security is motivated by post-nationalist aims that both emphasize the ethics of political action and at the same time serve Canada's practical interests. He explains how, despite Canada's original aim of maintaining ties with Europe, it has been forced to open up to exchanges and deeper relations with the countries of its own hemisphere, turning inevitably into a "country of the Americas."

Our "The Splendor of Mexico" section in this issue centers on articles about the history and natural resources of the state of Morelos in central Mexico. The center of the sugar industry during the colonial period and the first century of independence, many sugar haciendas were built in this state, magnificent examples of the architecture of their time. Architect and restorer Alfonso Toussaint has contributed an article on this topic. Morelos, just south of Mexico City, was where one of the most genuine, radical social movements of the Mexican Revolution originated: the Zapatista movement. Cinematographer and documentary-film maker Francesco Taboada offers our readers a revealing glimpse at last surviving Zapatistas, all centenarians, whom he interviewed about their struggle, their frustrations and their views on the Zapatista movement almost 100 years later. Las Estacas is a natural paradise in the state of Morelos, renowned for its beauty, splendid climate, thermal waters and flora and fauna. Topiltzin Contreras and Fernando Urbina write about this center for eco-tourism and its owners' ability to reconcile a business proposition with the creation of a culture of respect and care for the environment.

The Brady Museum of Cuernavaca is the legacy of artist-collector Robert Brady, who chose Cuernavaca to live the last years of his life amidst his collection of objects and works of art from all over the world. Sarah Sloan, the current director, has contributed an article about the museum to this issue.

Our "Ecology" section includes an article by Gerardo Ceballos and Jesús Pacheco about the Chihuahua habitat of the prairie dog and the efforts that have been made to protect this native of Northern Mexico from extinction.

Once again we dedicate this issue's "Literature" section to promoting the work of young Mexican writers. Playwright and stage director Carmina Narro exhibits her ability to write a tight plot that goes to the very heart of the most contradictory human feelings. We present our readers with her *Shadow Boxing*, accompanied by an article by critic Rodrigo Johnson about the new directions young Mexican playwrights are taking.

Voices of Mexico pays homage in this issue to Amalia Hernández, probably the best known and most successful exponent of Mexican dance in the last century. Dance critic and historian Alberto Dallal writes about her career and its significance for Mexico's culture.

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