

José Francisco Ruiz Massieu, an irreparable loss

In Mexico there is room for plurality, dissent and criticism, which are indispensable elements of democracy. But never for violence, which is the antithesis of politics!

María Fernanda Riveroll, widow of Ruiz Massieu

Only one day after President Carlos Salinas proclaimed that the presidential transition—which takes place on December 1, 1994—would be characterized by stability and order, José Francisco Ruiz Massieu, Secretary General of the governing Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), was assassinated.

And while crimes are committed every day in Mexico City—as in any other great metropolis—this second political assassination in our tragic year of 1994 shook Mexican society once again. As the writer Carlos Fuentes asked: Who's next?

The assassinations of Luis Donaldo Colosio (March 23) and José Francisco Ruiz Massieu (September 28) constitute “a much more disconcerting, terrifying and phantasmagorical [kind of] violence.... This is not the violence which enemies and opponents of the regime use against its members, which would at least be explainable. This is the violence that breaks out between powerful members of one and the same family.... It is a suicidal violence... which leaves society bewildered, with an unbearable sense of danger and orphanhood,” wrote Adolfo Aguilar Zinser, a congressman from the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) (*Reforma*, October 14).

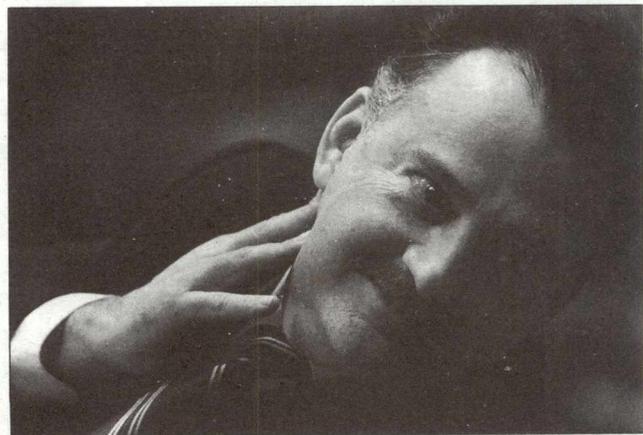
Ruiz Massieu did not get his last wish. At the time of his assassination he was on his way to the Federal Elections Institute (IFE), where a long-awaited debate was to be held between Jorge Carpizo—president of the IFE and Secretary of *Gobernación* (the Interior Ministry)—and Porfirio Muñoz Ledo, president of the PRD. “It’s a good

cast and I don’t want to miss the event,” he said before getting into his car, where he received the fatal gunshot.

Muñoz Ledo stressed parallels in the deaths of Colosio and Ruiz Massieu: “Colosio was murdered when agreements for a political reform began to be translated into will and action. Ruiz Massieu was killed when the desire for a national democratic dialogue began to be translated into deeds.” The latter assassination occurred one day after the PRI published a call for political reform.

In addition to the fact that both victims favored democratizing the country and carrying out a dialogue with the opposition, they were both extremely close to the president. Although as a result of his divorce Ruiz Massieu ceased to be a member of the Salinas family, he continued to have an excellent personal and professional relationship with the president.

José Francisco Ruiz Massieu was born in Acapulco, Guerrero on July 22, 1946. In 1969 he received his *licenciatura* (roughly equivalent to a bachelor’s degree) in law from the National University of Mexico (UNAM), and was immediately awarded a scholarship to carry out



He was a well-prepared and creative politician, with a genuine vocation to serve his country.

Sad Spectacle in the Legislature

It was almost a *fait accompli* that José Francisco Ruiz Massieu was to become president of the House of Representatives' "Grand Commission" on November 1st. Shortly before his death he noted: "The great challenge is for Congress to become the stage for political *concertación* [accord through negotiation of conflicting positions]; that the House of Representatives become the house of political dialogue." He insisted on the need for a constant dialogue which would replace the idea of a struggle for power through the extermination of adversaries.

This practice was very common in Mexico during the first part of this century. In honor of one of its victims the Belisario Domínguez Medal was established, to be awarded by the Senate in recognition of service to society. On October 7, shortly after Ruiz Massieu's assassination, the Chiapas poet Jaime Sabines was awarded this medal. A senator from Ruiz Massieu's home state of Guerrero gave the traditional reading of the historic speech that Belisario Domínguez made from the Senate floor against President Victoriano Huerta in 1913—a speech which cost him his life. "The text moved many. Nothing could have been more up-to-date or relevant" (Néstor Martínez, *La Jornada*, October 8). Among its passages is the following: "The fatherland demands that you fulfill your duty, even in the face of danger, and even if it is certain that you will lose your life...."

The duty of our legislators is to watch over and safeguard the interests of the people who elected them. Nevertheless, the Permanent Commission of Congress was stained with Ruiz Massieu's blood on October 5, when the PRI majority voted to give a leave of absence to PRI congressman Manuel Muñoz Rocha—one of the alleged intellectual authors of the murder—rather than depriving him of parliamentary immunity. (So long as a legislator enjoys this constitutionally stipulated immunity, no legal action may be undertaken against him.)

Even five days later, the House of Representatives' Subcommission of Inquiry ruled out, on the grounds that it was "unnecessary," the request by the attorney general's office that Muñoz Rocha be stripped of his immunity.

Néstor Martínez and Oscar Camacho wrote the following account of this unfortunate commission session (*La Jornada*, October 6):

...The discussion went on along the same lines for almost three hours until [PRI congressman] Florencio Salazar, with tears in his eyes, spoke of his memories of his chief and friend.

In his remarks Salazar explained that he had originally planned to vote in favor of the leave of absence, but that after listening to the arguments made by the PAN and PRD, "I believe it would benefit Congress for this ethics judgment to be approved if all arguments are exhausted...." Above and beyond specific hypotheses, Salazar said that the murder of Ruiz Massieu is undoubtedly a political assassination, and that he would vote against [the leave of absence] for the sake of consistency and because the country demands justice, public security, certitude and change, as well as politicians who conscientiously face up to their responsibilities.

Salazar's statement met with the approval of many members of his party. When [commission president] Humberto Lugo Gil saw that this was endangering the process of approving the leave of absence, he called a ten-minute recess. PRI congressmen were summoned to a private discussion in an adjoining conference room, where Lugo Gil and González Avelar called for party unity.

Not all were convinced, but in the end they obeyed discipline and voted in favor, with the exception of Florencio....

Poor Donaldo, poor me

With his unjust disappearance, Luis Donaldo did me a final favor: he gave me back the ability to feel sadness with an intensity I thought I had lost forever exactly 30 years ago, on another occasion when death by violence paid a visit to my life. While I met him at a young age—twelve years ago, during Miguel de la Madrid's presidential campaign—our friendship grew ever closer over the past eight years of working together as part of Carlos Salinas' team.

In December of 1991, circumstances, concretely the inadvisability of an early withdrawal from my duties in the Guerrero state government, prevented me from working with him in the PRI's National Executive Committee as we had both wished. The catastrophe of Wednesday the 23rd prevents this once again, this time in an irrevocable and terribly painful way.

Nevertheless, in recent years and especially over the past four months, I was close enough to Luis Donaldo to get to know his real nature, without any kind of obstacle. I was able to get past the outer shell all public men must maintain, and to see the man and his authentic soul.

Thus I was able to see that President Colosio would go down in Mexico's political history as the "noble president," because he had an upright, measured and warm vision of the matters of state. This vision left no room for malign passions, resentment or pettiness, nor even arrogance, that professional disease that often besets rulers of countries such as our own.

His seriousness—his sense of responsibility—was neither sad nor opaque. On the contrary, he was happy, with an unrowdy, straightforward and transparent kind of happiness, born of a sharp intelligence yet based above all on his moral condition, on his healthiness as a human being.

I would also like to bear witness to the fact that his presidential aspirations—which in his case it would be dull-witted to take as mere ambition, and which never led him to get involved in bureaucratic in-fighting—flowed from an inclusive objective: he had this aspiration because he wanted progress towards a system in which everyone would have a place, in which nobody would be left out, which would include external antagonists and internal competitors, all social groups and every region of the country. This was a genuinely humanistic conviction, alien to any kind of wheeling and dealing.

His party and parliamentary activities and his work in the field of popular welfare, like his modest origins in the rural middle class (as what he called a "child of the culture of effort"), gave him gifts which are indispensable for governing a country such as Mexico will be: patience, tolerance, generosity, simplicity and a sense of balance. He was equipped to be a president who would show the kind of leadership that the peoples of the world demand today.

The last hundred days, specifically since the rising of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), were very hard for Colosio as a candidate, and even harder for the good man that this young martyr was. He faced up to everything, as only upright people—whole people, as the men of the countryside say—can: he withstood bitter criticisms of his campaign and sought the explanation in its deficiencies rather than supposing that his detractors spoke in bad faith. He thoughtfully faced the evolution of events, including the unprecedented and the unfortunate ones, in order to contribute to a solution. He paid no heed to the pressures urging him to break with the president. He behaved generously towards the main protagonists of the past hundred days, extending his hand in fraternity. Rather than political artifice, all this was an exercise in morality. Not once, even in moments of confidence and in the most private surroundings, did he speak a word that contradicted his public behavior, nor did his frank visage give expression to anything that went against his public stand. *He acted out of conviction, not calculation; strength, not weakness; authority, not fear.*

Until the end—until Sunday, when I spoke with Donaldo for the last time—his comments regarding the president were characterized only by a kind of complete affection which is seldom seen at the top levels of government. He had only cordial words regarding those who, intentionally or not, stood in the way of his moving forward; and an understanding attitude towards opponents who did not respond to his initiatives for political civility and his efforts towards democratization.

To end: when his death was confirmed, I could only exclaim, in a voice I never knew I had: "Poor Donaldo, poor me, poor us; poor all of us!"

José Francisco Ruiz Massieu

Article dedicated to President Carlos Salinas, published in *La Jornada* on March 25 (under its original title, "Luis Donaldo, the Man") and again on September 29, 1994.

post-graduate studies in political science at Great Britain's University of Essex.

In 1971, together with his brothers-in-law Raúl and Carlos Salinas, as well as Manuel Camacho, he formed the Politics and Revolutionary Professions civic association, whose motto was "The professions in the service of politics; politics in the service of the people."

From 1987 to 1993 he served as governor of Guerrero, one of Mexico's most tumultuous states —completing a six-year term there was in itself a feat, Ruiz Massieu being one of the few to do so.

He was a law professor at UNAM and the Autonomous Metropolitan University. One of his students, Rafael Tovar y de Teresa, president of the National Council for Culture and the Arts during the Salinas administration, wrote: "What I remember from his classes is not only his insistence that one learn the structure of juridical systems and the function of government, but the most important point: his emphasis on the values which should be the basis of public officials' ethics.... There is no way anyone could forget seeing him arrive for the first day of class with copies, for each one of us, of texts which cannot be found in Mexico; he considered these materials crucial to our training."

Ruiz Massieu sought the elimination of illiteracy. Thus he believed that the most important thing about culture is to spread and share it. Despite his intense political activity, he always made time to read and write. He authored or

coauthored numerous articles, books and prologues, coordinated publications and sponsored a range of cultural and academic projects. Key among his books are *El proceso democrático en México* (Mexico's Democratic Process), *¿Nueva clase política o nueva política?* (A New Political Class or a New Politics?) *Ideas a tiempo: las perspectivas de la democracia* (Ideas in Time: Perspectives for Democracy), *La construcción democrática* (Building Democracy) and *Cuestiones de derecho político* (Issues in Political Law).

Among other posts that José Francisco Ruiz Massieu held were those of Assistant Secretary of Health and General Director of the Institute of the National Fund for Workers' Housing. Starting on May 13, 1994 he served as Secretary General of the PRI and that party's representative to the IFE. He had recently been named coordinator of the PRI and was expected to be made president of the House of Representatives' "Grand Commission."

While he did not always put his modernizing and democratic political thinking into practice, and his term as Guerrero governor had some negative aspects, he was a tireless, well-prepared and creative politician, with progressive ideas and a genuine vocation to serve his country. Thus we consider his death an irreparable loss for Mexico ❧

Marybel Toro Gayol

Managing Editor.

Goodbye, Pepe

Pepe [José Francisco Ruiz Massieu] was one of the most singular characters that you could meet. An impassioned reader, profound analyst, noteworthy writer and vigorous polemicist, he paid tribute to intelligence and knowledge.

His political vocation came at an early age. Thus he studied law, as a way of learning about contemporary reality, as well as history, in order to learn that of the past; for the same reasons, his post-graduate studies focused on political science. To preserve his memory, we are left with his broad-ranging written and material work.

Pepe was one of those men in whose presence one felt obligated to think. Talking with him was a dizzyingly intense experience. Sometimes a conversation would result in new lines being written in his ever-present notebook. But with him nothing was a whim or passing fancy; everything was converted into action.

We lost him at what showed every sign of becoming the best time in his life and at a crucial point in the life of the country. A bullet went through Pepe's neck and lodged in the heart of us all.

Diego Valadés

Excerpted from *La Jornada*, September 29.