CENTRE FOR RESEARCH ON LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

The 1994 Presidential and Congressional Elections in Mexico:

A Cerlac Report

By Official Canadian Observers from York University

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CENTRE FOR RESEARCH ON LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN
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CERLAC REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

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Canada's traditional reputation as an international middle power has continued to grow in recent years. In addition to its commitment to peace missions in many parts of the world, Canada has recently moved to actively participate in election observation and monitoring in Third World countries. Thus, the government, usually in close cooperation with Canadian and local NGOs has played a very important role in elections held in Namibia, South Africa, Angola, El Salvador, Nicaragua. More recently, it has been Mexico that has come to occupy Canadians' attention.

Canadian interest on Mexico is, in turn, a development of our new economic partnership created through NAFTA, the triple economic association between Canada, Mexico, and the United States.

The three governments have also consistently maintained that the economic prosperity expected to result from this agreement will in turn create the conditions for the further democratization of Mexico. Both the United States and Canada have given their utmost unconditional support to the various electoral and democratic reforms introduced in Mexico since 1988.

Constitutional and electoral reforms undertaken during President Carlos Salinas de Gortari administration have, however, been found wanting by both most Mexican citizens and the myriad of grassroots organizations that have sprung in Mexico in the last decade.

The views of the governments of Canada, Mexico and the United States and their allies in the corporate business world have thus contrasted dramatically with those held by the average Mexican person. Following the tainted results of the 1988 presidential election, most Mexicans saw a window of opportunity in the electoral reforms that President Salinas was compelled to introduce since assuming office. Grassroots organizations and political parties began to organise in order to seriously challenge the now sixty-six year old hold on power by the ruling party, PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party). Their efforts were successful, although in a piecemeal form, as victories in local and state elections seemed to demonstrate. However, in national congressional elections held in August 1991, those progressive forces experienced a significant step backward as a result of the massive majority attained by the ruling party-government coalition. Remarkably, one of the first measures adopted by the new PM-dominated legislature in December 1991 was to authorize the incineration of the ballot boxes pertaining to the 1988 presidential elections thus denying the possibility of future research demonstrating the extent of the electoral fraud that permitted Salinas to assume office.

The controversy surrounding the 1991 elections (the ways in which the government handled national census, the voters' registry and the delivery of electoral cards were openly questioned, as it was the impartiality of electoral organisms) forced the Salinas administration to introduce yet more

electoral reforms to prepare the country for the next largest electoral exercise, the August 1994 presidential and congressional elections.

These new reforms to the electoral legislation included, among many others, the permission to foreigners to come and observe, for the first time, the entire electoral processes.

The Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean, at York University, was among some of the various Canadians institutions and organizations that decided to use this opportunity to send a small delegation to Mexico as official foreign observers. With the enthusiastic support of its Director, Professor Meyer Brownstone, and his successor, Professor Ricardo Grinspun, and their funding contributions, I was able to continue a project begun in the Summer of 1991 in collaboration with the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development (Montreal, Quebec). The project aimed at developing a better understanding of human rights and political issues as they unfold in Mexico. As an ad-hoc observer to the 1991 congressional elections, I was able to see firsthand the variety of means used by the government-ruling party coalition to subvert the electorate's will, as well as the incredible degree of human rights violations, committed generally by public officials, and which are traditionally ignored by the mainstream media in Canada and the United States. This earlier impression was confirmed by successive trips to Mexico to follow up the pace of electoral reforms, elections, and human rights developments. In November 1993, Thomas Legler, a doctoral candidate in Political Science, and CERLAC affiliate, travelled and wrote a comprehensive account of the elections held in the State of Yucatan. Tom and I drafted a proposal for funding to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SR-MC), that aimed at expanding the scope of CERLAC's involvement in Mexico.

Although this bid for funding was unsuccessful, CERLAC's Director, Professor Meyer Brownstone's commitment to the project was unwavering. With his encouragement and financial support, the trip to observe the Mexican elections became a reality. Forming part of that team of elections observers were three York University graduate students: Barry Levitt (Political Science); Richard King (Osgoode Hall Law School), and Lucy Lucissano (Sociology), and the former member of parliament, Dan Heap. While in Mexico, this group affiliated with the Civic Alliance, the largest monitoring organization in the country. At the Civic Alliance's request we travelled to the State of Puebla, where we were paired with local observers, and with whom we then visited several polling stations in the highland region of the state during the election day.

What follows is the personal accounts of what the members of the team saw, experienced, learned, and considered to be the most important features of the 1994 elections. In addition to Barry's, Richard's and Lucy's reports, we have also included the report by Teresa Healy (Political Science, Carleton University), who has also spend time doing her doctoral research in Mexico, and who was a member of a Canadian Delegation of NGOs attending the elections as official foreign observers. Their reports coincide in pointing to the significant number of irregularities

that each and everyone witnessed in the various locations they observed before and during the elections. Their views were also coincidental with those of the majority of foreign observers invited by Civic Alliance. They stand in stark constrast with the reports publicized by the local and international media, other official foreign observers, and representatives of business organizations. Although it would be next to impossible to generalize their specific accounts of irregularities in order to question the entire electoral process, it is still important to understand that the irregularities here dennounced suggest characteristics of systemic fraud that have theoretical and political significance and are therefore worth of some more in-depth investigation.

Last but not least, the institution of foreign observer does not actually exist in the Mexican legislation. We were all allowed to attend as "foreign invited guests", and were expected to abide by regulations enacted by electoral legislation and the Federal Electoral Institute. As "foreign invited guests", the Canadian delegation of York University students, academics, and NGOs received the most praise from Mexican organizations and individuals committed to furthering democracy in Mexico.

Finally, we want to acknowledge one more time our appreciation to Professor Meyer Brownstone, Professor Ricardo Grinspun, Liddy Gomes, Sheila, and others at CERLAC for their support through the various phases of the project. Likewise, our thanks to Licenciado Manuel Aguilera, at the Mexican Consulate in Toronto and Mexico's Federal Electorate Institute, for the expeditious ways in which our visas as "foreign invited guests" were handled. Our deepest gratitude goes to the many individuals working at Civic Alliance headquarters, especially Dr. Sergio Aguayo from the Mexican Academy of Human Rights. Dr. Aguayo and the Mexican Academy of Human Rights are the pioneers in developing a political culture programme conducive to fair and honest elections in Mexico. Ricardo Hernandez, from Equipo Pueblo, took charge of the logistics for our trip and made every effort to assist us in our mission. Licenciado Raul Flores and Dr. Julian Castro Rea also helped us in extending the original invitation to come as foreign observers. Our hosts in Puebla and Ajalpan treated us like friends: our recognition is inmense given the fear that many of them had about their personal security; that fear however did not prevent them from actively participating in the promotion of democracy in Mexico. To all of them, *muchas gracias*.

PRE- AND POST-ELECTION ACTIVITIES: INSTITUTIONAL LEARNING AND ORGANIZATIONAL LINKAGES

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Introduction

Although the official discourse in Mexico has portrayed the country in a 'democratic' light for much of this century, the 1994 elections were nonetheless highly significant. After liberalization and NAFTA, after the controversial elections of 1988, after the start of the Zapatista uprising, the 1994 elections were perceived by many Mexicans (and non-Mexicans) as a crucial historical moment. For the PRI and others in favour of the current transformation of Mexican society, the election was an opportunity to verify the support of the people for these projects. For those opposed on various grounds, it was an opportunity to loudly voice dissent, and, for some, perhaps to vindicate the 'true' victor of the controversial 1988 Presidential elections.

The PRI government went to great lengths to showcase the 'new Mexico' to the world. The technological infrastructure of the election was highly sophisticated, as was the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE), the supposedly 'independent' para-governmental body charged with planning and executing the election process. The general sentiment that we perceived in Mexico was of attaching great importance to these elections, even a degree of optimism, yet simultaneously retaining an extremely high degree of scepticism regarding the whole process. Our perceptions, we discovered, were supported by survey data of Mexican voters in the weeks leading up to August 21st.

As important as how people *felt* about the elections was what they *did* about them. Many Mexicans were organizing fervently, participating in the political process not only as partisan supporters but as observers, and in other capacities which could potentially bolster the legitimacy of the electoral process, and of 'democratization' in general.

In particular, Mexicans concerned about democracy, human rights, etc organized themselves to a level of visibility and breadth that was unprecedented in recent times. What social scientists refer to as 'civil society' was everywhere visible; the constituency, and social space, for increasingly independent and oppositional political action was being forged. Significantly, these constituencies had created new linkages that transcended not only state boundaries within Mexico, but national boundaries as well. It is through these linkages that we found ourselves involved with the 1994 elections, and with various organizations, both governmental and non-governmental.

The purpose of this report, then, is to summarize the week of organizing, learning, and networking in which our delegation participated, prior to the election day itself. I will examine not only our extensive contact with the Alianza Cívica, our host organization, but also our interactions with the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE), the Canadian Embassy, and the other Canadian organizations that were represented by observers.

1. The Federal Electoral Institute

Prior to leaving Toronto, we had met with the staff of the Mexican Embassy, arranged for our accreditation from the IFE, and also received a special visa. This meeting was brief yet congenial, and our main contact at the Embassy repeatedly emphasized his respect and support for our presence in Mexico during the elections.

Several days after our arrival in Mexico, we visited the branch of the IFE that dealt with 'foreign visitors'. Their facility, set up in the luxurious Hotel Nikko, was where we registered with the WE and picked up the photo identification cards that identified us as observers. As well, we also received an extensive kit of government publications, most of which were available in both Spanish and English. These included copies of relevant electoral legislation, and examples of voter education materials produced by the IFE. Furthermore, official materials from four or five of the nine officially registered political parties were available upon request.

The IFE also provided an impressive array of amenities for foreign 'visitors' and media. The centrepiece of these facilities was on the mezzanine level of the Hotel Nikko, where two long rows of powerful computers with high resolution screens were available. These were equipped with CD-ROM hardware, which could be used to access a laser disk containing statistical information based on the padrón (electoral list). The data regarding the voters' list could be processed using variables such as voting district, gender, state of origin, age, etc., and the program was capable of producing graphs and charts of various kinds. A team of IFE staff was available to familiarize visitors with the software, and to answer questions about the *padrón.*

In this same room were a dozen (or so) telephones and FAX machines (available, with permission, for relevant long distance use). As well, there was one unit of the machines used for producing the voter ID cards that all Mexicans required in order to cast their ballots. The card, complete with tamper-proof photo and black computer data 'stripe,' was one of the technological innovations that the government held up as a 'guarantee' of free elections. For any visitor who so desired, a mock voter ID was produced (complete with his/her picture and fingerprint!) in order to demonstrate the efficiency and effectiveness of the procedure. It should be noted that, at several points during our visit to these facilities, we were filmed by a camera crew and/or photographed (e.g. using the computer systems, proudly displaying our mock ID cards, etc.). I can only assume that these will be used for the purpose of documenting the IFE's role and, since it was an 'in house production,' portraying it in a positive light. At no time were we asked to consent to being filmed, and in my opinion, our group experienced profound discomfort with the situation.

2. The Alianza Cívica

The Alianza Cívica, a coalition of over 400 Mexican non-governmental organizations, provided one-day intentive courses for all 'foreign visitors' under their sponsorship (over 600 in total). Observers were trained in groups of thirty to fifty people, and training sessions took place virtually every day in the week leading up to elections.

Sessions were conducted with simultaneous English-Spanish translation (which satisfied the needs of the majority of foreign observers). The content of the training consisted of the following:

a) a brief lecture on the historical context of the Mexican political system;
b) a video presentation on the successes and failures of recent democratization efforts by the state and civil society;
c) a discussion which included Marie Claire Acosta (President of the Mexican Commission for the Defence and Promotion of Human Rights), on the human-rights implications of the elections and the various possible outcomes for Mexican society;
d) a debate held among three candidates for the House of Deputies, one from each of the largest parties (PRI, PAN, PRD), with a question period following;
e) several extremely detailed presentations on the Mexican electoral process in general, and the rules governing the ballot-casting procedures in particular.
f) presentations by Dr. Sergio Aguayo, head of the Mexican Academy for Human Rights, regarding:

i) the ongoing research of the Alianza Civica on the biases of mass communications media towards the ruling party;
ii) elucidation of the more than 300 cases of coercion and repression brought to the attention of the Alianza Civica, the vast majority of which involve complaints against the PRI and its advocates;
iii) a brief summary of the various voter education campaigns that were conducted, both by the IFE and by other organizations.

After completing the training process, our next organizational contact with the Alianza was at the state level. When we arrived in the city of Puebla, we consulted with our two contacts there, Alejandra Mesa and Lisa Fuentes (the latter is a Professor at American University in Washington D.C.). They informed us that a briefing on the local political situation would take place, followed by a press conference with local and regional media. For these events, all foreign observers assigned by the Alianza to the state of Puebla (about a dozen in total) were present. We were told which areas of the state were thought to represent the greatest potential for conflict on election day; individuals in specific polling districts in these areas had requested additional observers from the Alianza or its affiliates. Those of us from the CERLAC delegation who had come to Puebla divided up several destinations among ourselves, in consultation with the local Alianza representatives. These were, indeed, thought of as possible sites of conflict. For example, in the area to which two of us (Lucy and Barry) were assigned, a local PRI politician had allegedly shot several dissenters during a politically motivated skirmish a few years earlier.
Our experiences of the election day itself are detailed by Lucy Luccisano elsewhere in this collection. However, I would like to emphasize one significant point: the risks incurred by many of the people upon whom we depended in our roles as observers. One individual had been particularly targeted for repression by the government. In the days leading up to the election, his telephone line was mysteriously disconnected, thus making it more difficult for him to coordinate observation efforts for

election day, including our own placements. Because of this very real potential for harassment, firing from one's job, even physical violence, our delegation feels that we must be extremely careful in compiling these reports. We feel sufficiently concerned about the safety of some of those who were involved in the planning of the observation efforts that we do not even feel free to disclose their names. This in itself speaks volumes about the nature of Mexican democracy.

3. Other Canadian Organizations

Our activities in Mexico City afforded us the opportunity to interact with most of the other Canadians who were accredited 'visitors' during the election. These were representatives of organizations such as OXFAM-Canada, the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC), Common Frontiers, the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW), Development and Peace, the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development (including Ed Broadbent himself), and a number of other church, development, solidarity, and human rights organizations. They originated from several different provinces, with the majority representing organizations that were either national in scope or were based in Ontario or Quebec.

Our first organized contact with other Canadian observers was on the Wednesday evening prior to elections. The main focus of the evening was a presentation by Teresa Healy, a Carleton University Doctoral Candidate affiliated with several NGOs, who had attended the Democratic Convention in Chiapas earlier that month.

The following morning we met again, this time at the invitation of the Canadian Embassy. Canada's embassy in Mexico City is an impressive edifice in an upscale area, very near the hotel in which the IFE based its foreign visitor services. The gathering of Canadian observers included most of those who had attended the previous evening, plus two Members of Parliament (one Liberal, one Bloc Quebecois), and several representatives of the Business Council of the Americas. The purpose of the meeting was to introduce the observers to the Ambassador (David Winfield) and the embassy staff. As well, we were briefed on the emergency procedures (rather limited) available to aid observers in distress. Furthermore, the ambassador was questioned by NGO representatives regarding the almost total lack of material and institutional support by the Canadian government for the election monitoring process; neither Canadian nor Mexican NGO efforts were supported, with the exception of French translation services for the Alianza Cívica. This stands in sharp contrast to the Canadian governmental response to elections in South Africa and, more recently, Mozambique.

Many of the Canadian observers met yet again that afternoon. In this gathering, various Canadian NGO representatives engaged in dialogue with three Mexican activists, one of whom was with Mujer a Mujer, another of whom was editor of Excelsior, Professor of Economics at the UNAM, and a member of the Grupo de San Angel. This last organization was well known in Mexico for having drafted a document entitled "Twenty Points for Democracy," which was endorsed by all nine Presidential candidates (including, after much deliberation, Ernesto

Zedillo). Discussion centred on the Chiapas uprising, and the potential spread of violence after the election.

Our extensive contacts with other Canadian observers were significant on a number of different levels. First, it represented an opportunity for networking and knowledge-sharing among organizations with similar interests. Second, as individuals, it was beneficial to us to feel that we had a support group' with whom to discuss some of the logistical issues of the observation process. Third, and perhaps more importantly, this contact laid the groundwork for the post-election debriefing that would take place in order to create a composite portrayal of our respective observations .

4. Epilogue: Synthesizing Our Experiences

On the Tuesday after election day, all 'foreign visitors' affiliated with the Alianza Cívica gathered in the Poliforo Siqueiros, an enormous auditorium in Mexico City. Most were physically and mentally exhausted by the rigours of their duties, and the hectic pace at which they had travelled long distances to remote areas. Nonetheless, the turnout was impressive. The purpose of this assembly was to synthesize the experiences of a large number of observers, such that the visitors (and the Alianza) could quickly gain a sense of how the elections had transpired. Knowing that the tabulation and analysis of the thousands of reports filed by observers would likely take weeks or months, the Alianza strove to elicit at least a general representation of people's observations.

This was done in two phases. First, observers met in subgroups, roughly organized by geographic origin, to compare and contrast experiences. Second, the entire assembly reconvened, and one representative from each geographic subgroup presented a summary of its cumulative experiences.

The Canadian contingent, approximately fifty-five strong, was large enough to warrant its own subgroup. As people shared their depictions of August 21st, it became apparent that a wide range of experiences had occurred. These ranged from observing fairly minor infractions of electoral procedure, to more major violations, to at least one case of a Canadian observer being severely harassed and intimidated. It also became apparent that members of observer teams who had witnessed the same events, in the same place, held drastically different opinions as to the gravity of certain violations. This was particularly divisive among Canadians who had spent election day in the State of Chiapas.

When we reconvened with the other groups and were able to compare anecdotal evidence on a national scale, the lists of infractions began to sound strikingly similar. Different observers in vastly disparate regions of Mexico tended to depict electoral violations that were substantively comparable, if not identical. To us, and to our fellow observers, this was highly suggestive of system-wide problems in the democratic process. One US delegate went so far as to call for a petition, signed by the entire assembly, denouncing the election as fraudulent. While reservations about such a brazen statement hindered it from coming to fruition, a sense of collective dismay permeated the crowd.

Conclusion

The Alianza Civica would go on to produce an overall analysis of the electoral process, based largely on the reports of observers, both foreign and Mexican. To a certain extent, the relative level of fairness and democracy was in this way quantified, insofar as values as contentious as these can be *quantitatively* expressed. However, in that meeting at the Poliforo, less than forty-eight hours after the polls had closed, a *qualitative* analysis began to emerge.

We felt, as did most of our fellow observers, that there was ample grounds for questioning at least the legitimacy of the electoral *process,* if not the final results themselves.

MEXICAN ELECTION OF AUGUST 21, 1994

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The journey to the destination where I observed the elections began on the morning of Saturday, August 20, 1994 with a two hour bus ride from Mexico City to Puebla. In Puebla, the CERLAC delegation met with the regional contact person from, and various other members of, the Civic Alliance. Following a press conference held in Puebla, four members of the CERLAC delegation (Professor Nibaldo Galleguillos, Barry Levitt, Lucy Luccisano and myself) left by bus for Tehuacan, arriving there at approximately 8:00 p.m. on Saturday night. In Tehuacan, we were met by one of the national electoral observers who drove us to the home of another national observer in Ajalpan. The CERLAC delegation were split into two groups in Ajalpan. Professor Galleguillos and I remained in Ajalpan until approximately 3:00 a.m. on Sunday, August 21, 1994, when we left with national observers for Cuautotolapa, the village where we were stationed to observe the elections. Professor Galleguillos, three national election observers and myself arrived by truck at the polling station (Polling Station 94, Casilla Basica, Casa del Senor Esteban Cuello Mendoza) at approximated 6:30 a.m. and remained there the entire day, until the vote count was complete (approximately 10:30 p.m.).

I observed a number of irregularities on election day, some more serious than others. Set out below are my observations relating to these irregularities, followed by some general comments and conclusions as to the validity of the results from the polling station.

Site of the Polling Station

Upon arrival at the polling station, there was no sign indicating that the site was in fact the polling station, although Nibaldo and I were told there was a sign up early in the week identifying the site as the polling station. During the assembly of the polling station, the appropriate sign was put in place.

The polling station was a covered verandah of a private residence. While it was convenient because it was centrally located within the village and in previous elections had (according to the national observers) been the site of the polling station, there was a public school located approximately 40 metres from the polling station.

Opening of the Polling Station

By 7:00 a.m., the electoral officers, the PAN and PRD representatives and all of the necessary electoral paraphernalia were at the site of the polling station. None of the electoral officers took any steps to assemble or organize the station so that it could open on time. The electoral officials were apparently waiting for the PRI representative to arrive before setting up the polling station, which is unnecessary, since the electoral officers were present. At 8:15 a.m. the local *cacique* arrived by truck, dropping off his daughter (who happened to be the PRI representative) and his son. Upon the PRI representative's arrival, assembly of the polling station began with the PRI representative directing the entire

process (see observations below). The polling station finally opened at 9:15 a.m.

Conduct by Party Representatives within the Polling Station and During the Counting of the Votes

All of the representatives (PRI, PAN and PRD) played a more active role in the voting process than did the four electoral officers. This was in part due to the fact that they were all more familiar with what had to be done on election day than were the electoral officers. However, the PRI representative was clearly in charge of the conduct of the polling station throughout the day, including the count of the vote afterwards. She determined how the station was set up, which of the electoral officers and party representatives would do which task within the polling station, and how the count was conducted. Her presence at the polling station, along with the presence of her brother and a number of men who later demonstrated themselves to be the "village allies" of the local boss, was clearly intimidatory.

Message from the Church Loud-Speaker

Shortly before 11:00 a.m. a message came over the loud-speaker located in the steeple of the church, which was located about 25 metres directly in front of the polling station. The message from the church was clearly audible to persons standing in line to vote at the polling station. The message stated: *"Once you have voted for our candidate, please come to the church to pray."* This message was repeated once more a little later on in the day.

At approximately 1:00 p.m., Professor Galleguillos and I wanted to take a closer look at the church, which was by far the largest and most spectacular building in the village. We walked to the church doors and upon hearing singing from the church, decided not to enter but rather to sit on the bench in front of the church. Approximately two to three minutes after we sat down, the church emptied. At the time, both Professor Galleguillos and I believed that the church service was over. We remained seated on the church bench for about 20 more minutes before walking back to the polling station.

On arriving at the polling station, one of the national observers told us that our trip to the church had caused a large commotion at the polling station. The PRI representative became very nervous when we left for the church, immediately shut down the polling station, and told her brother to telephone the church. While neither Professor Galleguillos nor I entered the church and therefore are unable to say what exactly was taking place inside the church, the reaction of the PRI representative, when viewed in light of the loud-speaker message and the historical PRI domination of the area, have to be viewed with a great deal of suspicion.

Minor Showing up to Vote

At 1:15 p.m. a minor showed up to vote with a voting card clearly stating his age to be 17 years old. The specifics of the card are as follows: Gonzalez Mendoza Valentin, Age 17, Cuautotolapa S/N, Cuautotolapa 0, Ajalpan Pue, Folio 86449509, Year of Registration 1993 0, GNMNVL 76121521H300, estado 21, municipo 010, localidad 0012, section 0094. He was not permitted to vote.

Number of Persons in Polling Booth

All day there were a number of men standing or sitting near the polling station. As the day progressed, more and more men were "hanging around" and were actually inside the polling station, directing people to the booths and the ballot boxes (i.e. becoming involved in the election process). Having verified who the party representatives and four appointed electoral officers were earlier in the day, it was clear that these men had no formal role to play in the voting process, and ought not have been in the polling station. We were told by the national observers that these men were the "village allies" of the local *cacique,* and indeed, when the local *cacique* returned to the polling station later in the day, it was these same men who went away to another building in the village with the local *cacique.*

Communication Among Voters During the Voting

There were numerous incidents of voters whispering or attempting to talk to each other. A number of voters tried to ask the party representatives how to vote. A great deal of this seemed to be due to the fact that a great many voters could not read, and were uncertain about how to vote. Whenever these situations occurred, the party representatives did their best to stop the whispering.

Conclusion

The presence of Professor Galleguillos and I at the polling station did have an influence on the outcome of the vote. The PM representative was clearly concerned about how Professor Galleguillos and I were viewing the election. Typically, this manifested itself whenever a small incident (for example, whispering among voters) took place. Following such an incident, the PM representative would immediately look at Professor Galleguillos and I to see whether either of us were taking notes or looking particularly concerned. In addition to taking pictures, Professor Galleguillos also recorded some of the conversations going on at the polling station as well as the messages coming out through the church's loudspeakers.

Our influence also demonstrated itself in the final vote count. Historically, this polling station had shown PRI victories by 100% or greater. Yet of the ballots cast on August 21, 1994, approximately one-third were spoiled (people either did not mark an 'X' or marked an 'X' over the entire sheet or in a tiny corner of the ballot). What the large number of spoiled ballots indicates is clear: if the results of previous elections are to be believed, those persons who were illiterate and were whispering or asking for help during the voting must have been given "help" in marking their ballots in previous elections. Clearly, for many people, this was the first time they had actually voted on their own. However, given the other problems identified above, particularly the intimidation by the PRI representative, I believe that while the voting at this station was likely more *procedurally* democratic than it had been in past elections, there is still little evidence of substantive democracy.

Based on my observations of what occurred at the polling station, I believe that the number and severity of the electoral irregularities were sufficient to declare the results from this particular polling station null and void.

REFLECTIONS ON MY EXPERIENCE AS A FOREIGN 'OBSERVER' DURING THE 1994 MEXICAN ELECTIONS

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The experience of participating as a foreign 'observer' during the Mexican elections was an opportunity to witness both the complexities between a civil society demanding its democratic rights and a government committed to maintaining its institutionalized governance. As part of the CERLAC Delegation to Mexico, I held the privileged position of being an invited guest of both the Civic Alliance and an accredited foreign 'observer' by the Federal Electoral Institute, (IFE). This afforded me with the opportunity to visit the activities of both the Civic Alliance - many of which took place at its central office in Mexico City - and those of the IFE - held at the Nikko Hotel.

With respect to monitoring the elections, many of the members of the CERLAC delegation, including Professor Nibaldo Galleguillos, Daniel Heap, Richard King, Barry Levitt and myself were assigned to monitor the elections in predominantly indigenous communities in la Sierra Negra, in the state of Puebla. The presence of foreign and national visitors was particularly important in Puebla, as these areas are heavily dominated by PRI local bosses. In previous elections, such areas had witnessed conflict between the PRI local bosses and the local people. Our contact suggested that because the situation within these communities continues to be intense our presence in these areas was crucial. As such, the CERLAC Delegation to Puebla was divided into three groups: Daniel Heap went to monitor the elections in Northern Puebla; Nibaldo Galleguillos and Richard King went to Ajalpan; Barry Levitt and myself went to Coxcatlan. Barry and I were accompanied by a Canadian reporter, Sylvie Dugas, who writes for both Le Devoir and the CBC. While the journey from Mexico City to the home of our national contact in Coxcatlan took approximately 8 hours, the time we spent travelling was extended over a fourteen hour period, as we had to visit various regional contacts of the Civic Alliance and participate in a press conference. As such, Barry, Sylvie and I met our national contact, Belisario, very late Saturday evening.

In the following few pages, I will convey some of the events that occurred in the district of Coxcatlan, Puebla both preceding and during the 21st of August. These experiences will be accompanied with an account of the electoral irregularities that both Barry Levitt, Sylvie Dugas and I witnessed at three different polling stations - Ocotlamanic, Tepeyotoc and Coxcatlan. As opposed to presenting a detailed account of the activities that occurred at each of the election stations, many of the infractions witnessed will be classified under the headings serious and minor irregularities. In this article, serious infraction will be defined as having an impact on the outcome of the vote and minor infraction will refer to as electoral irregularities that could have an impact on the outcome of the vote. There will also be a brief discussion of Mexico's political culture and its impact on people's ability to make choices.

Events Prior to the Elections

We had spoken to some of the local people about their concerns with this election. I will present some of their comments and insights, particularly those of a woman, who will be called 'Flora'. Flora works as the assistant to a local leader in the community. She highlighted some of the events and activities preceding the election. Flora informed us that the phone line of the community's progressive church leader became mysteriously disconnected on the days preceding the election and began operating again the day of the election. Given that this is one of the few telephones in the area and given this priest's public commitment to fighting social injustice, Flora suggests that the phone lines were purposely disconnected. Because the phone is also used by many progressive members of the community, this makes communication between the local people and other Mexicans difficult, if not impossible.

Flora told us that government subsidized food-aid was delivered and distributed a few days before the election in Coxcatlan. Food-aid is part of the governments welfare program started in 1988 which is called *Programa Nacional de Solidaridad,* PRONASOL (National Solidarity Program). Food-aid is delivered in packages with large inscribed PRI logos. It is not an electoral infraction to deliver government endorsed food-aid to communities, nor does the imprinted PRI logos on the packages in any way suggest a breach of electoral laws. However, it has been documented that PRONASOL welfare packages have been deployed by the PRI in the strongholds of the opposition party, the Revolutionary Democratic Party (PRD).[1] Another related problem of the PRONASOL welfare-aid is the PRI logo on its packaging. As pointed out by Flora, these forms of assistance which are marked with the PRI and not the national logo is problematic as it serves to obfuscate the distinctions between the party and the government. It should also be mentioned that the colours of the PRI logo are the same as those of the national flag and appear in the same sequence: green, white and red. The PRI has been 'granted' the rights to deploy these colours. This serves to conflate the PRI's governance with the state. Flora stated that people in rural areas continue to be confused about the distinction between the government and the party of the PRI. It can be argued that the PRI's strategies such as delivering food-aid clearly marked with their logo is not limited to an election tactic, but represents a PRI governing strategy in the creation of a particular political culture which operates to their advantage. Interestingly enough, the PRI-marked parcel in which the food-aid is packaged becomes transformed by many poor women into a shopping bag. Many women can be seen at the market with their PM shopping bags. Because PM symbols are incorporated into peoples daily lives, poor rural people will more than likely recognize this logo on

[1] Such examples are found in the State of Mexico - particularly in the municipalities that form the periphery of the Metropolitan Area of Mexico City; and more recently in the *gubernatorial* elections of Michoacan where it is estimated that each vote for the PRI cost US $70, compared with just over two dollars per vote for the PRD" (E. Chavez, 'Michoacan: Cada Voto del PRI Costo 239, 188 Pesos; Cada Uno del PRD Costo 6,916 pesos', *Proceso*, No. 821 (27 July 1992), pp.22-7). "It is estimated that 12% of PRONASOL's entire 1992 budget went to the relatively small state of Michoacan" (Fox and Moguel, 'Pluralism and Anti-Poverty Policy').

a voters ballot than any other political parties' logo. The proliferation of the PRI's logo is only one example of its attempts to propagate its name. Another example of the PRI's election campaign technique, is its continued monopoly of political advertisements in the media. Even though the IFE set financial regulations on the amount of money and air time allotted to each party, the amount fixed was quite high and the PRI was the only party financially capable of spending the limit.

Flora's comments about the PRI cultivated political culture serves to illuminate an exchange that we had with some local men. Finding it strange to see foreigners in la Sierra Negra, some local men asked us to explain our presence. After explaining what we were doing, we asked them who they voted for and why. One of the men explained that he and his friends voted for the PRI because "at least we are guaranteed the delivery of food." He continued to state that "the government gives us food to eat and guarantees us a place to live, they treat us like donkeys and, in fact, we really are no more than that." They also expressed fears that if the PRI was not voted into government, "the PRI would leave the country taking all the money with them and leaving Mexicans penniless." Although these are the testimonies of a few, it can be argued, that in impoverished rural communities that are depended on state welfare programs, the governance of the PRI's uninterrupted 65 year tenure has cultivated a particular political culture which operates to obfuscate the distinctions between the state and PRI. This confusion becomes advantageous to the PRI. It is for such reasons that the delivery of food-aid, marked with the PRI logo is suspect and angers those such as Flora who understand the subtleties and the implications of such logos and how they cultivate a particular political culture.

In order for the Mexicans to participate in the elections as national observers, they had to attend workshops sponsored by the IFE to be accredited as official observers. Flora explained the difficulties people had in finding the IFE workshops, as these workshops were situated in obscure places. Not only was it difficult for the Mexicans in the community we visited to find the IFE workshops, but once they had found the specified location, they were greeted by a note on the door indicating that the workshop had been relocated. This change of address was particularly inconvenient for Mexicans, as this meant another day of travelling, of spending money for transportation and of losing paid or unpaid labour to locate the IFE workshops. Despite these difficulties, many Mexicans went to the trouble of locating the IFE workshops. The official IFE accreditation to national observers was to be sent to Mexicans in the mail/or distributed by a local contact. Five days previous to the Sunday election, it was reported that 10,000 domestic accreditation cards had not been delivered to Mexicans. In fact, according to our contacts in Coxcatlan, many qualified Mexicans could not monitor the elections because they had not received their official accreditation. In other cases in Coxcatlan, the regional contact received the accreditation Saturday afternoon and was distributing them to Mexicans late Saturday evening. These accreditations were delivered by our contact to Mexicans as he was driving us to meet our national contact which was between the hours of 11-12pm Saturday evening. The failure of the IFE to live up to its commitment of providing accessible training workshops

and delivering the official accreditation cards in a reasonable amount of time previous to the election day, or in some cases not at all, demonstrates a failure to maintain its articulated commitment to allow for inclusive democratic processes.

Serious infractions

At one of the polling stations we visited, we witnessed three truck loads of people being brought to the polling station. Our contact informed us that this effort was sponsored by the local PRI municipal government. As pointed out by our contact, this type of PRI accompaniment to the election polls constitutes an electoral infraction. In previous elections, truck loads of people were not only brought to vote in one polling site, but were driven to various polling stations to cast their ballots. It has also been suggested that en route to the polling station, the PRI representatives continue to campaign on behalf of their candidates. Although we can only speculate on what could have transpired within those trucks present at the polling station in Coxcatlan, our contacts informed us that the government disproved of any form of political accompaniment to the polling stations. As such, it can be argued that the local PRI sponsored activity of transporting people to the polling station is an electoral infraction.

Officially, it was possible to have two party representatives as scrutineers at the election table. However, at the polling stations that we visited, there was an overwhelming number of PRI members hanging around the election table. At one polling station, two men situated themselves 'strategically' behind the ballot boxes. I suggest that this was strategic because from their vantage point they could observe a number of things simultaneously and the Mexicans knew that they were being observed. As such, these men could observe the Mexicans receive their ballots, walk into the secret ballot box and leave the ballot box to deposit their vote. Interestingly enough, many Mexicans did not fold their ballots while in the secret voting booth, but folded it in front of the ballot boxes - the boxes behind which the PRI party members stood for the duration of the election. It can be argued that Mexicans "felt" the need to show these observers their ballot sheet. This suggests that some Mexicans could have felt uncomfortable about being watched and, consequently made their choices visible. It can be argued that this type of observing is problematic, as it constitutes a form of intimidation.

At another polling station, a group of eight to ten men were quietly sitting in front of the election table. Sylvie and I approached this group of men and asked if they had voted and why they were hanging around the election table. They told us that "yes" they had cast their ballots and were "hanging around the election table to supervise the electoral process for the PRI". About 5 minutes after they had made that statement, they had all quietly left the election station. The overall impact of being observed by PRI local officials - party bosses - and supporters is unclear. It is unclear because it demands a qualitative analysis. However, the experience of being watched should not be underestimated as it means something different in a different context and in a different culture. The presence of so many PRI known members and supporters, serves to remind Mexicans, as they cast their ballots, of their PRI neighbours. Given what I have seen, I would strongly suggest that "observing" can be interpreted as an intimidation tactic deployed by the PRI.

According to Mexican electoral laws, the president of the polling station is supposed to deliver the ballots to a designated drop-off point in the area. At the polling station in Coxcatlan, the president of the polling station, after counting the ballots and making the election results public, left to deposit the ballots. Minutes after he had left, four police vehicles had arrived at the polling station - a police marked car and a van were occupied with uniformed police officers, the other two were white unmarked cars which were occupied with men wearing black shirts. They parked in front of the polling station, and a few of the police entered the polling station, in search of the ballots. In fact, the police had indicated that they came to pick up the ballots. When they were informed that the president had left to deposit the ballots, they immediately left. This event is problematic on two counts. First, the police are not supposed to 'pick-up' the ballots. This is the responsibility of the president. It was also bizarre to see four police vehicles in search of electoral ballots. Second, it remains unknown to us if indeed they were able to meet with the president and if so, what was done with the ballots.

Minor infractions

According to Mexican electoral laws the polling booths must be open and in full functioning capacity by 8am. One of the polling booths we visited did not open until 10am. The secret voting booth was to be situated in a place that ensured privacy. The structure of the booth consisted of three cardboard panels and a plastic sheet which functioned as an opening, but it had no ceiling. The lack of a ceiling became a concern in one of our polling stations. A man who was sitting on the roof of an adjacent building could look down into the secret polling booth and observe people as they mark their ballots. While his ability to actually see what the voter marked on his ballot was slim, his presence on top of the adjacent roof and his ability to look into the booth was quite obvious. The man's presence on the roof could have had an impact on Mexicans casting their vote.

As a means of ensuring that Mexicans could only cast one ballot, indelible ink was to be imprinted on the voter's right hand thumb after he/she cast their ballot. However, many times the indelible ink was imprinted on the wrong thumb. It is possible that the person responsible for placing the ink on the voter's thumb became confused and mistakenly imprinted the wrong thumb. This confusion also resulted when the voters themselves held up the wrong thumb to be marked with ink. Sometimes the person administering the ink was cognizant of this mistake and asked for the thumb on the right hand. Many times however, administering the ink on the wrong thumb went uncontested. It is possible that those having offered the wrong thumb to be marked with ink had intentions of casting another ballot at another polling station. Another related incident is that a few men had attempted to leave the polling station without having their thumbs marked with ink. The men at the election booth did not allow this to occur, - they caught the voters as they were attempting to leave and demanded that their thumb be imprinted with the indelible ink. This raises the question, why did these men wish to avoid getting their thumbs marked with ink? There are at least two possible answers; one, the men did not want to have black ink on their thumbs; or two, perhaps they had intentions of casting another ballot.

At one of our polling stations, the regional PRI party member visited the polling station. After reviewing the voters' list and ensuring that all was well, he left the polling station. Because the completion of his duties coincided with our departure, we decided to talk to him and followed him to where we believed to be the PRI offices in this community. What we thought was his office, turned out to be the local pub (cantina). Given that Mexico legislates a Dry Law for the day preceding, during, and succeeding the election, the presence of an individual - particularly a party representative - in a local cantina is suspect. We did not see the regional PRI representative having a drink. However, after briefly greeting us, he and his friends immediately left the pub. While it remains unclear, what went on before we arrived at the pub, or why the PRI member was at the pub, his presence at the pub remains dubious.

Concluding thoughts

While it is easier to make the argument that electoral procedural irregularities constitute fraud, it is much more difficult to explain how the political culture in Mexico, that is the daily governing strategies of the PRI contribute to, what can be described as, a form of cultural politics and its impact on the election. For example, unlike any other party, the PRI was financially able to spend millions on its public relations and media advertisements. The effects of their ability to dominate the media has served, among other things, to obfuscate the distinctions between the government and the PRI party. These media campaigns in and of themselves cannot be situated within the category of fraud, but they have an impact on how people conceive of their choices.

Mexicans who participated in ensuring clean and fair elections were angry with both the procedural processes of the elections and the political culture fostered by the PRI. While many popular sectors Mexicans were saddened at the low returns for PRD, they were exasperated that this election was fraught with electoral irregularities, particularly when the PRI promised a clean and transparent electoral campaign. The failure of the PRI to maintain its commitment was seen as another lie which was camouflaged with modern computerized devices and with discourses of electoral democracy. The Mexicans I spoke with hours after the election were enraged with the lack of integrity of the PRI. One Mexican man said, "we have been lied to and tricked yet once again." One Mexican woman, said, "we are tired of these empty promises of justice and fairness, enough is enough, the Mexican people will respond to these systemic lies" After saying these comments she looked at me, and said "don't think we're not scared of dying, but we can't continue living like this." It is difficult to explain the disappointment and the feelings of betrayal experienced by many Mexicans the days following the election. The atmosphere at the Civic Alliance was transformed from that of excitement and hope to one of a bizarre and quiet melancholy. It can be argued that what was different in this Mexican election was the incorporation of a modernized version of electoral mechanisms which co-exist with the continuance of old style intimidation and ideological tactics.

Nevertheless, the efforts of the Civic Alliance represent an important political exercise in creating and demanding new political spaces for participatory democracy. In their struggles for

democratic rights, the Civic Alliance invited progressive NGOs, academics and activists to accompany them. These international linkages of solidarity are important as they link the Civic Alliance to an international community which is interested in democratic and human rights. Such alignments, it is hoped, will facilitate the transition to democratic forms of governance in Mexico that are inclusive and participatory.

DEMOCRATIC ARCHITECTURE ON THE EDGE OF THE ABYSS: REGIONAL POLITICS AND FEDERAL ELECTIONS 1994, OAXACA, MEXICO

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> The political rights of Mexican citizens are not yet guaranteed, and unfortunately, in Mexico a culture of respect for the personal, free and secret vote does not yet exist. Those who today try, ingenuously or in self-interest. to celebrate the quality of this election, contribute to widening the abyss that separates us from effective suffrage and credible and transparent electoral processes. That is not how democracy is constructed.

Introduction

What sorts of abysses are formed in the process of democratisation? Are they not the kinds that separate parties from the state and ballots from sticky fingers? Mightn't they separate dinosaurs from their lairs or billionaires from their billions? On the other hand, what kinds of democratic processes compel the largest national electoral coalition of a country to proclaim a widening abyss between the citizenship and effective sufferage? Since August 21st 1994, I have had reason to consider such questions. As an international visitor to a small town in Oaxaca, I learnt an enormous amount about the formal "democratic architecture" 3 as well as the more substantive expressions of politics during the Mexican Federal Election. My observations lead me to the conclusion that there was a conspicuous disjuncture between form and content expressed on this occasion.'

I was accredited by the Mexican government, as one of 775 "international visitors who (came) to learn about the development of the electoral process" surrounding the elections of August 21, 1994.5 In this capacity, we were offered orientation sessions by the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) and permitted to remain inside polling stations during election day. We were allowed to ask questions and hold meetings with political parties, but were warned not to interfere in any way with the process, involve ourselves in Mexican politics, nor declare any candidate or party victorious. We were advised to remain completely impartial, thereby respecting Constitutional guarantees of national sovereignty.

We were officially invited guests of the Civic Alliance, a plural and diverse coalition of more than 400 non-governmental and civic organisations from all 31 states and the Federal District of Mexico. Our role was to accompany national observers in their tasks on election day. The Civic Alliance provided each of its 488 international visitors with a questionnaire to record observations from August 21st. These were returned to the Civic Alliance for analysis along with the documentation gathered from the 12,000 national observers. The 30 questions covered five areas:

* Setting up of the Polling Station
*Voting
*Scrutinising and Vote Counting
*National Civic Alliance Observers
*Final Comments

Our delegation was keenly interested in incorporating an understanding of pre-electoral or campaign issues in its analysis and we were briefed on the central national issues by the Civic Alliance over the course of our full-day training session. Apart from having read the documentation sent out by the Alliance before arriving and conducting our own research, many international visitors arrived in the region where we would be present during the elections at least two days beforehand. In some areas formal programs had been set up and in others we relied upon our Civic Alliance liaison to introduce us to our counterparts, national observers, election officials and other political actors in the region.

In my role as translator, staff to the delegation and international visitor, I travelled to the state of Oaxaca with two representatives of InterPares and one representative from the Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America. Others in our delegation went to the regions surrounding Tepic, Nayarit and Cuernavaca, Morelos. The experience of this delegation is documented at length elsewhere but for our purposes here I would like to draw upon some of my own observations from August 21, 1995.6 These remarks are only meant to describe some of what was observed at the regional level and point towards issues needing further elaboration.

Pinotepa Nacional, Electoral District VIII, State of Oaxaca

Oaxaca is one of the largest and poorest states in the country and stretches across both mountain and coastal regions. It has only 2.72 percent of all voters in the country, but fully 25 percent (580) of all municipalities, many of them very remote. WE materials indicate that District VIII of Oaxaca encompasses 54 municipalities and formulated a voters' list of 129,844 (94.58% of the eligible voters) for the 1994 federal elections. Pinotepa Nacional is a medium sized city in a Pacific region near the border with Guerrero. Surrounding municipalities are both mountainous and coastal with a sizeable black and large indigenous populations.' According to the president (Vocal Ejecutivo) of the IFE Council of District VIII the fact that some polling stations were 24 hours away from the District seat in Pinotepa Nacional and others were not reachable by road at all presented immense difficulties for the distribution and collection of ballots.

Upon our arrival in Pinotepa Nacional we were introduced to the region by our hosts in the Civic Alliance. Following that, we gave a press conference to a packed municipal hall, because of our hosts' intentions that our arrival be widely announced. Immediately we understood that our presence would indeed be met with great interest. As we began, the judicial police arrived and inquired as to the location of our hotel so that they could protect us. The next morning during a live radio interview, two military soldiers arrived to invite us to a meeting in the barracks. We graciously declined. They requested all of our identification but did not stop the interview.

In a pre-electoral meeting with human rights organisations in Pinotepa Nacional, we heard reports of selective violence and coercion and generalised electoral irregularities. We were very short of time and were not able to document the cases.8 It was reported to us that on August 14th, a PRD activist was assassinated. We have very little

information on this case. On August 3rd in the municipality of San Pedro, eight soldiers summoned by the municipal president came looking for a PRD activist accused of 'dividing the community'. He was not home at the time, but suspicious characters came looking for him in the final days before the election and he fled to hide in a dry river bed. Another oppositional leader was jailed and others were not granted official status as national observers. During the campaign, PRD members were prohibited by force from campaigning in a small community outside of the city.

We were shown duplicate names on the voters' list, were given two examples of duplicate voters cards arriving at people's houses and were told that known PRD activists were not put on the voters' list. We heard how the PRI campaign had been bolstered by the use of public resources, including vehicles, money and the distribution of construction materials. Agricultural credits were promised to peasants if the PRI won. One of the city polling booths was located outside of the house of the PRI municipal president, a brother of the PRI candidate in the area. The only PRD member of a municipal council was expelled on charges of fraud.

It was explained to us that employees of the state, for example municipal health workers, had to prove that they voted by coming back to work with their identification card stamped. We found out later that much of the tension in the "Special Polls" was caused by the fact that state workers denied their right to vote knew that they might face severe repercussions if their cards were not stamped.' These electors were under intense pressure to deliver the vote for the PRI. As members of official unions, their membership in the PRI is automatic. Given the widespread disbelief in the secret ballot, the threat of losing their jobs was a powerful one. For example, immediately after voting, an indignant bus driver told me that he thought that the indelible ink showed he voted for the PRI.

This same bus driver showed me a ticket that he received because he parked his bus in the town square in Pinotepa Nacional after having dropped off PRD supporters at the closing rally of their campaign. He had done exactly the same thing a few days previously, but was afforded every courtesy, since he was contracted by the PRI on that day. In another illustration of how the corporatist vote is delivered, we were shown a letter distributed to peasants calling a meeting of the National Indigenous Institute (INI) Jamiltepec, on election day, August 21st. It was an invitation from the PRI candidate delivered through the municipal authorities and included another letter signed by the PRI presidential candidate, Ernesto Zedillo, asking for their vote.

Municiality of Santiago Jamiltepec District VIII Oaxaca

For election day observation, I was located in the Municipality of Santiago Jamiltepec, District VIII, in the state of Oaxaca. This is a coastal municipality of 16,451 in which 5.36 percent of the district's population lives. The voter participation rate has been very low historically. In the 1989 local elections, for example, only 1,681 votes were cast out of a total voters' list of 5,749.10 Results from 1991 Federal Deputy Elections indicate that 3,156 votes were cast, suggesting that the participation rate had significantly increased. In these elections, the PRI was only 67 ballots

short of winning 50 percent of the total municipal vote. Curiously, in two of these 15 polls, the proportion of spoiled ballots were enormously high. (Poll 1B: 571 of 730 votes cast; Poll 8B: 200 of 305 votes cast) Poll 8B was won by the PRD; the only poll not taken by the PRI in this municipality. More data is required before drawing any conclusions about these earlier election experiences.

A. Setting Up the Polling Station

The three polls that I observed all opened between one and two hours after the opening time of 8am. 3 voters left one poll by 9:10am without being able to vote. The polls were located in their proper places outside the designated public buildings and the election materials, including the indelible ink were present. Each poll had two folding screens with plastic curtains with signs indicating that the vote was to be free and secret. Each poll was staffed by a president, a secretary, a first and second scrutineer (or their alternates). Each registered party was entitled to send one representative and an alternate. Representatives and alternates from the PRI were present in all cases and a representative from the PPS came to sign in and promptly left. Apart from the Civic Alliance observers, another national observer from the Movimiento Oaxena por la Certidumbre Electoral was present at different times throughout the day. In all three cases, the names of the presidents of the polls did not begin with letters between T-Z, indicating that they had not been selected by the lottery system". In one poll, the first and second scrutineers did not appear until close to the count. At the beginning of the day, the judicial police visited the poll, wrote down the names of the presidents and offered to respond to whatever problems might arise during the day.

B. Voting

At one poll, I noted that in my absence, the secretary had added someone's name to the list but I saw no other indication that those not on the list were voting. In fact, I heard the election officials in one poll telling a large number of people that they could not vote. It was a surprise to realise that, unlike in Canada, anyone with a voters' list, marking off who had voted, was in contravention of electoral law. Unauthorised people did stay in the polling area including, in one case, an older man who was the alternate PRI representative. Throughout the day, he remained sitting on a bench facing the voters as they deposited their ballots, in such a way that he could ask them how they voted as they walked by. They were asked to flash him their ballots in that moment. At the same poll, I observed the second scrutineer talking to everyone who joined the end of the line. She was checking their documentation and, reportedly, telling people how to vote for the PM. I was informed of both of these practices by three voters. Apart from these three polls, I took a quick tour of others in the municipality. In four polls I saw repeated demonstrations of PRI party officials helping voters deposit their ballots, open them, fold them or in some way interfere with the secrecy of the ballot at that moment. It was a practice that was done openly, repeatedly and continued even after I took photographs.

The most astonishing example of a lack of a secret ballot occurred in the poll where I spent the most time. I began to notice that groups of six or seven older indigenous women were arriving at the poll with young Spanish speaking

women. These young women gathered up the older women's identification cards, presented them to the secretary of the poll, who crossed out their names from the list and stamped 'voted', in the usual way. The young woman, however, picked up the ballots and went into the voting booth with each of the older women. When they had finished voting, she then took the ballots, handed them to the PRI representative who was standing at the ballot boxes. He folded them, handed them back to the voter and she deposited them in the urns. Her marked identification card was returned with all of the others in the group. I cannot say whether their fingers were inked or not. I saw this practice repeated at least four times.

This incident was infinitely rich in offering me insights into Mexican politics. It was not just that the PRI representative folded and looked at the ballots. In fact, he stood at the urns and "helped" many people, mostly women, fold and put their ballots in the urns throughout the day. It was not only seeing the younger women go into the booth with the older indigenous women. It was the experience of watching a form of political expression so much older than and unfamiliar to me, on which it appeared that a liberal form had been superimposed. Despite all of my varied and recent experiences of Mexico, I can say with no certainty what it was that I saw happening in those moments.

Maybe it is abundantly clear that the INI-Jamiltepec meeting had gathered up people for the vote and I was watching the realisation of a *Carrousel*.' I have pictures of four feet below the plastic curtain of the polling booth, but how do I know if it was outright fraud or whether the younger woman was simply helping the elder to vote for the first time in her life. Maybe she had never held a pencil before. How do I know whether or not the indigenous communities had made an informed communal decision to vote for one party; it could have been the PRI, maybe it was the PRD.

What I do know is that I saw countless examples of election irregularities that contravened the Federal Electoral Institute's instructions and the Federal Electoral Law. This is a determination based only on August 21st itself and apart from everything I saw and understood about pre-electoral conditions. Even if we only use the strictest formal institutional criteria, the secrecy of the vote was not guaranteed here. Based on their Guide for Electoral Observers, Elections Canada observers would not have been able to declare this election "free and fair", had they been present in this capacity. What I am sure of is that liberal democratic processes were not realised on August 21st 1994 in Casilla 2013C Santiago Jamiltepec, District VIII in the State of Oaxaca.

C. Scrutinering and Counting

It was suggested that we observe the count in only one poll. National observers remained in 2013B and 2016 while I watched the count in 2013C. I was able to answer positively to all of the questions posed in this section of my report to the Alliance. It was, nonetheless, an excruciating and chaotic experience. The officials dumped all of the ballots out on the table and each of them made a pile of ballots for each party. I saw the president put votes for the PRD into a pile for the PRI. They tended to be more likely to void ballots for the PRD marked out of bounds. They scratched numbers into the table

to keep tally and had trouble counting. After one disastrous round of this, where the ballots did not add up, I suggested to the president, on the advice of the national observer, that they do a recount together, with one person calling out the names. Unfortunately, it was getting dark and it began to rain lightly. After a long wait, the school supply room was opened up and we moved inside for the rest of the count. In the end, the ballots added up correctly and I would say that a fair count was held, but it took hours and hours to count and complete all of the forms.

One important reflection must be made at this juncture. The people who were officiating in this poll on August 21st, were very young. They were not old enough to vote in 1988 and this was certainly the first time they had ever run a poll. They worked extremely hard and they were serious in attending to the tedious work of the day that stretched on towards 2am the next morning. They meticulously followed the directions that they were given by an IFE official who came to check on them every so often. While the secretary counted his ballots at the beginning of the day, the others were very patient. When the stapler-like device did not make a clear mark on the identification cards, they hammered it with a rock. When they made mistakes in their counting, they began again until it was done correctly. In comparison with previous elections, when the ballot was marked directly in front of the PRI officials on the table, this process was a distinct improvement. Watching them work, the PRI representative shook his head and remarked to me that we were witnessing a truly historic event. Maybe we were.

Now, here is the crucial point. No matter how dedicated they were, these young people conducted their tasks of attending to the formal expression of liberal democracy, within a larger social context over which they appeared to be in no position to command. They dealt with the tasks presented to them at their table, but they would not guarantee that a free and secret vote was held. They did not openly question their seniors, the people who had years of party experience and who were violating the secret vote at the urns. They did not ensure that only one person would enter into the polling booth. They may have been more educated than many in their community and obviously were not peasants, but they were subject to the social relations of the community and seemed to display no authority that would secure the conditions necessary for a free vote.

D. National Observers - Civic Alliance

When this political demeanour is contrasted with the work and preparation of the Civic Alliance National Observers it is obvious that the age of the election officials does not explain very much about their lack of attention to the violations occurring around them. The National Observers, all students from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), were highly committed to a defence of the vote. They arrived in Oaxaca after journeying by bus from the capital, slept in difficult situations and had next to no money for expenses. The community of Pinotepa Nacional donated food for them and a space to sleep. I presume that the big difference was that they were not subject to the same reprisals the youth members of oppositional parties of Pinotepa Nacional would face had they taken on

this role. Except for the Civic Alliance liaison, none of the Observers were from the region and given that their role was not to participate but observe, they were not responsible for contesting violations of the law. Unfortunately, we left too quickly to participate in a debriefing session with them.

E. Election Results 13

POLL 2013B:

80.2% voter turnout (458/571)

	Deputies	Senators	President
PRI	176	179	170
PRD	163	173	172
PAN	40	38	47
PT	4	4	5
PRCRN	2	4	4
PARM	4	4	5
PPS	9	10	12
EV	3	2	1
PDM	1	0	1
VOID	56	45	41
	458	459 (?)	458

POLL 2013C:

Voter turnout: 78.5% (448/571)

Deputies:		Senators	President
PRI	200	202	202
PRD	144	153	156
PAN	39	35	36
PT	8	6	6
PFCRN	3	4	4
PARM	2	5	2
PPS	3	4	3
PVE	0	0	1
VOID	49	39	38
	448	448	448

The voters' list in poll 2013 was divided exactly into two, because of its size. 2013 Basica (basic) was divided from A-M (282 men/ 289 women) and 2013 Contigua (contiguous) from the initials M-Z (258 men/ 313 women). Each section had 571 voters and taken together, there was 79.3 percent voter turn-out. Later, it became evident that this was a characteristic of the election throughout the country. Mexican society was highly mobilised to participate in the federal election of 1994 and voter turn-out was massive, I would argue in a paper that could elaborate on the pre-electoral conditions, as a result of both coercion and desire.

It is my understanding that this municipality has always been a PRI stronghold. In this election, despite all of the irregularities we witnessed on August 21st, the PRD came very close to winning in this municipality. When we arrived back to the central office where the votes were being tabulated in the early hours of August 22, it was announced that the PRD had won in the city of Pinotepa Nacional. We had to leave almost immediately to drive to the airport, a journey of 3 hours, and so we were not able to stay to hear the final results. This interim report cannot yet draw general regional conclusions because of a lack of data for the state of Oaxaca in 1994.

Based on what we saw in a rural PRI bastion, however, we arrived in Mexico City expecting to see substantial gains for the opposition in their areas of strength. That was not to be the case. Upon return to Mexico City from the states, delegates from each of the three groups reported a sense of incredulity at what we heard in the media and read in the press in Mexico City. It was as if there had been two different elections held and we had missed the real one. In the rural areas, we had witnessed incontrovertible evidence of a lack of a free and secret vote. We also observed oppositional parties winning polls in remote regions, historically dominated by the PRI. In Mexico City, on the other hand, immediate reports of election day irregularities were scarce and the press was at a loss to explain the surprising distribution of official results in which the opposition was defeated in many of their strongholds.

Final Comments: The Two Elections of August 21st

The Civic Alliance findings indicate that there tended to be two different electoral experiences in Mexico. The Alliance found that the rate of irregularities was consistently higher in most rural and southern regions of the country, than that of northern and urban areas. While the incidence of violations in the secret vote of urban and northern regions was itself high enough to raise a serious alarm at 22.34%, the fact that observers in 59.89% of the polls in most southern and rural region reported such violations is staggering. Similarly, with respect to the evidence of coercion of voters, the discrepancy is enormous. Observers reported irregularities in 12.53% of polls in the most urban-northern region and 46.03% of polls in the most southern-rural region."

It must be said, however striking these results, that the "two elections" theory does not go far enough in explaining the results of the election. The pre-electoral conditions were such that voters went to the polls fearful of future reprisals were the PRI to be defeated or even weakened in the election. These conditions substantially limited the exercise of the free vote. The PRI government was able to manipulate the timing of expenditures for the PRONASOL and PROCAMPO programs. Its disproportionate access to and control of the media limited the public's access to

other parties. The PRI dramatically outspend the other parties and it created fear in the electorate by suggesting that voters would choose political instability if the PRI lost. Despite the concentrated efforts of opposition political parties and citizens' organisations, electoral reforms were limited, especially concerning the credibility and impartiality of electoral bodies. Many problems with the electoral lists remain unexplained.'

As we listened to official reports applauding the electoral experience of August 21st, it was evident that some high-profile international delegations, judged the incidence of electoral offenses to be anomalous. Our delegation did not draw the same conclusion but concurred with the scepticism of our hosts. In their Election Day Report, the Civic Alliance argued that while millions of citizens voted freely, electoral irregularities were more than isolated incidents, had clearly distinguishable patterns that systematically violated citizens' electoral rights. As a result, they assert, millions of Mexicans were subject to intimidation, denied their right to vote or denied a secret ballot.'

Liberal democratic rights were violated on election day, in the most overt and subtle of ways, despite the claims that this election would be the most clean, transparent and democratic in the country's history. It was imperative for the PRI to legitimise its government on liberal democratic principles at the local, state, national and international levels, but post-electoral events indicate that it has not been able to convince the organised opposition of this. The architecture simply does not meet the specs, and I doubt that the PRI will be the political actor able to hold the edifice from shifting ever more precariously towards the abyss. A longer paper on this topic would need to consider national level issues as well as both the pre- and post-electoral periods in order to strengthen this argument. For now, it can be said with certainty, and with great disappointment, that the Mexican election of August 1994 did not meet the democratic standards promised by outgoing President Salinas, the ruling PRI, nor federal electoral officials, and long anticipated by the Mexican electorate.

ENDNOTES

1. Teresa Healy, Carleton University, was staff to a Canadian delegation of 10 members from national organisations representing church, development, labour and women. With the delegates, she was accredited as an international visitor during the August 21st federal elections in Mexico after having been invited by the Civi Alliance to accompany national observers as they monitored the elections.

2. Alianza Civica / Observacion 94, "La Calidad de la Jornada Electoral del 21 de agosto de 1994: Informe", (Mexico, D.F., 19 de septiembre de 1994, p 17, (translated by author).

3. Jose Francisco Ruiz Massieu, El Proceso Democratico de Mexico, (Fondo de Cultura Economica, Mexico, D.F., 1993), p.9.

4. Rare indeed are the opportunities to be present during an event of such importance and **I** am most grateful for the serendipitous correlation of forces that brought me there. I would like to thank the Instituto Federal Electoral for its courteous assistance, Common Frontiers and the Ad Hoc Delegation for the opportunity to work with the delegation and the Alianza Civica for its commitment on behalf of the Mexican people.

5. Article 82, paragraph 2. Federal Code for Electoral Institutions and Proceedings (COFIPE). This modification approved by Congress May 18 1994. International visitors are protected under Section One, Chapter One of the Mexican Constitution. As noted in Alianza Cívica, "Guidelines for International Visitors", p. 1.

6. "Canadian NGO/Church/Labour/ Women Delegation to the 1994 Mexican Elections 1994: Final Report", (Ottawa: OXFAM-Canada, November 1994), 47pp.

7. The black coastal population descends from African slaves brought to work on German cotton plantations. A PRI sponsored organisation of 400 women from this community participated in electoral education and organisation during the campaign.

8. This problem might have been diminished had I taped the conversations we had with people. It is very difficult to translate for others, with no equipment and write notes or remember exact names, places and dates at the same time. We shared our information afterwards among ourselves, but it was still incomplete. The documentation would have improved had I arrived earlier to conduct one-on-one interviews. The objective of the exercise, however, was not to conduct a pre-electoral study in this way, especially with the lack of resources faced by the delegation. The Civic Alliance, for its part, had prepared us specifically for the observation of election day, August 21st.

9. Formally, the "Special Polls" were set up with the purpose of serving travelling voters. An all party agreement at the national level limiting the number of ballots to 300 was intended to prevent historical practices of abuses at these polls. In fact, the agreement caused a great deal of conflict on election day since many people who did not find their names on the voters

list in their own poll, were also directed to the Special Polls. Voters had to travel long distances to them only to find that there were no more ballots. As a result of this and reports that the police and military had arrived at the polls early in the morning, using up most of the ballots, confrontations arose all over the country by early afternoon. In response, the presidential candidates admitted their error in judgement and asked for calm to be restored for the remainder of the day.

10. "Elecciones Locales de Ayuntamientos, 6 de Agosto de 1989, Oaxaca, Distrito VIII", Instituto Federal Electoral (IFE) documents.

11. We were told by the Vocal Ejecutivo (the president of the regional Federal Electoral Institute, District that people whose names begin with the letters T-Z tend to be illiterate in this region. As a result, an all-party agreement had replaced many of the presidents selected by the random lottery process. (T-Z born in November or December) Her assumption only makes sense to me with the additional piece of information that the Priista Banuelos family owns and controls virtually the whole region and the Vocal Ejecutivo is a member of the same. Evidently, this family is not among the illiterates at the end of the alphabet.

12. The *Carrousel* is a variation of "vote early and often', whereby groups of voters are brought to one polling booth after another by the PRI and vote in each one. The *Taquero,* is the practice of depositing multiple ballots as if they were one (stuffed like a taco). Doing the Crazy Mouse means sending people around from poll to poll looking for their name on a number of voters' lists.

13. These election results were written down on the evening of the election. I am unable to check the veracity of the numbers with the National Observer at poll 2013B. These are unofficial results and I cannot explain the discrepancy of the senatorial totals. Most of my observations, as mentioned, were made at poll 2013C.

14. The Civic Alliance Election Day report was based on the results of 62 questions answered in 1,810 observer reports. The reports were chosen in advance of the election to permit a sample national profile. The questions asked whether there was evidence of irregularities in the polls being observed and do not refer to percentages of votes cast. The results were tabulated according to national totals and according to municipal populations. This division by population gives an indication of variations between urban and rural areas. Alianza Cívica/ Observación 94, "La Calidad de la Jornada Electoral del 21 de agosto de 1994: Informe", Mexico, D.F.: 19 de septiembre.

15. Faced with the crush of media attention celebrating this election, our contradictory evidence seemed out of place in the story that was being told. More information, however, has been released since August 21st. Apparently, the National Chamber of Radio and Television formally instructed all its affiliates on August 22 "not to discuss post-election protests, and not to use the word fraud" Equipo Pueblo, Mexico Update Vol. II, Num. 3, September 6, 1994. web : carnet. mexnews.

16. Alianza Cívica, "La Calidad de la Jornada Electoral", p.16.