

**The Mexican Left Between the Fall of  
State Socialism and the Rise of  
Neoliberalism: Some Observations**

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**Working Paper No. 2  
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# **The Mexican Left Between the Fall of State Socialism and the Rise of Neoliberalism: Some Observations<sup>1</sup>**

**Edward J. McCaughan**

The Mexican Left and the Cuban Revolution are the two principal case studies for my doctoral dissertation: "Global Change and Paradigm Crisis: Latin America Between the Fall of State Socialism and the Rise of Neoliberalism--What's Left?" The main thesis is that major changes in the structures and practices of the world system have caused a paradigm crisis and challenged the Latin American Left to rethink its notions of and strategies for development and the creation of democratic societies.

What are these changes? Economically, I'm talking about the restructuring of the world economy, at the initiative of core nations and core-based capital, in response to the profit crisis of the 1970s. This is a complex process frequently represented by the sexy but somewhat deceptive term, globalization. I say deceptive because the restructuring has primarily been about restoring the profit rates and expanding the domain of transnational capital. It's also been about reasserting the dominance of core nation-states in the world system, following a couple of decades in which developing nations were demanding a bigger share of the global pie, politically as well as economically.

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<sup>1</sup> These comments were prepared for an informal presentation to the Chicano/Latino Research Center at the University of California, Santa Cruz. They reflect the author's preliminary observations and conclusions based on research still in progress. Edward J. McCaughan, a doctoral candidate in sociology at UCSC, has written extensively about Mexico.

For Latin America, such restructuring has meant, among other things, (1) subordination of national policies to international financial institutions, which in turn contributed to, (2) a devastating decline in wages and living standards, (3) an abandonment of the internal market in favor of export activities, (4) the dismantling of national welfare states, (5) destruction of small and medium national industries, and (6) the absorption of the few remaining dynamic economic sectors by transnational capital. At the same time, the collapse of the socialist bloc has swept away any remaining illusions some of the Left had harbored about an alternative socialist world system in the making.

Politically and culturally, the changes seem less thoroughly negative, but no less challenging. Politically, some of the major changes are the collapse of the Soviet bloc, the failure of many Third World revolutions, the ascendancy of electoral democracies as the current political system of choice, and the emergence of new social actors.

Culturally and ideologically, some of the more obvious changes include, on the one hand, the important theoretical innovations of feminism and post-structuralism, and, on the other hand, the astonishing success of neoliberalism. In little more than a decade, neoliberals apparently convinced broad sectors of intellectuals and policy makers around the world--including those on the Left--that the 18th century ideologies of Smith and Ricardo will lead the way into the Third Millennium.

### **Paradigm Crisis on the Left**

All of these changes pose serious challenges to the traditional paradigms of the Latin American Left<sup>2</sup>, particularly its emphasis on the state. Because, despite important distinctions among Latin America's various nationalist, populist, and/or

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<sup>2</sup> I'm using "Left" to refer to those forces that traditionally were guided by ideological and ethical principles that stressed social equality and social justice over individual liberties and democracy.

socialist regimes and movements throughout the 20th Century, they shared a developmental paradigm that placed the state at the center of economic, political, social, and cultural change.

That statist paradigm has been seriously shaken by (1) the restructuring of the world economy, (2) an aggressive neoliberal ideological offensive, and (3) the collapse of the former Soviet bloc. These are the three key independent variables of my thesis.

Relatively more attention has been given to the economic and political, particularly policy-related, implications of such changes for Latin America, but little attention has been paid to the ideological and cultural sphere. Therefore, a primary concern of my dissertation is to explore how these recent changes in the structures and practices of the world system have affected *ideology, culture, and discourse among the Latin American Left*. (There you have the dependent variable.)

But, I don't think it's quite as simple as a one-directional, causal relationship. One central hypothesis of my dissertation is that the relationship between these global changes and national ideology is a two-way street. In other words, I am going to argue that while the Left's existing ideology and political culture are clearly being redefined by these global changes, at the same time the Left's traditional world view mediates the way it understands, assesses, and chooses to respond to those changes. In this sense, existing national political culture is subject as well as object--a mediating variable that will be vital in determining how Latin America responds to and perhaps alters the world-scale changes underway.

That's why I've chosen Mexico and Cuba as my two case studies. Not only are they the two oldest, highly centralized, and still effectively one-party states in Latin America. And not only do they represent two variations on relatively successful

revolutionary, nationalist, and statist regimes, which now face daunting economic, political and ideological challenges. They are also two societies with very deeply embedded nationalist political cultures in which discourses of social justice, social equality, and national autonomy remain very strong.

One hypothesis is that broad sectors of the Mexican Left and of the Cuban Revolution will prove less susceptible to neoliberalism than will their counterparts in countries where similarly strong political cultures never existed or were severely ruptured by military authoritarian regimes in the 1970s and extensive liberalization in the 1980s (a break that never occurred in Mexico and Cuba).

In other words, while the Mexican Left and the Cuban Revolution face similar objective problems in trying to formulate new development models and political systems that effectively respond to a changed world order, they will do so within the context of very powerful, deeply-rooted national political cultures that still place considerable value on the goals of social justice, social equality, and national autonomy.

A few words about methodology. For the two principal cases, I want to isolate, as much as possible, the impact of the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the hegemonic rise of neoliberalism, which both occur in the latter half of the 80s. So I'm writing an historical chapter for each case that will present the thinking of the Mexican Left and the Cuban Revolution as it had developed by the late 80s on the big issues of development, democracy, and the international situation.

Then, primarily on the basis of interviews with Left intellectuals, though obviously supplemented with recent written materials, I'm writing chapters on the current process of ideological redefinition and reassessment in each country.

So far, I've done 43 interviews in Cuba and 30 interviews in Mexico, using a questionnaire that is divided into five groups of questions related to (1) economic development and state/market relations, (2) the international situation, (3) democracy, (4) new social actors and the social subjects of change, (5) ideology. These also constitute the themes of the five core chapters of the dissertation.

Now let me summarize some of my findings and tentative conclusions about the Mexican left.

### **The Mexican Case: 1968-1988**

First, let's look at the trajectory of the Mexican Left from 1968 to 1988. I'm starting with 1968 because the popular student movement of that year represents a watershed for the Left and for national politics generally. 1988 is another key marker, because it was in that year that an impressive national movement coalesced around the presidential candidacy of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas.

In the quarter-century since the 1968 student movement, the Mexican Left has undergone a complex process of revitalization and growth, marked by frequent disputes and ruptures but also by a halting, still fragile unification. To give some sense of that process, I want to focus on those sectors of the Mexican Left that have been most important, in terms of their political, organizational, and/or ideological influence, on the formation of the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) in 1989, following Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas's 1988 bid for the presidency. These include (1) the former Corriente Democrática of the ruling Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI); (2) the former Mexican Communist Party (PCM); (3) the "revolutionary nationalists" of the former Movimiento de Acción Popular (MAP); and (4) the independent, post-68 socialist left, exemplified for this presentation by the former Organización Revolucionaria Punto Crítico (ORPC).

Now, you say, there are some obvious omissions. Indeed. The Partido Mexicano de los Trabajadores (PMT), for example, is important in terms of its broad base and the prominence of its leader, Heberto Castillo, but I'm not going to focus on it here because it has made a less distinguished contribution to the key political, strategic, and ideological debates that have informed the Left's rocky road to unity. Nor am I including here the various Maoist and Trotskyist groups; even though many of them are now also within the PRD, and they have made important contributions, there isn't time today to describe the more nuanced differences represented by these tendencies.

First, a very brief sketch of the origins of these groups:

*The Corriente Democrática* began to coalesce around Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas (the son of former President Lázaro Cárdenas) and Porfirio Muñoz Ledo (former President of the PRI and former labor secretary) in 1986, with the intention of democratizing the PRI and, through that process, also democratizing society. The CD also called for the PRI to retrieve the abandoned social agenda of the Revolution. That social agenda conflicted with the neoliberal policies of the de la Madrid (1982-1988) and Salinas (1988-1994) administrations; and the calls for democratization conflicted with the interests of the PRI's labor and peasant bosses (*charros*). Ten days after the nomination of Salinas (1987), Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas left the PRI and was nominated for President by three traditional "loyal opposition" parties, all of which are offshoots of the PRI's "left wing" or old PCM splinter groups. Eventually a National Democratic Front was formed to support Cárdenas. Heberto Castillo (founder of PMT and the 1988 candidate of the Mexican Socialist Party) finally withdrew from the race in support of Cárdenas, and other progressive and socialist forces joined the NDF.



*The Mexican Communist Party (PCM)* was founded in 1919, supported the Lázaro Cárdenas government, and lost much influence but survived the difficult post-WWII/Cold War years. A reformist leadership finally emerged in 60s and began internal efforts to democratize the party and reach out to the rest of the Left. The first concrete effort at unification was the formation of PSUM in 1981 (a merger of PCM, some former split-offs from the party, and the MAP--which I'll describe below), and then PSUM merged with PMT in 1987 to form the PSM (Mexican Socialist Party).

*The Movimiento de Acción Popular (MAP)* was founded in 1981 by group of intellectuals of the 68 generation (who split from ORPC--described next) and trade unionists of the "Democratic Tendency" who helped mobilize a mass movement to democratize the trade unions in mid-1970s.

*Punto Crítico* was first founded as a left magazine in 1971 by Raúl Alvarez and several other leaders of 1968 upon their release from jail. It eventually evolved into a political organization (Organización Revolucionaria Punto Crítico-ORPC). ORPC dissolved in 1989 to participate in forming the PRD. Several of its members now hold key leadership positions in PRD.

A review of the evolving perspectives of these forces since 1968 reveals that the current broader unity of the Mexican Left reflects both (1) a genuine ideological and strategic convergence among some sectors and around some issues (mainly the need to democratize Mexico's political system), and (2) a conjunctural political, pragmatic convergence that at least temporarily overrides substantial long-term programmatic differences that still exist.

In any event, despite the explicitly socialist orientation of some (e.g., sectors of the old PCM and ORPC) and the more nationalist-populist orientation of others (e.g.,

CD, former MAP, PMT), they all share key short- and medium-term goals of democratization and broader social justice.

### **Strategic Differences in the Left**

Now, bear with me through the alphabet soup while I try to summarize the key points of disagreement within the Mexican Left and how unity has been forged--at least for the moment--despite those differences.

Two closely interrelated questions have defined the most significant fissures within the Mexican Left since 1968: (1) how to characterize the political project of the Lázaro Cárdenas regime in the 1930s and the nature of the modern Mexican state that was consolidated under his leadership; and (2) what are appropriate, viable strategies for political and social change in Mexico today.

The Corriente Democrática views the Lázaro Cárdenas regime as the culmination and consolidation of the social agenda of the Mexican Revolution, as enshrined in the 1917 Constitution. From this perspective, *cardenismo* was a genuine national, popular alliance, in which worker and peasant interests were strongly represented by mass organizations, which, in the view of Lázaro Cárdenas's son, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, were largely autonomous, despite having been state-sponsored. There is apparently a general consensus among the CD that post-Cárdenas governments remained largely responsive to popular demands until the administration of Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado (1982-88).<sup>3</sup>

The Mexican Communist Party supported the Lázaro Cárdenas regime and collaborated in the construction of major industrial unions in the 1930s. The PCM

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3 For more on the views of the three main leaders of the Corriente Democrática, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, Porfirio Muñoz Ledo, and Ifigenia Martínez, see their interviews with Andrew Reding in "The Democratic Current: A New Era in Mexican Politics," *World Policy*, Vol. V, No. 2 (Spring 1988).

viewed the *cardenista* social reforms as progressive and recognized that his administration helped provide the political space for important advances in labor organizing. The *cardenista* social reforms--according to this perspective--benefited the workers and peasants but *cost them their autonomy* by reinforcing the subordination of the workers movement and its dependence on what the PCM viewed as "the government of the bourgeoisie." The Communists maintained this somewhat ambivalent position for many years. However, the events of 1968 were the "coup de grace" to any progressive appeal that the ideology of the Mexican Revolution still held for the Communists. The October 2, 1968 massacre and subsequent repression led the PCM to the position that democracy in Mexico was only possible with another revolution that would overthrow the bourgeois government.

Although the PCM's position departs substantially from the CD by characterizing all post-Cárdenas regimes as "bourgeois," its cautious approach to the Cárdenas regime itself left open the possibility of supporting a *neocardenista* agenda in order to reclaim the banners of the Mexican Revolution.<sup>4</sup>

The Movimiento de Acción Popular was the most articulate component of a renewed revolutionary nationalist tendency in the post-1968 period. This perspective offers an interpretation of the Cárdenas era that shares much in common with views expressed by the CD and the PCM. In what leading theorists of this tendency refer to as the ongoing "*disputa por la nación*" since the Revolution, *cardenismo* is the moment when the project of the workers was most strongly represented. A particular theoretical twist is added to this analysis by their emphasis on the autonomy of the Mexican state from any particular class interest. For them, the political bureaucracy

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4 For more on the PCM see Barry Carr, *Mexican Communism, 1967-1983: Eurocommunism in the Americas?* (San Diego: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, UCSD, 1985) and Carr's 1992 *Marxism and Communism in Twentieth Century Mexico* (University of Nebraska).

that emerged from the revolution has considerable independence from the bourgeoisie.

Like the CD and the PCM, then, the revolutionary nationalists see a *political* turning point for the revolution in the post-Cárdenas years. But unlike the PCM, they do not view the subsequent governments as "bourgeois," since they view the political class as autonomous of social classes. The problem, according to the MAP theorists, is that the political class has lost its capacity to use the state's autonomy to promote the interests of the nation as a whole.<sup>5</sup>

More typical of the independent socialist left that emerged after 1968, Punto Crítico departs significantly from all of the previous analyses of *cardenismo*. They view Cárdenas as a populist who was responsible for establishing "the essential basis of the Mexican state," which is "corporatist control over the workers." ORPC interprets the nationalizations undertaken by Cárdenas as an expression of the rise of the national bourgeoisie and discusses the "strictly bourgeois character of the state." This political tendency views 1968 not as a major departure from past state policy but as a major change in public *awareness* of the authoritarian nature of the state.

This interpretation is not altogether different from the perspective of the PCM. But it is quite different from the perspective of the CD, which views the Mexican political system as a democracy that was only gradually eroded. In stark contrast to the revolutionary nationalists' interpretation of the political bureaucracy, Punto Crítico argued that one particular fraction of the bourgeoisie, finance capital, has come to dominate the state.<sup>6</sup>

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5 For more on MAP's perspective, see Rolando Cordera and Carlos Tello, *México: Las Disputa por la nación* (Mexico: Siglo XXI, 1981).

6 For more on ORPC's perspective, see Punto Crítico, "Mexico: Class Struggle and 'Political Reform'" in *Contemporary Marxism*, No. 1 (Spring 1980); Revista Punto Crítico Grupo Cultura Obrera, *Crisis y Reforma Política en México* (Mexico: Punto

## Electoral Politics and Strategies for Change

Not surprisingly, such different interpretations of the nature of the Mexican state produced quite different strategies for political and social change in contemporary Mexican society, which was the second major question dividing the left in the 70s and 80s. Those differences were initially sharpened or exacerbated by the government's limited political reforms of the mid-1970s and by the worsening economic crisis.

Bitter disputes over attitude and strategy vis a vis the state led to political splits and long-festering animosity, even among former allies. But the political reform and the economic crisis also demanded new political practices, which in turn contributed to ever more fully elaborated and nuanced strategies and tactics, ultimately allowing for the at least temporary, broad unification (and in some instances re-unification) within the PRD in 1989.

In political practice, the differences over strategy were played out in three important debates, with different sectors of the Left giving different emphasis in each case: (1) electoral work vs. mass organizing, (2) work inside vs. outside of the corporatist labor organization, and (3) cooperation with "progressive" forces within the government vs. mass, frontal assaults on the government.

Because there is not time today to provide examples from all three, I'll just highlight the debate about electoral politics, since the dominant party of the Left today, the PRD, is largely engaged in the electoral arena.

One position stressed the importance of the electoral arena from the beginning of the political reforms in the 1970s. A prominent leader of the PCM, for example,

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Crítico, 1979); and Alejandro Alvarez, *La Crisis global del capitalismo en México, 1968-1985* (Mexico: Ediciones ERA, 1987).

argues that by participating in the political reforms of 1977-78, the PCM was able to broaden the scope of the reforms. The fight for the Communists' legal and electoral status became primary a focus of the PCM in the mid-1970s. Another PCM leader claimed that "elections have provided the most important political response to Mexico's economic crisis."

An influential MAP theorist also emphasized the importance of the electoral arena, maintaining that, despite the government's control over the electoral process, the 1977 reforms did substantially advance the conditions in which to consolidate political and ideological pluralism and help regularize political confrontation. In part, it was this position, and the acceptance of positions in the Echeverría (1970-76) and López Portillo (1976-1982) governments by certain prominent individuals, that led to a split between this group and Punto Crítico.

A second position, as represented by Punto Crítico, held that the political reforms, in the context of economic crisis, offered nothing to the popular masses while threatening the independence of the Left and leading the Left to abandon popular struggles and the struggle for socialism. ORPC argued that, save specific exceptional cases, conditions in Mexico were not appropriate for electoral contests in the late 1970s and early 1980s. On the other hand, unlike some left organizations that completely avoided the electoral arena until the 1988 presidential elections, the ORPC supported various Left presidential and congressional candidates (including Communists) in the 1970s and 1980s.

By the mid-1980s, differences over whether or not to participate in elections, then, had become less important than differences over the relative importance given electoral work over mass organizing. Revolutionary nationalists of MAP saw the importance of the electoral arena *expanding* after the 1982 crisis, given divisions within

the PRI and a resurgent right-wing PAN. They viewed elections as an increasingly effective means of confirming the illegitimacy of the PRI.

Organizations such as the ORPC, on the other hand, also came to view the potential of the electoral arena more favorably, but for quite different reasons. In their view, *the emergence of new social movements and popular organizations*, many of which had important ties with groups such as the ORPC, changed the prospects for popular intervention in electoral struggle, at least on the local and regional level.<sup>7</sup>

### Partial Consensus Emerges

The increasing consensus about the viability of electoral work, then, did *not* reflect a new consensus about the nature of the Mexican state. Rather, for each organization, electoral work seemed to be the logical outcome of their initial strategy. Those, like the PCM, who participated in the political reforms from the beginning could argue that they had indeed substantially opened up the electoral arena to progressive forces. Those like the MAP, who privileged the state as the key site of social struggle, felt vindicated by the fissures that were deepening within the bureaucracy, making electoral politics more effective. Those like Punto Crítico, who had criticized the reforms and emphasized mass organizing, could claim to have helped alter the social correlation of forces in Mexico, thereby changing the context in which electoral work could be pursued.

Thus, by the time the Corriente Democrática decided to break with the PRI and launch an independent campaign to elect Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas as President in

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<sup>7</sup> For more on the various approaches to electoral politics, see Carr (1986), *op. cit.*; Punto Crítico (1979 and 1980), *op. cit.*; Carlos Pereyra, "Efectos políticos de la crisis," in Pablo González Casanova and Héctor Aguilar Camín (eds.), *México ante la crisis*, Vol. 2 (Mexico: Siglo XXI, 1985); and Jorge Tamayo Rodríguez, "Los movimientos sociales y el proceso electoral de 1988 en México," in *Memoria*, Vol. IV, No. 29 (Jan.-Feb. 1990).

1988, most significant sectors of the Left had already embraced electoral politics in one form or another. Then, having reached more agreement on the viability of electoral struggle itself, the neoliberal policies of the de la Madrid administration provided common demands that could unite the various left parties and social movements. The identification of the neoliberal administration as the common enemy is what allowed such diverse sectors to group together.

In addition, *neocardenismo* was also seen as a demand for the rule of law--a demand to reform the legal, juridical system that has allowed the state to operate without being subject to the rules. Neocardenismo thus permitted the particular demands of each sector/movement for its rights and democratization of its political arena to become part of a demand for general legality and for the overall democratization of the entire system.<sup>8</sup>

Following the 1988 elections, which many people believe Cárdenas actually won, most of the Left forces who had gathered around his candidacy moved to form a new party in 1989. In the process of organizing the PRD, they lost the more rightist elements of the old "loyal opposition parties." But the PMS, PMT, and Punto Crítico all dissolved and their members joined the new party, a rare event in the history of the world's Lefts. In addition, virtually every Maoist and Trotskyist formation split, with half moving into the new party and the others allying with the new Salinas administration!

Key individuals from the old MAP forces initially participated in the formation of the PRD but gradually distanced themselves and moved more firmly into Salinas's camp. It seems more than a little ironic that their revolutionary nationalism was far

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<sup>8</sup> For more on this latter point, see Tamayo, *op. cit.*



more compatible ideologically with *neocardenismo* than was the ideology of the socialist Left, and yet they proved less able or willing to work within the new party.

### **The Left Since 1988**

What I have to say about the post-1988 period is still much more tentative and less synthesized, because I'm just beginning to go back through the 30 interviews I've done over the past couple of years. The interview sample includes unaffiliated Left intellectuals, former members of the PCM, ORPC, Corriente Democrática, and MAP, as well as individuals from Maoist and Trotskyist tendencies. Of these 30 people, 15 are very active in PRD, approximately 10 in leadership positions.

Following are some of my tentative findings based on an initial review of the interviews.

On the positive side, the political earthquake of 1988, the Cárdenas candidacy, the broad front created around it, and then the formation of the PRD in 1989, allowed the most vibrant sectors of the Mexican Left to avoid the paralysis and morass of identity crisis that has afflicted Left forces elsewhere. It allowed the Left to reconnect with a mass, national movement, and to further unify forces. It provided an option other than neoliberalism--which has been embraced by Left forces elsewhere--because *neocardenismo* offered an alternative with mass appeal.

In these ways, the 1988 movement and the formation of the PRD have helped make the Mexican Left--for all its problems and weaknesses--one of the more hopeful forces in the Americas today. The PRD is certainly now considered, even by its detractors, to be a major player in Mexican politics.

On the negative side, coming when it did (almost simultaneously with the collapse of the Soviet bloc), the emergence of *neocardenismo* and the PRD as an

electoral force has somewhat sidetracked the Mexican Left from doing a more thoughtful analysis of old Left paradigms and more long-term, strategic thinking about the future. Remember that the Left's convergence around issues of democratization and electoral politics was not accompanied by convergence around a common strategic analysis of the Mexican state, Mexican capitalism, or economic alternatives. Since 1988, many of the best political minds of the Mexican Left have been obsessed with an electoral struggle in which the PRI still largely determines the rules of the game.

For example, for the first couple of years after its founding, the PRD's journal, *Coyuntura*, devoted considerable space to analyses of topics such as voting patterns in various electoral districts and the particular forms of electoral fraud. Overall, the party leadership was almost completely preoccupied with how to respond to electoral fraud, to mobilizing mass protests against the PRI's undemocratic electoral practices, and to forging temporary electoral alliances.

While such concerns are perfectly understandable, in the meantime very little substantive reflection seems to be taking place about the real lessons of the past (both the Leninist and the revolutionary nationalist past), or about strategic options for the future. Beyond strategizing how to win the 1994 presidential elections, there seems to be little serious discussion of governability, alternative economic plans, democratization beyond the electoral front, and other such critical questions.

This was particularly striking during my Summer 1992 interviews, but I found some improvement in this regard a year later, perhaps suggesting that more time is required for the Mexican Left to adjust and respond to such dramatic international and domestic changes. In the Summer of 1993, I found that the scope and depth of analysis in some key Left publications had improved considerably, notably *Coyuntura*

(now under Cristina Laurell's direction), and *Memoria* (edited by Arnolfo Martínez Verdugo). I also saw a change in the quality of the interviews themselves. People (some being interviewed for the second time) seemed more thoughtful and reflective, and to be taking a more long-term view. I'll give some concrete examples of this below, but first a few words about a second, potentially serious development within the Mexican Left.

### **Paradigm Crisis and Lack of Self-Confidence**

One of the clear fall-outs of the crisis of Marxism, the disarray of socialist political forces, and the enormous influence of neoliberalism is what I perceive as the Left's loss of self-confidence in its ability to articulate concrete alternatives, particularly economic alternatives. On the one hand, neoliberalism as ideology has been so successful that a new common sense has been created, accepted by many within the Left, that it is utopian, impossible, and/or anachronistic to even suggest a national economic project in the current stage of capitalism. Internationalization of capital and "globalization" have been accepted by many Leftists as absolutes, with no contradictions, no space for maneuver--despite the fact that relatively little empirical research and analysis has been done on the nature of Mexican capitalism since "la crisis."

At the same time, the crisis of Marxism and socialism seems to have left many without any confidence to propose alternatives. I say this even though many on the Left refuse to even accept this crisis of real socialism as their own crisis (it is common to hear life-time Leftists insist that the Soviet Union, Leninism, and "real socialism" were never serious points of reference for them--a claim I find hard to accept). Nevertheless, in the face of the discrediting of socialist theory and practice, the Left seems very afraid of being criticized for harboring old, outmoded notions and

illusions. Any project defined in terms of national autonomy, or which suggests some form of state intervention or planning, risks condemnation as utopian, impossible, old-fashioned. Timidity in such an atmosphere simply allows neoliberalism to go uncontested in practice, despite the extensive intellectual criticism of it.

Neoliberal ideology seems to have convinced many on the Left that big capital is the only social actor that can legitimately plan how to further its interests in the world market. It think it is time both to (1) reassert the right of states, other classes, and other social forces to plan and pursue their interests within that market, and (2) identify the spaces within which such interests can be pursued. Given the extensive and accelerated internationalization of capital since the 1960s, and the erosion of state's regulatory capacities, it seems to me that one key question, theoretically, is how to understand the relative autonomy of the nation state *vis a vis* the world economy and, specifically, transnational capital, rather than simply *vis a vis* national social classes or other nations. Traditionally, Marxist analysis of the state has given more attention to its class character; to the extent Marxism addressed the external sector, it was often in terms of some ill-defined "imperialism." There is a need to identify, concretely, whatever spaces for maneuver or relative autonomy exist within the now almost thoroughly globalized world system, whether those be spaces for the state, organized labor, or more scattered and heterogeneous social movements.

Left forces hoping to offer viable alternatives for national development need to come at these questions from new directions, in light of changed conditions. But there is a danger that, rather than tackle these problems with new boldness, the Left, in light of the serious challenges to its traditional paradigms, will simply buckle under the ideological offensive of neoliberalism, particularly at a moment when it is so thoroughly preoccupied with electoral politics.

I got some sense from interviews in the summer of 1993 that at least a few key people in the Mexican Left are starting to think about these issues and are beginning to regain a level of self-confidence in their ability to present alternatives to neoliberalism without falling into traps of the past. But this is all quite new and very much in process.

### **Political Tendencies Today**

At this point, based on my interviews and on writings of the Mexican Left since 1988, I think it's possible to identify three broad informal tendencies (both inside and outside the PRD): conservative/orthodox, liberal, and radical/"renovationist" (parallel to tendencies I found in Cuba, interestingly). These are tendencies that do not seem to correspond neatly with past political or ideological affiliations, or with generations, but rather reflect the genuine crisis of Left thought, and the shake-up and realignment of the Left in response to recent changes in Mexico and the world.

I'll try to explain the content of these tendencies in terms of the economy and politics--leaving aside for time's sake a discussion about attitudes toward new social actors, the international order, and ideology *per se*. I should also say that having a liberal or conservative view on economics doesn't seem to preclude having a more radical or renovationist perspective on democracy.

#### State and Economy

*Conservatives:* If you're coming from the old PCM tradition, a conservative position on the economy would be that the crisis of state socialism was really a crisis of Stalinism--it was authoritarianism and lack of democracy that led to economic collapse, not state planning or centralization. From this perspective, a socialist economy, defined mainly in terms of state ownership and direction, is still a viable

alternative for Mexico. There is a small group of former Communists who hold this perspective, which exists mainly outside of the PRD.

From a non-Communist perspective, there is also what I would call a conservative or orthodox vision of economic options: Ifigenia Martínez, e.g., an economist and one of the three key leaders of the CD and now of the PRD, maintains that it is simply not true that the nationalist model of development failed in Latin America. While acknowledging there were structural problems, such as chronic trade deficits, she argues that the real problem was the betrayal of those projects by governments that relied increasingly on private enterprise without being willing to hold the private sector accountable. In Mexico, she would see this betrayal beginning with Miguel Alemán in the 1940s and then becoming particularly problematic under de la Madrid and Salinas in the 1980s. The issue, for her, is not whether the state should play a strong role in the economy--of course it should. The issue is how to guarantee the rationality of state actions.

I suppose the essence of the conservative or orthodox view, then, is a belief in the state as the most important actor and tool for economic change and development.

*Liberals:* Liberal perspectives are expressed by sectors of the Left who have remained within the PRD, as well as by those who have allied themselves more closely with Salinas. The liberal perspective, as you'd expect, emphasizes the need to let market forces work on the Mexican economy to make it more efficient, productive, and competitive in the new globalized world economy. This tendency also expresses a certain sense of inevitability and irreversibility in the face of global restructuring and fuller economic integration with the US. One long-time PCM theorist, e.g., told me, "there is no alternative to neoliberalism; it is an error to oppose the market."

But, even the most liberal perspectives within the Left still stress the importance of traditional goals of social justice, equality and national sovereignty. Their twist on this is to let market forces guide the changes necessary to allow for economic growth, but within the framework of these traditional goals. This is an example of the influence Mexico's traditional political culture retains, even among those forces most influenced by liberalism's renewed currency. I found the same thing in Cuba.

*Renovators:* What I want to signify by this term is that group of people who still emphasize social goals and social, even collectivist economic visions, and more radical notions of democracy, and who are critical of both statist and liberal approaches. This position, e.g., argues that the state/market dichotomy is a false one. Here are some statements from interviews and documents that get at this:

The state and market are givens, but it is society that decides how much of each; that balance is worked out in concrete practice through social struggle.

\* \* \*

Soft planning, like the CEPAL model, failed. Rigid planning, like the Soviets, failed. But that doesn't mean the market is the answer, because we know from experience it isn't. We need to thoroughly reassess the form of planning.

\* \* \*

The PRD's program opens the debate about the need to build the public's space, that is, spaces which belong neither to the state nor only to private capital, and that in one way or another would constitute social property and a kind of expression of the citizens organized toward such goals.

This position also opposes simplistic either/or formulations regarding economic integration with the U.S. Some, e.g., would argue that such integration needs to be mediated first by a fuller regional integration with Latin America. Others argue that an alliance between progressive social sectors in Mexico, the U.S., and Canada first has to be established before it's possible to move forward with a workable economic integration.

It's interesting to see how the existence of these three tendencies within the PRD got played out in the economic programs proposed at the Party Congress in July 1993. There were two proposals made, one slightly more market-oriented and one slightly more state-oriented--but both of them justifying their approach in terms of promoting the *national* interests of social justice, equality and sovereignty. Neither proposal was acceptable to the Congress and it was decided to hold another national meeting of the party later in the year to try to hammer it out.

It is worth noting the differences in the way the two proposals defined the economic role of the state. The more liberal of the two saw the state's role being to intervene in order to correct or balance relative prices (i.e., raising wages, lowering interest rates, reducing excessive financial profits, etc.), in order for the various social actors to then meet in the market place in fair pursuit of their social interests. The second, somewhat more statist proposal asserted that "the fundamental economic responsibilities of the state are [to assure] sufficient jobs, the productivity and stability



needed for solid development, the fairness needed for a development with social justice, and the competitiveness needed for sovereign development."<sup>9</sup>

In both proposals, there were also passages that had clearly been influenced by what I am calling the "renovators." But the results were a fairly unsatisfactory mishmash. Nonetheless, the Left within the PRD is at least beginning to hash out what might be a viable alternative to neoliberalism in Mexico--and perhaps one that is not simply a blast from the past, a golden but moldy oldie.

### Politics and democracy

As I mentioned earlier, one result of the Left's maturation between 1968-1988 was a certain convergence around the question of democracy and democratization. So in some ways the differences in this area are less striking, but I think they exist nonetheless.

*Conservatives:* Because authoritarianism of the Left and Right has been so thoroughly discredited, I'd say the conservative perspectives on democracy and democratization are more visible in *practice* than in any conscious intellectual formulation (maybe more like racism and sexism in the University proscribed to a large extent from the official discourse but quite alive and well in practice). Conservative tendencies reveal themselves constantly, both internally (e.g., top-down, bureaucratic, careerist behavior within the PRD), as well as externally (e.g., reproducing corporatist relations with the mass movements).

*Liberals:* Liberal thinking is probably more dominant in political discourse than it is in terms of the economy. Democratization of Mexico has really become defined almost exclusively in terms of civil rights and a fair electoral system. The

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<sup>9</sup> Proyecto de Programa del Partido de la Revolución Democrática. Comunica, No. 31. Mexico: Comité Ejecutivo Nacional del PRD. (July 1993).

PRD seems to have done little thinking about what a democratic Mexico would really look like, beyond a multi-party system and end to the PRI's domination. There is a certain complacency about accepting the limitations of liberal democracy. For example, one former Communist told me, "Within the process of economic modernization, there are political advances: military regimes were broken. The worthy aspect of liberalism is that economic modernization is accompanied by political modernization." That is asserted as fact, even though Mexico is living proof to the contrary.

Some former MAP intellectuals apparently broke with the PRD partly over the issue of how to carry out the struggle for democratization. They have criticized the PRD for being too confrontational, for seeking a rupture with the old regime, rather than a "pacted," gradual political change, along the lines carried out in Chile or Venezuela. (This is consistent with the differences they had with more radical sectors of the Left during the 1980s as well.) These Leftists are now openly supporting Salinas and his so-called "social liberalism"--even holding up Salinas in the press as an example for the rest of Latin America.

*Renovators:* There are some important voices, however, who insist that meaningful democracy must be more than liberal, electoral democracy. For example (and it's interesting that both of these quotes come from women, perhaps because they've been closer to the new social movements?):

Democracy is something greater than political rights; it is something that exists among equals. There are severe limitations on citizenship under conditions of severe social inequality. It is impossible to achieve full political rights, and thus full democracy, without eliminating social inequality.

\* \* \*

The PRD, because of its origins in social movements, can't fall into a glorification of electoral democracy as an end in itself, because the social demands of those movements are real. . . . The struggle for the democratization of our country is the process of socializing power in the long run.

In that last phrase, "socializing power," you can get some sense of the extent to which traditional Left conceptions still very much inform the discourse on democratization among the "renovators," even while more liberal conceptions of democracy have been almost universally incorporated into the Left's discourse. Some of these differences can be seen in PRD debates about how to balance parliamentary forms of government with aspects of presidentialism, or in debates about how social movements are represented within the political arena.

As I mentioned previously, these are only preliminary conclusions from an initial review of the interview data. As I continue to analyze the research, one of the things I will be looking for is some meaningful or explanatory relationship between the background of the individuals interviewed and the political tendencies reflected in their current views. My suspicion is that differences will not correlate neatly with past organizational affiliation, because the paradigmatic crisis facing the Left is just that, a crisis, which, in some cases, is producing fresh new thinking and perhaps the emergence of new political/ideological tendencies quite independent of past experiences.

On the other hand, I see some evidence emerging from the data to suggest that the most conservative and liberal perspectives are expressed today by former

Communists and nationalists--that is, those once associated with the most statist traditions. Perhaps this reflects the severity of the paradigm crisis as it has been experienced by these forces, leading them to one or the other of two extreme reactions: retrench and deny the changes, or abandon the past altogether and embrace liberalism. At the same time, the interview data also suggests that the "renovators" tend to come from those sectors of the 1968 and post-1968, independent socialist Left--that is, people who had been influenced by critical Marxists like Gramsci and post-Marxist ideas that emphasized non-state actors. Many of the renovators appear to have have something else in common as well: regardless of their past organizational or ideological affiliation, they tend to have been closer to the new popular and social movements of the 1970s and 1980s, most notably the feminist movement and the urban popular movements. That experience may help explain the difference between their thinking and, say, those more closely tied with the traditional industrial trade union and peasant movements, or those intellectuals whose experience was more limited to internal party apparatus and/or university life.

Finally, I want to reiterate my observation that even the most clearly "liberal" of the Mexican Left still couch their arguments in terms of traditional Left values and goals of social justice and equity. Nationalist and social justice discourse is deeply embedded in Mexican political culture. While recognizing that quite problematic traditions like corporatism and *caudillismo* are also deeply-rooted, I think that, in the long run, the strength and depth of Mexico's nationalism, sense of collective identity and pride, commitment to social justice, and so forth, will help give cohesion to the Left's project. I suspect that Mexico's popular political culture, a product of the 20th century's first great nationalist revolution, will help make the Mexican Left less susceptible to neoliberal discourse and to surrendering before the supposed inevitable forces of "globalization." If that it true, the Mexican Left will be better

able than some to rescue what remains valid and worthwhile of old Left social values, while constructing a new Left paradigm appropriate to realities of the new century.

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