

INSTITUTIONALIZED REVOLUTION IN MEXICO

- THE POLARITY OF MEXICAN THOUGHT: INSTRUMENTALISM AND FINALISM.* By MICHAEL A. WEINSTEIN. (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977. Pp. 128. \$11.95.)
- MEXICAN POLITICAL BIOGRAPHIES, 1935–1975.* By RODERIC AI CAMP. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1976. Pp. 468. \$8.95.)
- CAHIERS DES AMERIQUES LATINES 1975.* By INSTITUT DES HAUTES ÉTUDES DE L'AMÉRIQUE LATINE, UNIVERSITÉ DE LA SORBONNE NOUVELLE. (Paris: Institut des Hautes Études de l'Amérique Latine, 1975. Pp. 434.)
- MEXIKO: DIE INSTITUTIONALISIERTE REVOLUTION.* By MANFRED MOLS and HANS WERNER TOBLER. (Köln, Wien: Böhlau, 1976. Pp. 235.)
- MEXICO IN THE '70s.* By THOMAS G. SANDERS. (Hanover, N.H.: The American Universities Field Staff, n.d.).

At first glance it would appear to be stretching matters to try to construct a review on the basis of a dictionary of political biography, a series of studies on Mexican migration involving Mexican and French scholars, a philosophical treatise, and a collection of articles by two German researchers. True, all of the volumes focus on Mexico, but that alone could hardly be expected to bring order, let alone unity, to such diversity. However, there is a common denominator—contributions to the understanding of the institutionalized revolution in Mexico—that links the volumes at hand and is pivotal to understanding contemporary Mexico.

The institutionalization began in the twenties and thirties when the declared goals of the Mexican Revolution were gradually translated into reality and institutional structures were created to serve the reformed society. It was in these years that the Mexican political system, including the institution of the official party, developed and became the instrumentality for a prolonged period of internal peace and stability. However, it is the postwar decades that are the focus of attention when conversation turns to the institutionalized revolution. Mexico came to be characterized not by agrarian revolution, but by those twin harbingers of modern society—urbanization and industrialization.

The historian can identify the roots of these developments in the final years of the Cárdenas administration—often identified as the high-water mark of the agrarian revolution—and even more clearly in the transitional period of Avila Camacho, coinciding with the Second World War. Indeed, the external factor of the war and its effect both on the Mexican economy and on the nation's external relations facilitated the change of direction that reached full expression during the Alemán period and that, to a greater or lesser degree, has characterized Mexico ever since.

Each of the volumes at hand provides either material for a better under-

standing of some aspects of contemporary Mexico or means that might be employed to achieve such understanding. Michael Weinstein developed his philosophical treatise in the hope that Mexican revolutionary thought might have evolved arguments applicable to current political and ideological concerns in the United States and elsewhere. The distinctive Mexican view, initiated as a revolt against the positivist philosophy underpinning the Díaz dictatorship, sought to identify Mexico and the Mexicans in a framework interwoven with nationalism. The Mexican thinkers—Caso, Vasconcelos, Ramos, Zea, etc.—eschewed traditional liberalism, Marxism, and traditionalism in their search for a “new humanism,” attempting to forge visions of an authentic community grounded first in vitalism and later in existentialism.

Dissatisfied with technocratic materialism and cultural imperialism, the Mexican thinkers “opposed the value of creative freedom to possessive individualism, the morality of charity to efficiency and exchange, and a culture grounded in aesthetic appreciation to one based on material progress.” Weinstein sees Mexican “finalism” with its emphasis on ends as a meaningful alternative to instrumentalism with its focus on means. Whether the Mexican model would prove useable in other latitudes is not as important as the fact that the discussion suggests the tendency of Mexican intellectuals to become disillusioned and critical of the developmental logic of recent decades. If the revolutionary philosophy developed as a response to the philosophical justification of the *porfiriato*, then concern about what some have chosen to describe as “neo-Porfirianism” becomes understandable. Is the polarity of Mexican thought identified with Porfirian dictatorship and nationalist revolution being replicated in the final quarter of the twentieth century?

Two years ago, the Sorbonne’s Institute for Advanced Studies of Latin America held a meeting with representatives of El Colegio de México to discuss specialized studies on the theme of Mexican migration, both internal and external. While scholars in this country are fairly familiar with the work of Gustavo Cabrera, Luis Unikel, Rodolfo Stavenhagen, and Jorge Bustamante (who here once again repeats his view of migrant labor as a commodity lured northward by capitalism), the impressive and serious scholarship of Claude Bataillon and Jean Revel-Mouroz and their students is not as well known. While broad, interpretative, and analytical presentations are included, the specialized studies, related to the local environment and internal migration, are particularly needed and most welcome.

The dictionary of political biographies thoughtfully and carefully compiled by Roderic Camp provides a much needed and highly useful tool for identifying and analyzing the political leadership of Mexico between 1935 and 1975. More than nine hundred biographical sketches compose the text of the volume, with cross-referencing of data to two or more sources for accuracy and specifics about career, education, elective and party positions, and key evaluatory comments of a laudatory, critical, or simply informative nature. In appendices, the author lists those who have served in key governmental, education, and political positions during the four decades. Listed are supreme court justices, federal senators and deputies, directors of federal agencies, departments, and banks, governors,

rectors of national universities, and leaders of parties, labor unions, and farmers' organizations. The result is virtually a government organization manual for Mexico since 1935. Some of the younger politicians who enjoyed a meteoric rise during the Echeverría period, like Javier Alejo, are omitted as are some of the appointment changes of the second half of that period. However, the volume is remarkable for how much it does include.

The final two publications have been left for last because they share a tendency for an early appraisal of Echeverría and his administration and, therefore, provide a suitable point of departure for a look at the institutionalized revolution. Thomas Sanders of the American Universities Field Service Staff has gathered together a group of reports from 1974–75 in which he examines some of Mexico's structural problems in the mid-seventies and endeavors to detail and appraise the policy and cultural changes affecting those problems. Underlying everything discussed and the main theme of the book is population. Against a background sketch of Mexican development since the Revolution and an interpretation of the Echeverría administration, the author turns his attention to the demographic situation in Mexico in 1975 and the new population policy. Migration and urbanization are other phenomena attracting his attention.

The two German scholars offer a series of essays in an up-to-date analysis of the Mexican Revolution and its institutionalization. Mols and Tobler, in five essays, examine the historiography of the Mexican Revolution down to 1940 and during its institutionalized phase since that date, discuss the place of the peasantry and of agrarian reform in the Mexican Revolution, analyze the institutionalized revolution, and evaluate Mexico under Echeverría. The work of Mols and Sanders offers eloquent testimony of the difficulties of trying to judge a contemporaneous Mexican president, even one who has been the first Mexican executive to be evaluated seriously while still holding power.

As there was in Mexico itself, attention is focused on political reform, redistributive tax reform and other instrumentalities directed to the same purpose, comprehensive development with concentration on regions of poverty, marginality, and low production, efforts to modernize and increase the productivity of ejidatarios and small farmers, expanded outlays for education especially in rural Mexico, a national population policy, the effort to achieve integral agrarian reform and rural development, and an external policy aimed at reducing dependency on the United States and at orienting Mexico toward the Third World and providing Echeverría with a leadership role in world affairs.

This is not to say that Mols and Sanders did not recognize the hazards of too speedy an appraisal without the full record and consequences being available and without the perspective of time. Sanders admits that the accomplishments he attributes to Echeverría are modest, that the rhetoric and innovations of Echeverría are not going to change very much problems deeply rooted in the Mexican system, and that many Mexicans remain cynical and detached from their government. Mols worries about the personalized style of government with the president doing everything and quickly, doubts that effective planning can result from continuous and large-scale dialogue, and questions whether the

government can sustain the integral agrarian program consistently and long enough to be effective.

Responding to his own question as to whether Echeverría has modified the basic parameters of Mexico's foreign policy and trade, Mols answers with an equivocal "yes and no." Interestingly enough, he concludes that Mexico was able to take advantage (or have more latitude) in part because the United States had assumed a "low profile" relative to Latin America in this period, but also because of the winds of change in Latin America coupled with the world energy crisis. But most striking of all is his reference to the projection of a nationalistic and revolutionary image abroad as related to the internal function of the legitimization of the institutionalized revolution!

It is astonishing how quickly the picture has changed. Within months of his departure from office, there has become apparent the high cost of the Echeverría period: a critical economic situation that, while it has external ingredients beyond Mexican control, was aggravated by Echeverría's impulsive action and inflammatory rhetoric; a bureaucratic nightmare complete with hundreds of overlapping, intersecretarial commissions and a doubling of government employees in six years; evidence that rhetoric too frequently substituted for sustained and effective action; leftist oratory undermined the confidence of domestic and foreign sources of capital without compensatory accomplishments; and land distribution without adequate preparation adversely affected food production without alleviating the situation of a land-hungry rural population. The final third of the administration also was characterized by an intolerance of criticism as evidenced by the *Excelsior* episode and by an effort to lay the groundwork for retention of significant power by the outgoing president in a major departure from Mexican tradition. Time will tell whether Luis Echeverría will be considered as a turning point for Mexico or simply an erratic swing of her political pendulum within the framework of the institutionalized revolution.

The changed direction of Mexico and the institutionalization of its Revolution brought criticism beginning in the forties. Critics complained that political democracy and social justice had been sacrificed in the rush to industrialize. By the sixties, there was general recognition that a half century after the Revolution, Mexico still lacked political, economic, and social democracy. The political tensions and social distortions of the sixties further encouraged an altered perspective of the Revolution and its aftermath. David C. Bailey, in an excellent and stimulating essay (*Hispanic American Historical Review* 58, no. 1 [Feb. 1978]:62-79), refers to a new revisionism regarding the Mexican Revolution. Admittedly, the more sweeping condemnations have come from the pens of members of present-minded social science disciplines. However, even historians have taken note of changes that, with time, may bring a meaningful reassessment of the Mexican upheaval and its results.

As Mols noted perceptively, the official view or myth of revolutionary continuity has a most important function. The nationalistic and revolutionary image projected at home and abroad has the internal function of legitimization. It is, in the German scholar's words, "the important stabilizing element as well

as the legitimatizing basis for the regime of the institutionalized revolution." Mols, noting the dovetailing of the present and the past in twentieth-century Mexico, recognizes that a revolution cannot endure forever, but can carry over in a process of continuous transformation even with changed directions, whether one considers such an aftermath a "Thermidor" or postrevolution or as the continuing thrust toward modernization after the "take off" of the violent phase.

Apart from ideological differences, underlying all questions being raised is that while Mexico has enjoyed exceptional political peace and remarkable economic progress for decades, the fact remains that the wealth created has been most inequitably distributed and that in Mexican society, as David Felix has observed, glaring contrasts of poverty and luxury are the rule rather than the exception. Few countries in the region have a more unequal distribution of income. Despite notable improvements, the better life has not been provided for many among the rapidly increasing Mexican population. Under the circumstances, cynicism comes easily and disillusionment is readily understandable. Simple continuation of the revolutionary tradition of land distribution cannot answer the need. Obviously, the main hope for genuine improvement must be through continued, or even accelerated, development, which can provide economic opportunity and social betterment for the millions living in marginality. Events of recent years are suggestive that the pragmatic Mexicans must learn from the lessons of the past. A reformed institutionalized revolution may prove to be the best, if not the only way, to meet Mexican concerns and needs. There is need for an even more intense commitment to national development, but one that will begin to overcome the obvious contradictions in Mexican economic, social, and political life.

President José López Portillo, while faced with the recognized immediate need to restore confidence, has declared his goal to broaden the distribution of wealth, opportunity, and justice. The key to achievement of the goal in his view is the facilitation of development that will create jobs and opportunities. However, whether the solution sought is liberal or conservative, of the left or of the right or a mixture of the two, salutary effects will not be forthcoming without addressing effectively what Víctor Urquidi has described as Mexico's "strong demographic dynamism—without historic precedent or parallel in almost any other country." Rapid population growth together with maldistribution of the wealth created through Mexico's economic miracle are the sources of her difficulties. Without significant progress toward national population control, any progress recorded will depreciate inversely to the numbers who must share in it and any program however well conceived and conscientiously applied will be overwhelmed and swept away by the flood tide of unrestrained humanity. That is the greatest threat to even a reformed institutionalized revolution and the greatest challenge to the pragmatic flexibility of the Mexican political leadership.

STANLEY R. ROSS
University of Texas, Austin