

## Dateline Mexico by Josefina Menendez

### Some surprises in the elections

*The mammoth voter turnout was a move to support the Mexican presidential system itself.*

As July 4 approached, commentators around the world were predicting the early collapse of the Mexican political system in the general elections that day. A myriad of small radical parties would leave the PRI ruling party with a small margin of victory. Mexican voters proved the opposite. They went to the voting booths in record numbers to give the PRI ruling party's presidential candidate, Miguel de la Madrid, an overwhelming 75 percent of the vote.

Eighty percent of the 31.5 million registered voters cast their votes for President, congressmen, senators and other local posts—compared with the 50 percent turnout of the 1976 general elections.

The excitement this heavy turnout has provoked among PRI and government officials greatly contrasts with the Anglophile press coverage in the United States. The *New York Times's* depressed mood has one reason: the Mexican political system, with its strong executive power, came out strengthened.

The highly centralized presidential system has been the backbone of the PRI and a key vehicle for the economic growth and political stability which Mexico has enjoyed since the 1930s. Voters saw a strong executive power as the best instrument to defend the country from the enormous economic pressures to which it is being subjected.

Despite the fact that the PRI has

been traditionally identified with Mexico's economic progress, the mandate for de la Madrid was not precisely a vote for the PRI. In many parts of the country, the PRI had put aside its pro-growth commitment to make deals with oligarchic groups such as the Acapulco tourism-pornography circles of former President Miguel Alemán. These rampant *Realpolitik* tactics have led to wide popular disillusionment with the PRI.

The party that most capitalized on this was the National Action Party (PAN), a "right-wing" front for the oligarchy. While final results in the congressional elections are still not available, in the presidential elections the PAN got 14 percent. The leftist PSUM alliance came third with 5.8 percent. A surprisingly high 2 percent went to the Trotskyist Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT). Two other splinter groups, the Falangist "Cristero" PDM and the ultra-left Socialist Workers Party (PST) barely reached the limit of 1.5 percent which the law requires to maintain the status of a political party. The greenie Social Democrat Party (PSD), got only 0.3 percent, and has therefore lost its party status.

Another surprise was pulled by the Mexican Labor Party (PLM). Preliminary results indicate that the PLM came in third in the key race for the mayoralty of Ciudad Obregón, the capital of the northwestern

state of Sonora. Since it is not a registered party yet, the PLM did not even appear on the ballot. Nonetheless voters responded to the PLM's independent campaign to make of the Ciudad Obregón area, a rich agriculture center, a pole of industrial development by writing in a PLM vote.

Nationalist forces in the PRI are sending signals that they will launch an internal housecleaning. On July 4, former President Luis Echeverría shocked political circles when, in an interview published in several dailies, he denounced former Interior Minister Jesús Reyes Heróles as a "traitor," a "liar," and an "alcoholic." "When Reyes Heróles . . . began surreptitiously to circulate stories that he was the author of the political reform, he was committing an act of treason," Echeverría said.

Echeverría described how Reyes Heróles tried to take control of the political reform originally proposed by President López Portillo. Reyes Heróles, he said, "plotted persecutions against his enemies," Echeverría among them.

Since their appearance July 5, the former President's remarks have been the topic of commentary in every important political column here. The main complaint is that he "broke the rules" of the compromise-ridden political system.

But there is no doubt that this is precisely what Echeverría's faction has in mind. They have announced they will fight to redirect the PRI toward its pro-growth orientation. And the message is directed at incoming President de la Madrid. The PRI, Echeverría said, "is a nationalist front . . . [and] I think the domestic oligarchy should not be part of it."