

EXPLAINING SOCIOPOLITICAL CHANGE IN LATIN AMERICA: The Case of Mexico*

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Since Mexico declared its independence from Spanish rule, the country has experienced two extended periods of political stability that are atypical of Latin American societies. The first, known as the Porfiriato, extended from 1875 to 1910. The second, which was heralded by the Revolution of 1910 and consolidated in the 1920s, still holds sway in the last decade of the twentieth century. The weaknesses of the Porfiriato have been analyzed amply, thanks in great part to the hindsight provided by the revolution that ended the era. Until recently, however, most works on twentieth-century Mexico have focused on the exceptional stability of the postrevolutionary regime. This approach has left largely unresearched (Knight 1989) or merely labeled as “crises” (Needler 1987) the recurrent episodes of union insurgency, popular protest, electoral opposition, and other signs of pressure for political change that have punctuated Mexican history since the Revolution. Consequently, analysts who have recently undertaken the arduous task of diagnosing at what points this imposing edifice might “give” have been unable to benefit from insights of work carried out in previous decades.

In the interval between 1982 and 1988, the erosion of support for the official party (from the right as well as the left) gradually became more visible, culminating in what has been called the “political earthquake of 1988” (Lerner de Sheinbaum 1989; Cornelius, Gentleman, and Smith 1989). Since then, analyzing political change in Mexico has become as urgent as analyzing stability was prevalent in the past. Yet unlike the process in previous decades, this new focus of research has not been accompanied by a renewal of the conceptual arsenal that most effectively explained stability. In practice, this tendency has created a style of analysis that eschews explicit reference to the analytical models in vogue in the 1960s and 1970s yet cannot avoid using the key terms created by these

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models. Such an approach leaves unclear which assumptions, key analytical tools, and central propositions of these models are still considered fruitful and which ones are being questioned.

Despite visible signs of wear, the Mexican political system in the early 1990s still appears to be defying political change. This description fits even after a decade of accumulation crisis marked by massive capital flight, towering foreign debt, record unemployment, three-digit inflation, rampant de-industrialization, and a ruthless monetary stabilization program that has "liberalized" everything but wages and salaries. Little has changed in the institutional arrangements that define the scope and limits of state power, despite reiterated promises from above to democratize and modernize political institutions. That is to say, nothing has changed in the formal arrangements that ostensibly govern Mexico. The Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) still tallies the majority of votes by the usual illegal means, as evidenced since 1986 in various gubernatorial elections and the 1988 national presidential and legislative elections.¹ And the new administration of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988–1994) took office right on cue, despite evidence of massive electoral fraud. This apparent return to previous patterns has, in some cases, encouraged a return to the study of stability and continuity, which have been viewed alternatively as a "new presidentialism" (Salazar 1989; Monsiváis 1990)² or as a drift toward a more exclusionary regime (Meyer 1989). Until 1989 the general consensus held that a return to the status quo ante was unlikely (Cornelius, Gentleman, and Smith 1989; Garrido 1989; Loeza 1989a, 1989b; Meyer 1989). Nevertheless, few observers have been willing to spell out what principles of change underlie the array of future scenarios that have been proposed. One may therefore speak of a crisis in interpretation, manifested by the unwillingness to refer systematically to an existing fund of analytical tools, despite the fact that these tools constitute the only instruments presently available.

Rather than pursue the game of trying to first-guess what Mexico's political future might be, this article proposes first to reassess the potential for analyzing political change of the models that were available to analysts when they began to turn to this problem. The discussion will next examine the ways in which these models have influenced current

1. In order to estimate the extent of the electoral fraud perpetrated in 1988, Francisco Báez Rodríguez (1988) selected a random sample of 300 for the 29,999 polling places for which figures are available (out of a total of 55,000). He then substituted the results where the PRI received a unanimous vote for the nearest polling place with a vote count similar to the average of the entire zone. The resulting vote for the PRI varies between 41.3 percent and 38.8 percent, that is, well short of the absolute majority that it claims to have obtained (taken from Meyer 1989, 326).

2. See also Alberto Aziz Nassif, "Modernización presidencialista," *Jornada*, 17 Oct. 1989; and Adolfo Aguilar Zinser, "Desconcertante aceptación del nuevo presidencialismo," *Excelsior*, 23 Sept. 1989.

debates on political change and then show what benefits could be derived from their more systematic use. This retrospective exercise should help to place the various conceptions of political change found in the literature in their proper theoretical perspectives, thereby clarifying the current debate over that process. The goal here is to help overcome the current theoretical impasse.

FOUR PERSPECTIVES ON POLITICAL PERMANENCE AND CHANGE

Every contribution to the study of Mexican politics implicitly or explicitly defines a set of central processes and structures in Mexico's political makeup based on a number of conceptual tools and theoretical assumptions. This section proposes to define these basic conceptions and examine their implications for analyzing political change. In the process, this concept will itself assume different meanings according to the perspective from which it is being investigated.³ Four broad paradigms will be defined. The first is the clientelistic perspective, which locates the major mechanism of political integration of Mexican society in the formation and continued reproduction of networks of patron-client relations. The second approach to be defined is the pluralist perspective, which gives primacy to individuals as causal factors in politics and explains events as outcomes of interests and values (Alford and Friedland 1985, 4). This perspective views Mexican society as a complex set of interacting aggregates that compete for benefits yet respect the general "rules of the game" incorporated in common values. The third perspective is the authoritarian-corporatist view, which focuses on the state as the dominant factor in explaining political outcomes. Defined last is the class view, which regards the process of capital accumulation on a world scale and the class relations derived from it as the key to understanding Mexico's historical trajectory.

The Clientelistic Perspective

Clientelism refers to the structuring of political power through networks of informal dyadic relations that link individuals of unequal power

3. The discussion in this section is based in part on a previous publication that I coauthored with Karen Kovacs (Brachet-Márquez and Kovacs 1990). The notion that sociological inquiry is based on fundamental theoretical perspectives that specify units of analysis, levels of abstraction, and key processes has been widely debated. This article owes its main debt to Robert Alford and Roger Friedland (1985), who distinguish among "pluralist," "managerial," and "class" perspectives. The fundamental difference between my approach and theirs is that I do not define perspectives in general but in reference to the single empirical case of Mexico. I am therefore defining not metatheoretical tools but strategies for analyzing the Mexican case. Also, I make no claim that these strategies represent the sum total of intellectual tools available, simply that they have been and are still being used de facto.

in relationships of exchange.⁴ In clientelistic structures of authority, power is vested in the top individual (the boss, sovereign, or head of clan) who personally decides how to distribute resources according to personal preferences. When applied to Mexico, this perspective represents the state as a top-down pyramid headed by the chief of the executive branch, who directly or indirectly dispenses favors to those below through complex patron-client networks that link the top of the social structure to the base. Civil society, in contrast, is perceived as a fragmented set of vertical relationships inhibiting the formation of horizontal interest groupings, whether based on party or social class. This form of political organization, which was understood initially as a typical trait of premodern oligarquic societies, was finally recognized as a more or less permanent feature of Latin American political systems.

Whereas patron-client networks have been identified as a source of praetorianism in other Latin American societies (Chalmers 1977), in Mexico it has been understood as a key mechanism of political integration and a *sui generis* mode of bureaucratic rule (Grindle 1977a). Analysts of Mexican clientelism have emphasized the key role played by patron-client networks in various aspects of the political system. Clientelism provides the informal backup of presidential power (González Casanova 1970; Cosío Villegas 1973; Kaufman 1975) while articulating political demands from below via “power brokers” (González Casanova 1970). Clientelism also influences processes of policy implementation (Poitras 1973; Greenberg 1970; Grindle 1977b) and links the official party to the core state apparatus as well as to the masses (Stevens 1977). In Brandenburg (1964), clientelism is the main theoretical insight employed to analyze the nature of Mexican politics. Mexico is described as being governed by a powerful and tightly integrated elite—the “revolutionary family”—made up of the *caudillos* who participated in the Revolution. This elite makes all decisions in a consensual fashion, leaving few options for the masses to voice their grievances except by asking for personal favors dispensed from the top.

Whether looked upon as channeling demands from the bottom to the top or as prompting responses from above, the mechanisms governing clientelism seem at first ill-chosen as sources of impetus for change. In the first instance, the inability of those making demands to organize a constituency horizontally limits their political strength. Likewise, state response to demands on a case-by-case basis via clientelistic channels increases its capacity to postpone generalized reforms that would meet these demands. Even in cases where organizing a constituency is made possible through official channels, as with labor interests, collective demands for change have been viewed as periods of “letting off steam” rather than as pres-

4. Clientelism and patrimonialism will be considered synonymous in this discussion. For the anthropological approach to clientelism in the Mexican context, see Foster (1967a, 1967b).

tures likely to effect real change (González Casanova 1970). Although this problem has been exemplified more often in the relationship between the state and subordinate classes, it seems an equally likely consequence of the structuring of informal linkages between private enterprise and state officials (Fagen and Tuohy 1974). This outcome leads to case-by-case implementation of rules regulating economic activities and to the limited ability of different business interests to create representative bodies and pressure the state into taking specific measures.

When viewed as an institutional process manipulated by the state, clientelism seems to offer more ways of managing inequality and the social conflicts it generates than ways of transforming society. When incorporated into the authoritarian-corporatist argument, as in Kaufman (1975), clientelism is said to account for the orientation of Mexican politics toward maintaining the status quo. The absence of interest groups capable of exerting pressures on the state, which this perspective takes as axiomatic, makes the initial impetus of reformist policies depend entirely on the personality and values of top elites, whether the values of the revolutionary family (Brandenburg 1964) or the personality and experience of the president (Grindle 1977b).

To examine the potential of clientelism for analyzing change, scholars must look for the circumstances in which clientelism fails to function as predicted. One might ask, for example, whether the survival of clientelism during recessions can generate pressures for change by retarding, rather than oiling, the machinery of state domination over society. This may be the case when the machinery of patronage and bribes slows down during times of economic scarcity, as it undoubtedly has since 1982. Because fewer goods and services can be distributed through personal favors, the battles waged to obtain such favors may become fiercer and the resulting distribution of benefits even more unequal. Under such conditions, clientelism resembles a lottery system with fewer and fewer winners. This perception is certain to reduce the number of persons willing to buy tickets or vote for the PRI. According to this hypothesis, clientelism creates pressures for change born of the frustrations of those who no longer have access to scarce favors. Clientelism also creates counterpressures for the state to override voter preferences or to propose reforms to win back popular support. For studying such pressures, the analytical framework of clientelism itself offers useful tools that have remained largely unused. Analysts therefore need to study the conditions under which clientelism exacerbates, rather than pacifies, aspirations from below. A case in point may be the current appeal of the strong anti-corruption stand taken by the Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN) among the middle sectors hit hard by the economic crisis of the 1980s. Similarly, the appeal among voters of the Partido Revolucionario Democrático (PRD), despite intimidation and fraud, represents a significant new facet of Mexican politics that may be related to the erosion of clientelism.

In short, clientelism represents a logic of political organization that emphasizes personal loyalties and vertical relationships as the central principle of political organization. To the extent that this logic has been successfully integrated into formal relations of political power in Mexican society (Grindle 1977a), it can therefore be seen as reinforcing the status quo. At the same time, political loyalty based on patron-client relations contains the seeds of its own destruction—and hence of political change—to the extent that it relies on the fiscal capacity of the state to distribute favors and benefits.

The Pluralist Perspective

Pluralism has endured a long period of academic discredit following the triumph of the authoritarian-corporatist view in the 1970s. Nevertheless, with the return of more competitive electoral processes in several Latin American countries, democracy has been put back on the agenda for discussion. The processes through which democratic transitions have recently emerged differ vastly from the first wave of postwar democratization of the 1960s. Yet it is still necessary to recall earlier pronouncements on democratization to assess the importance in contemporary analyses of the key concepts and fundamental assumptions underlying these earlier views, if only to discover in what ways they have changed in present analyses.

The pluralist perspective was initially exported to Latin America as the theory of political and economic development, also known as “modernization theory” (Huntington 1968; Almond and Powell 1966; Almond and Verba 1963; Pye 1966; Rustow 1967). Packenham (1973) discerned three major intellectual traditions in modernization theory: the economic tradition positing a positive correlation between economic development and the possibility of democratization (Almond and Coleman 1960; Cutright 1963; Dahl 1970; Hagen 1963); the social systemic approach holding that a number of global social conditions will lead to democracy (urbanization, literacy, exposure to mass media, better welfare measures, and so on) (Coleman 1960); and the political culture approach that emphasizes the importance of values for the development of democracy (Verba 1967; Almond and Verba 1963; Pye 1966). What makes these approaches “pluralist” is their shared representation of political development as a process of peaceful change toward democracy and stability rooted in economic development as well as in their corresponding negative evaluation of intense political conflict and revolution. All three perspectives are said to have been paradigmatically represented in Lipset’s *Political Man* (1960). This work held that the conditions for the development of democracy were wealth, a capitalist economy, and literacy (the economic approach), an open class system and participation in voluntary organizations (the

social systemic approach), and an egalitarian value system (the political culture approach) (Packenham 1973, 208–9).

Scholars adopting the pluralist perspective in studying Mexico initially looked for evidence of a general process of political development under the influence of the Revolution. This debate centered on whether the Revolution had accelerated the process of dislocation of the “uninstitutionalized” prerevolutionary political system that had prevailed before 1917, or whether postrevolutionary politics represented a continuation of the prerevolutionary “praetorian” political process. Of particular interest to these scholars was the creation of the official party that was perceived as reflecting a change from clientelistic to democratic linkages between public officials and the general population. For those inclined to interpret this development as a step toward democracy (Cline 1962; Scott 1964; Huntington 1968), the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR)—and its heirs, the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (PRM) and the PRI—was viewed as the aggregating force that satisfied “the majority of the strongest influence associations, dissatisfying as few as possible” (Scott 1964, 8). Simultaneously, the process of accelerated urbanization and industrialization that began in the 1940s was understood as a fundamental factor in preparing the laboring masses of Mexico to become fully participating citizens in a democratic system. For these observers of Mexican reality, what the Revolution had achieved was a transformation from personal uninstitutionalized premodern politics to a “highly complex, autonomous, coherent and flexible political system . . . with a demonstrated capacity to combine the reasonably high centralization of power and the broadened participation of social groups in the system” (Huntington 1968, 316–17).

This synopsis of the underpinnings of pluralism as expressed by early theorists demonstrates that political change lies at the heart of its claims. The logic underlying this view is that society is the source of such change, based on the evolving values of individuals as incorporated into interacting organized groups. To think of the state as the impetus of democratization would therefore violate the basic precepts of this paradigm unless analysts understand the state as an arena of competing elites following different “policy currents” (Maxfield 1990) and emerging state decisions as the result of these internal divisions.

The Authoritarian-Corporatist Perspective

The debates over authoritarianism and corporatism have expressed different, but often complementary, dimensions of the relationship between state and society in Latin America. These arguments have been virtually comingled in studies of Mexico, referring on one hand to the limitations on political pluralism, the concentration of power in the presidency, and low levels of political mass mobilization (Linz 1975, 255) and

on the other to the creation and domination by the state of “singular, compulsory hierarchically ordered and differentiated units . . . granted a deliberate representative monopoly within their respective categories” (Schmitter 1974, 93).

In several Latin American countries, the shift from the modernization perspective to authoritarian corporatism was prompted by violent regime change. In Mexico it was the conceptual fallout from these external social conflagrations that led to a new reading of the nature of the political system. In contrast with paradigmatic cases like Brazil and Argentina, Mexican authoritarianism could not be viewed as a sudden reaction to a turbulent populist period or a crisis of accumulation. Rather, it was created deliberately by the state in securing its own consolidation after the Revolution. Mexico’s authoritarianism was also viewed as having inherited some of the traits of the personalist oligarchic order that preceded it—the absence of meaningful elections, the practice of electoral fraud, the predominance of executive power, and presidential paternalism (Meyer 1977)—hence the importance of clientelism as a principle of political integration. At the same time, popular support of the official party was essential (unlike the countries ruled by military dictatorships), a characteristic that set Mexican authoritarianism apart (Stepan 1978; Kaufman 1977; Reyna 1974, 1977).

The principles of centralized political control and decision-making embodied in the authoritarian-corporatist perspective on Mexico would also appear at first sight to ill equip this model for analyzing political change (Kaufman 1973, 1975). Its characteristics have been identified as demobilizing popular sectors (Stavenhagen 1976; Stepan 1978; Kaufman 1975) and defusing social conflicts by providing selective responses to pressures from below (González Casanova 1970; Stevens 1977; Kaufman 1975). The inclusionary nature of Mexico’s regime, rather than opening up the power structure to the masses, has been interpreted as co-opting popular leaders and thereby depriving the grass roots of their capacity to voice grievances. Even organized business groups can be relegated to the limited role of negotiating the “mere details” of presidential decisions (Kaufman 1975), while subordinate groups have been reduced to accepting passively the benefits bestowed on them in the absence of any sustained demands (Grindle 1977b, 108). Opposition groups were bracketed as exceptional and therefore theoretically insignificant, whether they originated from below (as in the periodic resurgence of union activism in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1970s or the rural guerrilla movements of the 1970s) or from other groups (like *Almazanismo* in 1950, *Henriquismo* in 1952, or the student uprising of 1968). The fact that most of these commotions have been severely repressed seemed to confirm the power of the state and its capacity to enforce the status quo (Stevens 1974). The reforms that followed such social explosions, rather than undermining belief in unlimited state power,

appeared to be clever maneuvers for manipulating basically weak and disorganized foci of social dissent and bringing them under control with a mixture of repression and co-optation.

These limiting aspects, combined with those contributed by the clientelistic view, have greatly hampered the potential of the authoritarian-corporatist perspective for foreshadowing the complexity of the pressures for political change that Mexico experienced in the 1980s. This was particularly true of the explosion of democratic demands (Cordera Campos, Trejo Delarbre, and Vega 1988) that the state has attempted unsuccessfully to control via limited electoral reforms since the late 1970s (Gómez-Tagle 1988). Yet despite these limitations, the authoritarian-corporatist view still constitutes the main theoretical reference point of many recent analyses (Story 1986; Gentleman 1987; Cornelius 1987). The reasons for its longevity are not difficult to fathom: despite the undeniable signs that Mexico's political system is changing, authoritarian corporatism still provides the closest approximation to the main institutional mechanisms that are keeping Mexico's ruling regime in place in the early 1990s. The question that must be raised is whether this perspective can also help analysts understand what pressures for change this system of political organization is undergoing, despite restoration of tight state control following the 1988 presidential election.

Although peaceful democratic transitions are no longer unthinkable after recent events in Eastern Europe, it is nevertheless improbable that a highly entrenched system like the one ruling Mexico since the 1920s will be the willing architect of its own dissolution. Thus the contribution that the authoritarian corporatist view can make to studying political change must be sought in the strategies adopted by the political elite to retain power. Nevertheless, as with clientelism, analysts must also consider the conditions under which authoritarian-corporatist controls would be weakened to the point of ushering in new forms of political organization. Two kinds of processes of political change may therefore be considered: changes engineered from the presidency, which may be labeled as the transformation of authoritarianism, and the conditions leading to the weakening of authoritarianism.

In the initial formation of Mexico's postrevolutionary regime, state managers (the president in most cases) were perceived as shaping the political system: creating the official party, changing its membership (by including and excluding the military, incorporating peasants and labor, and so on), introducing reforms, and restructuring the economy. Yet although such actions represent political change, their implicit overall objective is to consolidate state power. Nevertheless, system reform, even if its efficacy is uncertain, must clearly be part of the analysis of political change. Presently, the reform of the official party ostensibly undertaken by the Salinas de Gortari administration constitutes yet another attempt at change

from above, one that represents political change insofar as it implies the transformation of authoritarianism. This reform effort may also have important implications for regime change if it fails to achieve its goal of restoring the hegemony of the official party.

Alternatively, political change can be predicated on the weakening of the mechanisms that have heretofore contributed to the stability of authoritarian corporatism in Mexico. Crises hold the potential for regime dissolution insofar as they are accompanied by factors that provide opportunities for the entry of new political actors and the success of alternate political expressions. Examples are intra-elite struggles and economic difficulties. As Miguel de la Madrid's *sexenio* was drawing to a close, many signs suggested the possibility of a democratic breakthrough. But as some authors have noted, the erosion of a power system does not usually provide sufficient reason for its demise (Stepan 1985; Foweraker 1989). Actual breakdown can usually be pinpointed accurately only after it has taken place (Knight 1989, 459). Yet the analysis of political change cannot be limited to predicting actual changes, short of being a mere exercise in guessing. It must be able to define regime debilitation, even if this symptom is not followed immediately by regime dissolution. Analysis of the weakening of the mechanisms that maintain authoritarian corporatism in Mexico must therefore be an important aspect of assessing political change. In short, authoritarian corporatism, as it has been applied to Mexico, refers to a logic of political power that places the source of change at the top of the political hierarchy, either as the direct result of reforms or as the failure of state managers to control the system during particular conjunctures.

The Class Perspective

Capitalism as the central object of study of the class perspective denotes a global process of interaction between a material base and a superstructure (or "mode of production") that simultaneously produces its own conditions of development and the contradictory tensions for its own transformation. Yet these broad principles are insufficient to explain the fact, unpredicted by Marx, that capitalist development in the periphery followed a path different from that taken by Western Europe. Why this has been so and how the lines of interaction between early- and late-developing capitalism should be conceptualized are questions at the core of the class debate regarding Latin America.

This article's interest in extracting the conception of political change that may be derived from this general debate must exclude all studies that fail to consider politics as theoretically significant, those that (in Marxist terms) entirely subsume social formations under the notion of mode of production, understanding them as mere instances of the global processes taking place on a world scale. This criterion thus excludes from the

present discussion a substantial portion of the literature that would consider Mexico (or any other formation in the capitalist periphery) as a mere point of articulation in a worldwide machinery, with no capacity to transform itself or affect the course of capitalism. This approach first and foremost excludes the dependency approach as represented by the works of André Gunder Frank and Immanuel Wallerstein. But it must also exclude the more historically oriented approach to dependency, exemplified by Cardoso and Faletto (1968), because it has failed to yield any detailed studies of internal class struggles in Latin American countries in general and Mexico in particular. I shall therefore engage in the debate over political change only with works that recognize the specificity of Mexican political institutions—particularly the state—or the capacity of class struggles to “act decisively to affect the character and shape of the development of productive forces within society” (Petras 1981, 152).

The backdrop against which studies of Mexico from the class perspective must be interpreted is the debate over the birth or transformation of the capitalist mode of production under the impetus of the Revolution of 1910, especially the problem of agency in this process. Although no consensus exists on whether the Revolution represented the transition to capitalism or simply a new phase of the historical process,⁵ nearly everyone agrees that the Revolution precipitated deep social and economic transformations by stimulating forces that transformed Mexico into a predominantly capitalist society.⁶ The question of the political leadership of the bourgeoisie in that process remains highly problematic, however: the Porfirian *comprador* bourgeoisie that held barely 10 percent of national wealth in 1910 (Gilly 1971) was not the major force behind the insurrection, which was actually composed of peasant, worker, and “petty bourgeois” elements. What later became the Mexican bourgeoisie is therefore more generally considered to be the heir rather than the source of the Revolution.

In attempting to solve this riddle, two possible interpretations have been offered. One attributes to the state the main role in simultaneously creating a bourgeoisie and expanding capitalism. The second interpretation upholds the principle of the political leadership of classes in the conduct of the state, albeit in the context of a fragmented dominant class that must make compromises with other classes or with the state

5. The world-systems approach contends that capitalism coincided with the formation of the international market around the sixteenth century (Wallerstein 1974). According to this hypothesis, Mexico has been capitalist since the hacienda system was created in the seventeenth century. Consequently, the Revolution in 1910 merely marked a new phase of capital accumulation shifting from an emphasis on export agricultural commodities to one on industrial production. Foreign capital also presents problems of interpretation. The mining sector in 1910 was fully capitalist but also entirely in foreign hands. Some authors therefore do not include this sector as part of Mexican capitalism.

6. Córdova (1985, 1986) is the only author of Marxist stripe to disagree with the consensus that the Revolution represented a major change.

itself. In the first perspective, the Revolution is considered a bourgeois revolution insofar as it ultimately benefited that class, but the state is perceived as exercising leadership over all classes through a political bureaucracy, hence its being defined as either “Bonapartist” (Leal 1974, 1986; Hodges and Gandy 1979; Semo 1985) or “paternalist” (Córdova 1985, 1986). The second interpretation traces different phases of capitalist expansion since the Revolution to the changing character of the class alliance undergirding state power (Cockroft 1983). In both approaches, the relative autonomy of the state—its capacity to manage the economy and class conflicts with relative independence from dominant classes—is perceived as stemming from the absence of class hegemony in Mexico.

The major political changes in Mexican history contemplated from the class perspective are those precipitated by economic changes: first the transition from commodity export to import substitution, and second, the shift to export-led industrialization. While the first trend led to the rise of a national bourgeoisie allied with transnational capital, the second is viewed as having been dominated by transnationalized monopoly capital. Although the state can temporarily delay these general economic changes and the class alignments associated with them, it must eventually give in to market forces or suffer the consequences. This point has been underscored by the political and economic crises experienced during the administration of Luis Echeverría (1970–1976), which Américo Saldívar attributes to the conflictive coexistence of various “class projects” in the policies of “shared development.” This unresolved conflict eventually crystallized monopoly capital’s opposition to the administration’s policies, leading to the fiscal and political crisis of 1976 (Saldívar 1985). Likewise, the state strategy to borrow in order to carry out economic projects and social reforms independently of the bourgeoisie (often cited as evidence of state autonomy in other perspectives) eventually backfired by leading to fiscal crisis and capital flight (Fitzgerald 1978; Hamilton 1985) and finally to the acute and protracted debt crisis of the 1980s (Alvarez 1987).

The class perspective generally views political change as a consequence of global economic transformations. In the Bonapartist interpretation, the state becomes the historical subject that pursues objectives, forges its own political cohesion through the official party, and generally imposes its conception of necessary interventions on all classes alike (Leal 1986; Córdova 1985, 1986). According to this view, class struggles are indefinitely frozen, leaving to the state the task of ensuring accumulation above and beyond the wills of dominant or dominated classes. Changes in the kind and direction of state interventions are therefore based on teleological assumptions that treat the state as a monolithic entity endowed with an inherent rationality with respect to the overall requirements of Mexican capitalism. The dismal failure of the administrations of José López

Portillo (1976–1982) and Miguel de la Madrid (1982–1988) to ensure stable conditions of capital accumulation, however, would seem to limit greatly the potential of this approach for studying political change in the 1980s and beyond. The Bonapartist view of Mexico also fails to specify the ways in which dominant classes are kept on the margins of politics. In other words, it overlooks Marx's stipulation that Bonapartism is an inherently unstable form of government, resorted to only briefly in times of crisis and with the explicit acquiescence of the bourgeoisie. Once the crisis is over, it is assumed that the bourgeoisie will regain its capacity to influence state policies (Marx 1972).

When the class perspective centers on class struggles as the crucial dynamic social process, political change becomes synonymous with struggles for hegemony among various fractions of the dominant class, as between national and transnational capital during the import-substituting phase of capitalist development. According to this perspective, the state is assumed to carry out a class "project," which implicitly defines it as an instrument of the victorious fraction or alliance. For example, state policies are viewed as alternating between serving the interests of a coalition of small business and labor on one hand and those of large national and transnational capital on the other (Cordera and Tello 1981). This thesis, however, is difficult to reconcile with the generally accepted idea that dominated classes in Mexico have no political role,⁷ mainly because Marxist orthodoxy rejects the possibility of a proletarian revolution taking place before capitalism has been fully developed. Only a few dissidents assert that the proletariat played a role in shaping Mexican political institutions and that its struggles against capitalism were either defeated (Cockroft 1972) or interrupted (Gilly 1971). But even these interpretations subscribe to a passive role for these classes once the Revolution has been institutionalized. This view implies that for the most part, the literature analyzing Mexico from a class perspective adopts for its own use the corporatist-authoritarian vision of a docile and co-opted proletariat with little capacity to destabilize or transform the political system.

Despite these limitations, the class perspective is an indispensable ingredient in analyzing political change in Mexico. By emphasizing growing inequalities within Mexican society, this view focuses on the process of class polarization that represents a potential threat to the status quo.

POLITICAL CHANGE IN THE 1980S: IN SEARCH OF EXPLANATORY SCHEMES

Despite the opportunities for studying political change open to students of Mexican politics via these four basic perspectives, these poten-

7. Saldívar (1985), for example, studies the decade of renewal of union insurgency, yet he devotes not a single chapter to that phenomenon.

tialities went largely unexploited until the mid-1980s. By the 1970s, early pluralist formulations attached to modernization theory had been dismissed, at which point most studies began to focus on political stability, rather than change, an approach viewed as the fruit of the *sui generis* combination of authoritarian-corporatist and clientelistic arrangements. Although dramatic or tragic moments in recent Mexican history were noted, they were not judged serious enough to undermine the capacity of the system to overcome momentary crises and make necessary adjustments. In particular, the student uprising of 1968, now considered by many as the first stirring of democratic demand (Loaeza 1989a; Foweraker 1989; Cornelius, Gentleman, and Smith, eds., 1989), was looked on as just another tragic chapter in Mexico's history of state domination of society.

Political change eventually found its way back onto the agenda of social scientists studying Mexico as a result of the return to civilian rule in some Latin American countries in combination with the severe economic crisis that befell Mexico after the debt moratorium of August 1981. While the democratizing trend called into question the strongly entrenched belief in the iron control of authoritarian regimes over society, the social and economic upheavals triggered by the economic crisis shook observers' faith in the crisis management capability of the Mexican state. Yet from the start, the task of explaining political change in Mexico differed radically from the analogous task regarding the countries of the Southern Cone, which were undergoing regime transitions. True to form, Mexico again failed to follow the patterns noted in other Latin American countries. Despite undergoing the most serious economic crisis since 1930 (and perhaps since 1910), few tangible events could be detected at first that marked political change, except for the increased electoral successes of the rightist PAN in 1982 and 1985. These events, however, could be considered a normal outcome of the political reform of 1977, which had been designed to combat electoral abstentionism without jeopardizing the position of the official party.

Students of Mexico, rather than being faced with a sudden and empirically identifiable set of changes to be explained "backward" by ex post facto reconstruction, were (and still are) "previewing" change from a forward-looking perspective. Neither its nature nor its direction can be specified with any certainty. Ambiguous but visible signs of wear on the ruling regime included the civic strikes of 1983 and 1985, teacher mobilization since the 1980s, and PAN's increasing militancy from 1982 to 1988, which was eventually crowned by the "political earthquake" of June 1988, an explosion of electoral opposition to the official party for the first time since 1940 (Lerner de Scheinbaum 1989; Cornelius, Gentleman, and Smith, eds., 1989). In response, analysts have begun to map out a variety of rationales for change that imply varying futures for Mexico.

The first question to be addressed is the extent to which the choice

of central processes and conceptions of political change found in recent discussions bear the mark of these previous formulations. Thus the question being asked is whether definitions of the crisis and transformation of Mexico's political system can be identified that follow the internal logic of each of the four perspectives outlined. The second question is whether such echoes provide useful theoretical rationales for predicting change.

The Authoritarian-Corporatist Argument for Change

The failure of the Mexican state and the presidency to control or manage the fiscal crisis in the 1970s that blossomed into the economic crisis of the 1980s provided the starting point for reassessing the resilience of Mexican authoritarianism (considered axiomatic in earlier studies). As the 1980s ended, many authors were questioning the viability of the old give-and-take methods followed by the party-state to overcome momentary crises (Cornelius, Gentleman, and Smith, eds., 1989; Meyer 1989).

The logic of authoritarian corporatism would dictate that reforms are undertaken to restore the power and prestige of the official party, which is considered indispensable for political continuity. Three central questions need to be answered. First, what changes are political elites prepared to make in order to retain power? Second, is the system capable of making those changes, despite entrenched interests? And third, is stability reestablished or not as a result of these attempts at reform? What the logic of authoritarianism does not dictate is the voluntary democratization of Mexican politics by established political elites, except on an extremely limited basis. Analysts are therefore dealing with the process accompanying the planned transformation from above of authoritarian corporatism, which aims at political continuity.

Before the presidential election of 1988, most analysts were focusing on this kind of planned change within the regime, as opposed to regime change. In this context, it is clear that "none of the reformist/modernizing elements within the regime is interested in pursuing changes that might put at risk the continued control of the key positions in the political system by the present ruling group" (Cornelius 1987, 16). Evidence of the resilience of Mexican authoritarianism has been perceived in the regime's capacity to pursue liberalization policies under the sting of economic crisis (Gentleman, ed., 1987), unlike other contexts in which such crises have triggered the emergence of brutal exclusionary authoritarian regimes. Since the 1988 election, reform in Mexico has been viewed as a way for the PRI to reconquer lost ground (Bailey and Gómez 1990). The logic of authoritarian corporatism is omnipresent in analyses in which the wisdom and foresight of the president is the major explanation for the move toward liberalization (Middlebrook 1986) or in which the development of opposition movements to the regime is interpreted as playing an

insignificant role in triggering the reformist mood of the government (Gentleman 1987).

In the most optimistic scenario, the Mexican state is characterized as capable of “energetic revival and remodeling of the existing corporatist system, rebuilt upon a new set of organizations and alliances” (Cornelius, Gentleman, and Smith, eds., 1989, 40). Oblivious of the strictures of the economic model embraced by the Salinas administration, this scenario generally envisions as unproblematic the successful “energizing” of grass roots that would simultaneously ensure the PRI’s victory and weaken the opposition. To succeed in recapturing a comfortable majority, the PRI is envisioned as “modernizing” in the sense of becoming internally more competitive (Cornelius, Gentleman, and Smith, eds., 1989, 41).

A somewhat less optimistic scenario echoes the previous one’s assumption of an elite reformist strategy yet questions the feasibility of proposed reforms. For example, it has been noted that PRI leaders fear a weakening of their membership base as a result of the legalization of opposition parties and that regional bosses oppose political liberalization because they fear losing control over state and local elections (Middlebrook 1986). These fears are not unfounded, as one analyst notes, considering the PRI’s increasing difficulties since the 1970s in ensuring voting discipline in its ranks and providing the customary “voting brigades” to perform the mandatory voting frauds (Garrido 1987).

A more pessimistic outlook asserts that the PRI’s proposed reforms for the 1990s are grossly unrealistic because they aim to make the PRI into something it has never been before—a representative body (Meyer 1989). This perspective defines the PRI not as a docile instrument of presidential will but as an empty shell lacking members and militants, incapable of attracting grass-roots support. Hence the PRI’s chances of becoming a participative and representative body are termed “practically nonexistent” (Garrido 1987, 76) or a “mission impossible” (Meyer 1989).

Had the theoretical premises of the authoritarian view been stated with more precision in such discussions, analysts would probably not be faced with such a gamut of opinions. Authors who borrow from the official discourse to describe the reform of the PRI as “modernization” (for example, Cornelius, Gentleman, and Smith, eds., 1989) do not specify whether they mean “democratization” or the more systematic use of co-optation and political subjection that is considered the hallmark of authoritarianism. In the first instance, even though political elites associated with the PRI may be hypothetically credited with initially opening the gates to pluralism (perhaps in an ill-advised effort to hold back the tide of democratic demands), they must lose control over the process at some point or else the situation is one of authoritarianism. For example, internal democratization of the PRI could quickly lead to internal political differentiation marked by major splits over policy areas—precisely the kind

of outcome traditionally held in check by heavy-handed corporatist control. In contrast, if “modernization” merely means having more than one officially appointed PRI pre-candidate for every political slot while the choice of candidate remains unsanctioned by internal elections (as seems to be true of the 1991 legislative election), then the logic remains that of authoritarianism, albeit a transformed version.

A second aspect of the authoritarian perspective that is generally neglected in such analyses is the nature of the concessions that would have to be made to the grass roots to restore confidence in the official party. This issue raises the question of how “inclusionary” a transformed PRI would have to be. Would welfare expenditures have to be significantly increased? Would the government have to alter its policy of wage restraints? Would the market-oriented economic model be reopened for discussion? Or are the concessions to be highly publicized, yet factually insignificant? In that case, how successful can such a strategy be after a decade of severe deprivation accompanied by sporadic popular mobilizations?

One more aspect that is left out of these discussions is the coercive component of authoritarianism. Can analysts realistically expect the Mexican government to revitalize the PRI without simultaneously crippling the opposition? Can government-controlled media be expected to grant coverage to opposition parties or PRI-dominated electoral commissions to report fairly on electoral returns? In short, can one really speak of a genuine PRI victory as long as the party has extensive means of repression at its disposal?

Each of these questions, drawn from the conceptual arsenal of authoritarian corporatism as inherited from the 1970s, suggests precise ways of empirically appraising the nature of the current reforms. This set of concepts also warns against confusing authoritarianism with pluralism: the task now before the PRI is not to become what it has never been (democratic) but to offer enough concessions to coax a significant proportion of the electorate into casting their votes in its favor. The goal is also to undermine the potential of opposition parties by less than fair means and by altering election results. Whether this objective is achieved in the old ways or with “modernized” techniques is a moot point.

The Clientelistic Cog in the Machinery of Authoritarianism

Can the PRI reform itself without altering the nature of the linkage that has been the basis of political integration in Mexico? And if these links are altered under the thrust of liberalizing reformism, can the regime survive? This question calls up the dark side of Mexico’s political regime, which is implicitly acknowledged by all but rarely examined in recent discussions of political change. What is at stake is not just the

composition of the official party but the principle of presidentialism, whose power is solidly entrenched in patron-client relations, starting with appointment of the Comité Ejecutivo Nacional of the PRI (Bailey 1987). As Luis Javier Garrido has noted, the extensive appointive powers of the president leads to political unaccountability of higher functionaries, which in turn leads to inefficiency and corruption (Garrido 1989, 418). A corollary to this axiom is that any strategy aimed at making the PRI more politically accountable should weaken bossism and corruption but would simultaneously deplete presidential power. The question of how far the president is willing to go in reforming the PRI is therefore closely linked with how much personal power the chief executive is willing to lose.

Bossism also forms the basis of PRI strength as the basic mechanism through which the rank and file are motivated to vote for the official party. It is difficult to imagine a more politically accountable system in which the boss of the Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos (CTM) would still be able to "appoint" union representatives to congress. At the same time, it is difficult to imagine that union bosses will continue to be willing to contain wage demands unless their extralegal (patron-client) powers are maintained. Underlying the current governmental position of leaving corporatism unquestioned while underlining the PRI's reform is the desire to avoid a confrontation with official leaders who continue to support governmental wage policies despite curtailing of their privileges (see Bizberg 1990; Segovia 1990; Cornelius, Gentleman, and Smith, eds., 1989).

Unless the implications of PRI reforms for transforming clientelism and, in turn, the implications of changes in clientelism for the overall stability of Mexico's political system are made explicit, analysts cannot project a precise image of the probable course that reformism will take in Mexico. Although clientelism, like authoritarianism, is a theoretical perspective that cannot furnish the answers, it can help formulate the questions that are crucial to understanding what lies under the mantle of current "modernization" policies.

The Pluralist Path to Political Change

Early formulations of the pluralist thesis on political change failed to perceive the significance of existing institutional obstacles to democratization in Mexico. In this context, the omnipresence of the state, the strength of the official party, and the absence of political pluralism were all interpreted as indications of an unfinished process of democratization that would eventually be completed. In contrast, more recent contributions to this view implicitly or explicitly include weakening of the mechanisms sustaining the authoritarian state as a prerequisite for the liberation of democratizing forces. As with the authoritarian perspective, the eco-

conomic crisis of the 1980s appears to many to offer an auspicious prelude to regime change. Yet in this case, such conditions are perceived as an opportunity for liberating pent-up demands for effective political participation. According to this interpretation, the reform of authoritarianism contemplated earlier would be insufficient to resolve the crisis of credibility suffered by the regime, although it might help strengthen the forces that would eventually achieve a genuine democracy.

At this point, it is important to distinguish between two lines of argument that imply radically different kinds of political change. The first and most fully analyzed is the conservative reaction to the crisis of the authoritarian-corporatist state that unfolded throughout the 1980s, leading to the strengthening of the Partido de Acción Nacional. The kind of democracy contemplated by this group is the creation of a political market based on the principle of competitive elections (Gilly 1990). The second line of argument calls for renewal of the redistributive goals of the Mexican Revolution. It has acquired a definite institutional shape in the creation of the Frente Democrático Nacional (FDN) out of a variety of left and center opposition parties that challenged the official PRI in the 1988 election. While the first argument calls for repudiating the "social pact" and the interventionist state, the second seeks to renew these principles via democratization. As will be shown, the latter is more closely associated with the class debate on democratization than it is with the pluralist perspective.

Considered a major voice of conservative tendencies, PAN has traditionally attracted a variety of social groups, from Catholic traditionalists to business elites and a small sector of the urban middle classes (Tarres 1987). Although PAN has been a permanent fixture in Mexican politics since the 1940s (Torres Ramírez 1971), it received scant scholarly attention until the 1980s. Its neglect was due in great part to the dominance throughout the 1970s of the authoritarian-corporatist view that has systematically minimized the importance of political dissidence. In the 1980s, however, the winds of democratization began to blow again through several Latin American countries, and PAN's electoral strength increased steadily (Molinari Horcasitas 1987; Gómez-Tagle 1988, 1990). In the process, the conservative right became the subject of speculation regarding the possibilities for democratic change in Mexico.

What links the analysis of this new development to the pluralist tradition is the focusing of many analysts on individual value changes and the generation of a new political culture as central explanations for the growing democratic demands channeled by PAN in the 1980s (Loeza 1989a, 1989b; Tarres 1986, 1990). Such changes are in turn supported by the classical pluralist argument of increased urbanization and education that are held responsible for politically activating the urban middle strata. The crisis of the 1980s has therefore merely sharpened the level of political

sciousness that has grown steadily under the influence of modernizing forces.

PAN represents an impatient new participative constituency that clamors for “unqualified democracy” (Krause 1987), yet one that merely aims at representing electoral interests. PAN has also become the focal point of demands for an end to the intervening state, that is, the cornerstone on which Mexico’s political institutions have rested since the Revolution. This approach would require the state to refrain from directing the economy but also to cancel its commitment to the popular classes, whose lot would be decided in the future by market forces. PAN can therefore be regarded from a pluralist perspective as a source of political change in two complementary ways: first, because its growing importance represents a change in the “civic culture” of Mexico, and second, because it favors economic individualism, also an important component of the pluralist tradition.

While the organizational form, political practices, and ideological commitments of the conservative forces pressuring for democracy are relatively clear, potentially democratizing influences coming from the left end of the political spectrum are much more difficult to capture analytically. Authors interested in the potential of social movements for democratic change have noted the break these movements represent with established practices of clientelism and state intermediation (Ramírez Saiz 1990; Carrillo 1990; Cook 1990), and hence their potential for eroding the PRI’s ideological hegemony. At the same time, however, these analysts recognize the difficulties faced by such movements in achieving effective political change. On one hand, in order to gain institutional strength, these movements must establish an enduring connection with the more stable organizational forms of the party, which threaten their own identities and independence and hence their potential democratizing influence. On the other hand, the sustainability of a stable leftist coalition capable of challenging both the PRI and the PAN has been questioned, despite the formidable campaign mounted by this coalition under the leadership of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas in the 1988 presidential election. The PRD that headed this coalition, while calling for an end to presidentialism and for the democratization of labor and peasant organizations, is still closely associated with revolutionary nationalism, which asserts the principle of state interventionism. The PRD has also been charged with replicating faithfully the “dedazo” system (finger-pointing as a method of selecting candidates) of the PRI, of which the PRD is the direct ideological heir (Carr 1989). Furthermore, the future of the Cardenista coalition is considered uncertain due to its failure to generate permanent organizational forms capable of sustaining a leftist coalition.

How likely is democratization, when perceived from the pluralist perspective? Clearly, it depends on the capacity of democratizing forces in

society to mount a serious enough challenge to established institutions either to topple the official party by electoral means or to force the government to define some limited institutional spaces within which democratic processes may develop unencumbered by authoritarian corporatist structures. The first scenario presupposes the ability of "pluralistic and democratic impulses from society [to] overwhelm by essentially peaceful means the regime's ability to contain such forces" (Cornelius, Gentleman, and Smith, eds., 1989, 43). It also implies the inability of the PRI either to carry out its internal reform thoroughly enough to recoup its electoral strength or to respond repressively and fraudulently to the electoral victory of rival parties. This optimistic scenario also ignores the profound fragmentation of democratizing forces in Mexico, especially the rift between the revolutionary nationalism of the democratic left and the neoliberalism of the right, which would seem to preclude their allying against the PRI (Carr 1989). This fragmentation has been manifested in the incapacity of opposition parties to establish stable structures and to offer specific alternatives to official policies following the 1988 election (Loeza and Pérez Gay 1989). The less optimistic scenario of partial democratization at the local and regional levels runs into the same institutional and ideological obstacles arising from the deep regional fragmentation of political allegiances, an outcome that is related to the PRI's reliance on local bosses (Asiz Nassif 1989b).

Revival of the pluralist tradition in recent analyses of Mexico undoubtedly represents a gain in that it has renewed scholarly interest in political phenomena issuing from society, as opposed to reducing them to the status of consequences of state actions. Yet this return has not been accompanied by thorough reexamination of the central propositions that have oriented pluralist thinking. As a result, the works inspired by this perspective have tended to endorse uncritically hypotheses bequeathed by early pluralist analyses without reaping the benefit of new evidence. For example, the economic approach in pluralist theory that viewed democracy as a natural consequence of economic development would appear to have been defeated by historical evidence. Most countries in Latin America turned away from democratic forms of government under the spur of economic growth in the 1960s but have come back to them amidst recession and debt crisis in the 1980s. In Mexico, economic downturn in the 1980s, rather than economic growth, appears to have accelerated democratic aspirations. Yet despite this evidence, the economic argument has made a comeback in a different disguise: it is now argued that political liberalization is inextricably linked with modernization of the economy because the corrupt and inefficient structures inherited from authoritarian corporatism hamper rational economic decision making. Although this argument (which is part of PAN's discourse) constitutes more an ideological position than a serious scholarly hypothesis, it is being diffused by

intellectuals (Krause 1987; Zaid 1987) and taken seriously to task in scholarly analyses (Cornelius, Gentleman, and Smith, eds., 1989, 35). The argument is nevertheless no different in essence from Dankwart Rustow's hypothesis of a close relationship between stages of economic development and democracy. The rationale implicit in both positions is that "pre-modern" (for Rustow) or "corrupt and inefficient" (for Krause and Zaid) structures are inadequate for modern capitalism. Both lines of reasoning predict that an archaic political system will or should be replaced by a modern, albeit democratic, one. This argument thus disregards the possibility that authoritarianism can be "modernized."

The "global conditions" approach to political liberalism also finds its niche in current discussions of Mexico's political future: electoral opposition has been located primarily in urban areas, where "large groups of the urban populace follow political developments events and . . . have access to more information than ever before through the press and electronic media" (Loeza 1989b, 351). Beneath this hypothesis is the pluralist credo that individuals develop civic capacities through constant contact with others in situations of communication and collaboration, as typified by pluralists in voluntary associations (Lipset 1960). But if this were true, then why has the now abundant literature on urban social movements not yielded more evidence of pressures for democratic political change? This body of work provides direct instances of citizen involvement in practical affairs like urban and land tenure, housing, local taxes, and public services. Yet most of those who have analyzed these movements admit that their role in effecting political change is limited (Foweraker 1989, 1990; Street 1991) and their linkages to the political apparatus, uncertain (Munck 1990). Is it not possible that electoral pressures like those experienced in 1988 are a passing phenomenon, with only shallow roots in permanent organizational structures capable of directing political action?

Finally, the cultural approach to political modernization that postulates a qualitative change in the attitudes of Mexicans toward their leaders from apathetic compliance to open defiance and participation also deserves closer examination. Is this phenomenon traceable to the 1968 student uprising as some argue (Loeza 1989a; Foweraker 1989; Bartra 1989; Cornelius, Gentleman, and Smith, eds., 1989)? Or should it be treated as a cyclical phenomenon periodically triggered by the internal tensions of authoritarian corporatism and then eliminated when these tensions are released by reforms? The first interpretation would allow analysts to speak of growing pressures for regime change, while the second entails pressure for authoritarian adjustments. Although the boundary between these two positions has often been blurred in recent analyses, the consequences for political change should be very different.

Class and Political Change

The class perspective has undergone significant change worldwide in the past decade. Democracy, which aroused little interest in the past, became a major focus of nonorthodox Marxists (Barros 1986; Chilcote 1988). In Latin America, the realization that popular mobilizations, far from bringing about social revolutions, had ushered in military dictatorships, led to revalidation of democracy as a means of popular empowerment (Chilcote 1988; Lechner 1986; Vasconi 1988; Brown 1988; Munck 1988). Yet the class focus on democracy should not be confused with either pluralist or authoritarian-reformist interest in this phenomenon. While the pluralist perspective focuses on electoral competition and authoritarian-reformist on authoritarian structures becoming more flexible, the class view looks upon democracy as the key to the equitable distribution of resources to the majorities in Latin America (Harding and Petras 1988). Formal democratic rights of freedom of speech and electoral competition are considered as mere means to these ends. Similarly, authoritarian reformism like that proposed by the Salinas administration would be judged as simply placing the stamp of legitimacy on a form of capitalism that excludes the majority from employment and exploits to an unprecedented degree the minority that makes up the formal labor force.

The orthodox view interprets the Mexican crisis in the 1980s as a new phase of capitalist relations of production rather than as a prelude to their demise. Consequently, the political changes associated with this new phase have no theoretical significance. They merely reflect changes in the composition of the power block resulting from these macro-changes (Rivera Ríos 1989). Thus now as before, rigid stagism in Marxist thinking impedes conceptualizing change that does not flow out of a change in the mode of production.

A second school of thought remains faithful to the idea of political change from below yet has difficulty in detecting evidence of such processes in Mexico's recent past. When labor remains identified as the major agent of change, the paradoxical fact must be faced that Mexican labor's increased exploitation has not been accompanied by a recrudescence of labor protest. The gradual opening of the Mexican economy to the international market since 1982 is said to have simultaneously marginalized official unions from making decisions about labor policy while further politicizing labor demands (de la Garza Toledo 1988). This process has in turn led to corporatism becoming obsolete as an instrument mediating the relations between labor and capital. The logical outcome of such a process should be mass desertion of official unions by the rank and file and renewed labor militancy via independent unions. To explain the fact that such a shift has not taken place, one analyst has proposed that the political crisis underlying these deep changes is still only partial in that it

has involved only a crisis in relations between the state and official union bosses (de la Garza Toledo 1988, 176). Yet this explanation leaves aside the question of why the rank and file should have stood by quietly while the bargaining power of their bosses was frittered away. Others have explained the relative lack of labor protest during the 1980s as displacement of the locus of discontent from the workplace to the neighborhood and community levels, a trend facilitated by the growth of the informal labor sector in relation to the formal sector (Davies 1990). This interpretation would account for the fact that the major challenges to the policies of economic austerity during the de la Madrid administration came from popular organizations headed by the *coordinadoras* (Carr 1986).⁸

A third group of analysts has bypassed the question of socialism altogether, focusing on permanence and change in identity as a point of entry into political change. This current is represented by Roger Bartra, who has focused on national culture as the key to consolidating political consensus in Mexico, noting the break in this consensus starting in 1968 (Bartra 1989). Yet what this change portends, apart from the promise of "alternative forms of expression" (Bartra 1989, 69), is far from clear. A less optimistic outlook in this line of thinking has been adopted by Sergio Zermeño, who argues that mass pauperization in the 1980s has led to general "decadence" and "anomie," and hence to a diminished capacity to organize on the part of subordinate classes (Zermeño 1990).

Given the current questioning of the major conceptual instruments that have guided class analysis in the past, construction of alternative future scenarios is greatly hampered. Having abandoned the concept of labor exploitation as the catalyst of revolutionary upheavals, the non-orthodox class perspective is left without its traditional theoretical ammunition to predict political change in the context of crisis. As the same time, this perspective has not developed its argument on democratization fully enough to formulate a theoretical domain clearly distinguishable from the pluralist perspective. Early hopes for the consolidation of Cardenismo as the institutionalized political expression of the left have been disappointed. Yet no alternative organizations have emerged to voice the demands of the impoverished Mexican masses, despite continued pressures on wages, increasing unemployment, and the generalized pauperization of the majority of Mexicans. The consequence of these difficulties is that more attention is being devoted to partial and micro changes, especially to the pressures for internal democratization in popular organizations, than to

8. An exception to that pattern is the teachers' union, which has been internally split since the 1970s between a militant "democratic tendency" struggling for union democracy and a traditionalist wing. This union has consistently and successfully fought for higher wages throughout the crisis years. Even so, it is not easy to classify within a traditional Marxist framework as part of the proletariat. For details on the teachers' movement, see Street (1986), Hernández (1986), Salinas and Imaz (1989), and Cook (1990).

macro political changes (Otero 1989; Carrillo 1990; Cook 1990; Fox and Gordillo 1989; Harvey 1990).

CONCLUSION

This article has sought to identify the theoretical frameworks within which the Mexican political system has been analyzed in the past in order to assess the difficulties each pose for studying political change as well as the opportunities for understanding this process. Four basic perspectives have been singled out—patron-client, pluralist, authoritarian-corporatist, and class—to demonstrate that each contains a distinctive logic of political permanence and change that has oriented scholarly work in the past and remains present in more recent works.

Today's analysts of political change in Mexico are still beholden to these earlier efforts, whether or not the more recent authors acknowledge their debt. The most important contrast found in their work is that between the logic of changes from above and that of changes from below. The first is most explicitly incorporated into the authoritarian-corporatist and patron-client perspectives. The logic of change from below, which has been associated with pluralist and class perspectives, may arise from the effects of a restricted democracy or from political mobilization of the masses.

Recognizing the multiplicity of sources of change implied by the different logics explaining such change, however, does not necessarily mean that these insights are interchangeable or can be combined indiscriminately. For example, it is a contradiction in terms to apply the vocabulary of pluralism to the subject of presidential reforms, as in saying that Mexico is becoming more democratic because the president has decided it will. It is similarly erroneous to discuss democratic processes in the terms of authoritarianism, as in speaking of the PRI leadership as "mobilizing" the grass roots. Thus the demarcation of theoretical horizons suggested by the present analysis underscores the complexity of analyzing political change by flagging the question of how different theoretical insights may be fruitfully combined, as well as the theoretical and methodological implications of such combinations.

This discussion suggests that no single theoretical framework can encompass the totality of the social processes that must be taken into account in analyzing political change in Mexico. For example, one may choose to analyze current institutional reforms engineered by the Salinas administration from the authoritarian-corporatist perspective, given that they come from the top down and aim at preserving the established order (albeit in a different form). This perspective, however, offers little in the way of explanation of why the Salinas administration is undertaking such reforms at all, especially in the face of strong internal opposition. The pluralist and class perspectives, in contrast, may go a long way toward

explaining the resurgence of urban movements and the increasing class polarization of Mexican society. A merger of the theoretical frameworks would suggest that class polarization and political mobilization create pressure on the authoritarian institutional framework, whose central elites are then moved to make changes to help them reinforce their power, whether through repression or reform or some combination of the two.

Thus the pluralist and class perspectives on social change offer explanations for the pressures and counterpressures to which the dominant order is subjected. Understanding these pressures provides insight into the reformist or repressive strategies adopted by the governing elite, even though the pluralist and class perspectives are alien to the logic of authoritarian corporatism and hence contribute little to the analysis of the dominant institutional framework. For that analysis, the authoritarian-corporatist and patron-client perspectives have more to offer.

Taken by themselves, each of the four perspectives offers only a partial and incomplete view of avenues of change. Analysts may make a variety of discoveries: that Mexican citizens are “ready” for participative politics; that authoritarian structures can be made more flexible or have become vulnerable; or that economic downturn has deepened inequality and exploitation. But history is full of instances when change has been held in check—despite the willingness of key actors to effect change or the “readiness” of society for a new kind of regime. In Mexico, democratic aspirations have been contained by the controlled participatory mechanisms imposed by state corporatism. But they have also surfaced periodically at various historical junctures, although not necessarily at the most favorable times, judging from the repression to which they have been subjected. In this sense, it may be said that the Mexican political system has always included important elements tending toward democracy: in the election of Francisco Madero following thirty years of a dictatorial regime; in the defeated struggles for union democracy of the 1940s; in the Henriquista movement of 1952; in the Movimiento de Liberación Nacional (MLN) of the early 1960s; or in the “democratic tendency” among electrical workers in the 1970s. The student uprising of 1968, far from being a qualitative step, is merely another dramatic landmark in a long process characterized by contradictory tendencies.

In sum, reexamination of the four explanatory schemes analyzed in this article suggests that the task before us goes far beyond formulating predictions on the basis of one particular logic of political change, as has been the practice in the past. This task requires that we distinguish clearly between forces pushing for and against change. It also requires the ability to deal with the complex interactions between the distinct mechanisms of political permanence and change that may simultaneously affect political institutions and actors. Following this path, we may begin to link the hypothetical scenarios of political change that have been proposed to par-

ticular configurations of societal processes, and ultimately to particular historical junctures. The result of such an open-ended theoretical strategy should be historically oriented studies of Mexico's political system that map out the different "mixes" of dynamic factors impelled by internal logics that alternatively reinforce and counteract one another, resulting in complex pressures and counterpressures for change.

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