

\* *democratization and politics in 1997*: Wayne Cornelius (Cornelius, Mexican politics....) outlines two scenarios for Zedillo, one in which enlightened reform will yield increased public support and greater power to discipline unruly elements of the official party, another in which a weak President will leave power vacuums permitting party "dinosaurs" and regional caciques increased sway, frustrating reformist elements and further frittering away public support, perhaps leading to the loss of majority control in the Congress in the 1997 midterm elections.

The evidence in February/March yields increasing credibility to the second, and in Cornelius' view, the more pessimistic scenario. The President's role is a vacillating one, as Dresser points out, initiating reforms and then backing off. The Mexico City election for the PRI has been put in the hands of one of the party's chief manipulators, Carlos Hank Gonzalez, and its candidate is read by many as a symbol of the dinosaurs. The influence of hard-line minister, Chauffet is also cited as indicative of a renewal of the power of the old authoritarians as the PRI comes under increasing threat. The cession of local -- the ex-Mayor of the Tabasco town of Cardenas, state - Layla Sansores -- daughter of a PRI state Governor and now PRD candidate for Governor of Campeche, and federal PRI leaders, primarily with options for the PRD, is reminiscent of the initial split nine years ago which led to the Cardenas candidacy in 1988 and the formation of the PRD by Cardenas, Munoz Ledo, Castillo and others shortly thereafter.

The PRI is in serious danger of losing two key bases of continuing power: the government of the capital, the Federal District and the 42% necessary to ensure its continued overall majority in the Congress. Those who favor alternation of parties in power, or decentralization or reduced executive authority do not view these possibilities as alarming or negative. The results of the local and state congress elections in Morelos in March -- which brought the PAN to municipal power in Cuernavaca, and the PRD to municipal power for the majority of the state including the city of Cuauhtla, were hailed by the President as evidence of the strength of democracy and by the opposition as portents of greater change.

At the same time, while the Federal mid-term, D.F. and other state gubernatorial elections have considerable portent for the Zedillo administration and the shape of politics through the year 2000, it should be kept in mind that there are significant areas where the elections have little apparent importance for people and where the abstention rate is extremely high. In communities visited in Oaxaca for example, abstention could be more than 60% and indigenous people find the whole exercise distant if not dangerous.

At the Federal level, in the capital, and in state capitals, the political atmosphere is highly charged. Some expect the civic and national elections to be inordinately "dirty", others see history unfolding as it should. In the states, particularly but not only in the south, assassination of opposition (particularly PRD) leaders and activists continues. Threats, press attacks, poster campaigns are aimed at all those assumed to be threatening the state/party system: the Civic Alliance, human rights and environmental advocates, progressive religious figures, etc. The increased presence and role of the military simply underline the continued and often urgent concern for human rights.