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This report is essentially a brief critical analysis of contemporary government in Mexico at the "grass roots" level. It is neither concerned with nor bears any relation to cities such as Mexico City, Guadalajara, or Monterrey where, to a significant extent, the city government is but an adjunct to the state or federal government and therefore atypical of the government of a municipio. These opinions are based on observations of the actual modus operandi of a group of relatively small Jaliscan municipalities: La Barca, population 43,000; Ocotlan, population 36,500; and Jamay, population 12,000.\*

### Theoretical and legal considerations

The Mexican constitution contains the following provisions which apply to the states and municipalities:

"For their internal government, the states shall adopt the popular representative, republican form of government, with the free municipality as the basis of their territorial division and political administrative organization.... Each municipality shall be administered by a council (ayuntamiento), elected by direct popular vote, and there shall be no intermediate authority between this body and the government of the state....

\*The term "municipality" as used here refers to the administrative unit in Mexico which approximates the "county" or "township" in the USA. It includes the urban center and the outlying communities which comprise the municipio.

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Municipal presidents (Presidentes Municipales) and aldermen (Regidores), chosen by direct popular election, may not be reelected for the term immediately following. (Emphasis added)

These constitutional provisions form the organic underpinning of municipal government in Mexico and at the same time theoretically militate against the development of political dynasties at the municipal level. Another very important constitutional stipulation provides that "municipalities shall freely administer their finances...and shall be invested with juridical personality for all legal purposes. However, the federal executive and the governors of the states shall command the public forces in the municipalities where they customarily or temporarily reside."

The term "public forces" as cited above has been interpreted by the Mexican Supreme Court to include "all federal, state, and municipal forces" and has resulted in the federal government, on various occasions, assuming active control of local and state militias without consulting the municipal authorities affected. This provision has consequently resulted in the federal government exercising absolute power over the states and municipalities in a manner unknown in the United States. However, aside from the question of control of the "public forces", the Mexican Constitution clearly grants to the municipalities the right to govern themselves as cognizable political units. So much for theory and legality.

#### The Role of "El Invincible"

Any discussion of government in Mexico, at whatever level, must devote considerable attention to the role of the "official" party, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional. Though the Mexican Constitution foresaw and legalized the development of political parties it never anticipated the PRI. Hence, above and beyond the tri-partite government envisaged in the constitution of 1917, stands the ubiquitous "official" party, and perforce municipal government is controlled and directed, with rare exceptions, through the national, state, and municipal committees of the PRI. Since the outcome of elections, whether they be at the local, state, or federal level, is a foregone conclusion, nomination by the PRI is tantamount to election. Therefore, the real election takes place within the PRI at its nominating conventions. At the municipal level this means, inter alia, that the presidente municipal and the regidores must be approved by both the local PRI organization and the State Executive Committee before they are officially nominated. It also means that the municipalities are ipso facto satellites of the State Executive Committee of the PRI; that is, they cannot in any real sense select their governments.

#### Municipal Government in Action

The election of the Presidente Municipal is the event which most arouses political interest in the average Jaliscan. The Presidente is, by law,

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a resident and by custom a native of the town in which he governs. He (or she in rare instances) is usually a successful businessman or farmer and member of a prominent local family. He may or may not be devoutly Catholic but his wife and daughters will be, and under no circumstances will he be a Protestant, legalized freedom of religion notwithstanding. He may or may not be personally popular with his constituency but he is respected or feared. In addition, of course, he must be acceptable to the State Executive Committee of the PRI.

The intellectual capacity of the Presidente apparently depends on the size and importance of the municipality which he governs. For example, not one of the Presidentes of the three municipalities on which this report is based has the equivalent of a high school education. One is barely literate with almost no knowledge of the world outside his fiefdom, while the other two are quite conversant about local, state, and national issues. The State Executive Committee of the PRI has, of late, tried to change the image of the local caciques from that of blundering ignoramuses to one more favorable. Nevertheless, most of the Presidentes are not educated beyond the primary school level and a number are actually illiterate. Understandably they are in constant need of "advice" from Guadalajara.

In most Jaliscan communities "continuismo" is the rule rather than the exception; that is, the same group of persons actually controls the political life of the township on a continuing basis; in many instances, the same family. Fiefdoms, or cacicazgos as they are called in Mexico, are gradually dying out in Jalisco. However, this depends primarily on the size and stage of economic development of the community. For example, in the smaller of the three model towns, Jamay, the same family has actually occupied the presidency for sixteen of the last twenty-two years. Two brothers, an uncle, and two first cousins have rotated the presidency between them, taking full advantage of the constitutional leniency which permits non-consecutive election to most public offices. During this same period, the two brothers rotated the presidency of the local PRI organization, which in turn selected the two non-family presidentes. Such is life in the small agrarian community.

In larger municipios such as the other two of the model towns, the selection of the Presidente follows a more democratic pattern. In Ocotlan, for example, the last five presidentes have been unrelated consanguinely, though all have belonged to the public sector (sector popular) of the PRI. This is the normal pattern in a town in which the business and commercial interests are dominant. In La Barca, a mixed economy town in which the agricultural sector is strongest, the presidency is rotated between the agricultural and business sectors.

The term "agricultural sector" as used here does not mean the ejidatarios; rather, it refers to the large landowners who make their living from the

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land but through the labor of others. It includes, for example, extremely wealthy families such as the Covarrubias and the Zuno Hernandez of San Agustin, Municipality of Jamay, as well as others less well known. This "campesino" is in reality the modern Hacendado who politically belongs to the sector campesino of the PRI, associates himself publicly with the aspirations of the great mass of farmers who earn their living from the soil, but whose family lives much as do the families of the wealthy business class. The Presidentes selected from the campesino sector are in politics primarily to see to it that the squatters (paracaidistas) make no attempts to dispossess them of their lands, or if they try, that the police power will be in friendly hands. In other words, the leaders of the campesino sector are normally wealthy farmers who have a vested interest in the political control of their communities.

The presidente municipal in the day-to-day execution of his functions acts very much like his U. S. counterpart. He appoints the chief of police and the city manager (secretario del ayuntamiento), the municipal treasurer, and other minor officials. The secretario acts in the absence of the presidente and functions much as the Secretario de Gobierno functions in the State Government. The secretario is usually a younger and more energetic person than the presidente and must be fairly intelligent as he has to answer all official correspondence and, in many cases, prepare legal documents. He is the Presidente's closest adviser and helper and usually is a personal friend.

Since most of the members of the local ayuntamientos receive salaries quite inadequate to their actual needs, most have other sources of income. Even the presidentes themselves devote at least as much time to their outside interests as they do to their official duties. The Presidentes of the three model towns mentioned at the outset of this report are all wealthy men in their own right. The Presidente of Ocotlan lives in Guadalajara and commutes daily to Ocotlan, a distance of fifty miles. Though he is a native of the Ocotlan area (actually he is from Jamay, some six miles from Ocotlan) he has variegated commercial interests in Guadalajara, to which he devotes at least half of his time. His weekends are all spent in Guadalajara. In his absence, as in the other towns, the secretario carries on his duties.

It should be pointed out at this point that the odium normally associated with the concept of "conflict of interest" as it is known in the United States is not to be heard of in Mexico, at least not at the municipal level. It would be unthinkable under present circumstances in Jalisco, for example, to attract competent people to political office if they had to divest themselves of their private holdings in order to hold public office. On the contrary, most of these politicos are attracted to their profession precisely because of the opportunities for personal enrichment that these posts represent. Suffice it to say that the salary which the office of Presidente Municipal proffers is of minimal importance to the

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person seeking the post.

The Presidente is assisted by a council of regidores (aldermen) who have responsibilities for essential public functions; i.e., schools, water, electricity, markets, labor relations, etc. Their numbers vary with the size of the municipality. In La Barca, for example, the largest of the model towns with a population of 43,000, there are 6 regidores, while in Jamay, the smallest of the model towns with twelve thousand inhabitants, there are five. By contrast, Guadalajara has ten.

The regidores usually represent the official sectors of the PRI as well as the more influential special interest groups; i.e., the farmers or campesinos are traditionally represented by the president of the Farmers League (Comunidad Agraria); the females by the president of the sector femenino; the organized industrial workers by the leader of the local sub-division of the CTM (Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos). Generally speaking, however, substantive decisions regarding the operation of the municipal government are made by the presidente in consultation with the head of the local unit of the PRI.

The regidores meet approximately twice monthly to approve decisions made in Guadalajara by the state administration or to submit proposals to the Presidente who decides whether or not they should be discussed with higher authority or can be acted upon locally. Nothing of substance is done locally without first checking with Guadalajara.

In the actual operation of the Jalisco municipality the presidente municipal is the central figure. However, he consults constantly with the state and federal deputies for his electoral district on all matters which involve expenditures of state or federal funds, all disputes which might attract the attention of the press, all invasions of private lands, and all projects which might incur municipal indebtedness. There is no written requirement that the state and federal deputies be consulted in the above mentioned instances. Nevertheless, every presidente knows the rules of the political game as it is played in the state and if he wishes to have a successful administration he follows them unswervingly.

The diputados, as the state and federal representatives of the electoral districts are known, control the financial strings to the state and federal administrations. Practically all public works projects are tri-partite; i.e., the federal, state, and local governments all share in their costs. Consequently, a local administration is obligated to receive advance approval from the state and federal governments before it can initiate any public works project of consequence. In actual practice, the state government, through its State Planning Commission, carries out cost and feasibility studies of all proposed municipal public works projects. However, even this preliminary step must be ordered by the Governor on the recom-

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mentation of the state and local deputies for the municipality concerned. Obviously in such a highly centralized system, local independence is practically unknown.

### CONCLUSION

From the brief facts set forth above it is possible to draw a number of salient conclusions regarding local government in Jalisco. First, it is patent that municipal government in a uniparty system is but an extension of the party apparatus itself. The entire ayuntamiento is comprised of party loyalists who know the system and accept its demands unequivocally. This assures fealty and conformity.

The second truth that can be extrapolated from this analysis is that the system is not only self-perpetuating but concomitantly militates against the emergence of political opposition at the grass roots level. For example, if by some chance a non-PRI administration comes to power in a Jaliscan municipality, such as recently happened in Teocaltiche, it immediately finds itself politically isolated and surrounded by enemies who can effectively cut it off from all state and federal assistance. A practical effect of this system is that a non-PRI municipal administration either functions in accord with the dictates of the PRI or with great difficulty, if not actual strife; i.e., Hermosillo, Merida.

Finally, it can reasonably be concluded that, for the immediate future, the system herein examined is unlikely to change dramatically. The reasons are manifold and ubiquitous; widespread ignorance and illiteracy, political apathy, lack of a tradition of resistance to authority, the realities of economic power available to the Caciques, and fear of the unknown. The PRI, by political sophistry in some instances and enlightened benevolence in others, manages to stay a few steps ahead of real difficulty. For the short term the populace is likely to remain basically quiescent and malleable. However, with the passage of time and an increase in political sophistication, which is the inevitable product of economic and educational progress, the demand for more representative democracy at the local level will likely increase, albeit slowly, until it is satisfied.

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