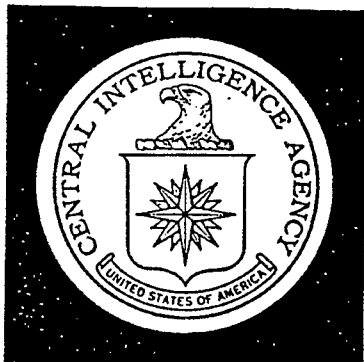


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DIRECTORATE OF
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WEEKLY SUMMARY

Special Report

Challenges to Mexico's Single-Party Rule

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CHALLENGES TO MEXICO'S SINGLE-PARTY RULE

The Diaz Ordaz administration's modest efforts to liberalize the government have intensified the popular cry for reform, and protest against the authoritarian style of Mexico's one-party system is surfacing with increasing frequency on a local level. These efforts have also stiffened the resistance of powerful old-guard political bosses who fear a diminution of their control. Last summer's student demonstrations provided the largest open manifestation of discontent with the government in three decades.

It is apparent that Mexico's unique political system, which was so effective in governing a backward society and which brought prosperity and education to many, is now being outgrown by an increasingly sophisticated, articulate public. Diaz Ordaz may have loosened the fiber of resistance to change, so that with good leadership the system can remain flexible enough to mature along with the population. Mexico's political course will probably be one of experimentation over the next few years, and the direction it finally takes could be chosen by Diaz Ordaz' successor.

With his six-year term expiring in December 1970, Diaz Ordaz will be under pressure from all sides seeking to influence him in selecting the presidential candidate for the July 1970 election, and this pre-election year promises to be an especially tough one for Mexico's ruling party.

Background

Mexico's political and economic progress in the midst of the political turmoil and fiscal irresponsibility associated with the Latin American region is generally credited to its unique political institution of "continuing revolution"--the Insti-

tutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). Embodying the myths, legends, and ideals of the 1910 Revolution, the PRI over the past 40 years has brought Mexico out of backwardness into its current status as a rapidly developing nation. Recently, though, the PRI has been strained by an increasingly sophisticated

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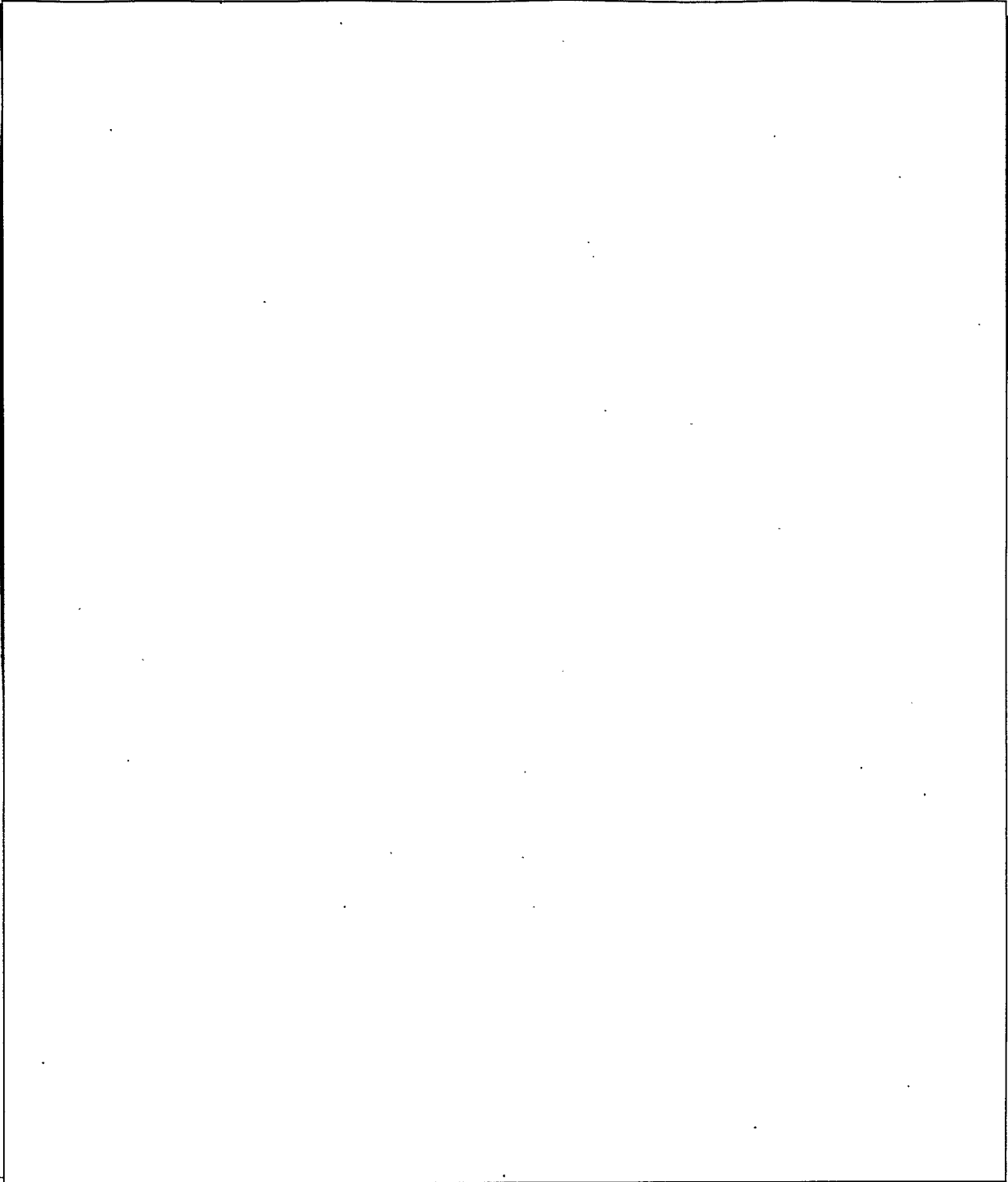
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signals that Mexico's vaunted progress and genius for stability have seen better times. The effect of the student movement at the very least is to have intensified the self-examination already in process among the nation's political leaders.

The Protest

Tough action by riot police and regular police on 22 and 23 July to put down clashes between students from rival prep schools triggered student charges of police brutality. On 26 July, an authorized demonstration organized by a government-influenced student federation was joined by a smaller group of Communists celebrating the Cuban anniversary. After the radical students turned the march into a violent looting spree, clashes with police intensified student charges of brutality. Further rallies generated violence beyond the control of riot police, and paratroopers were called in to quell the disturbances during which several were killed and hundreds were wounded.

Student demands grew beyond those for disbanding the riot police and now include indemnification for the injured students and the families of the dead, withdrawal of the army from occupied schools, and release of student prisoners. The several large, disciplined marches that were held showed unprecedented student determination on a fixed issue, but also provided a continuing threat of violence. Despite attempts by

The Newest Challenge

Beginning in July 1968, Mexican university and secondary school students projected themselves as a new force on the political scene. The fact that this hitherto bothersome but relatively inconsequential and disorganized element could suddenly shake a highly structured, generally sophisticated administration is attributable almost entirely to the timing of events. Minor disgruntlement over police interference in a school fight ballooned into a full-scale student movement against the government--less on the merits of the grievances expressed than because the XIX Olympiad in Mexico City provided a unique forum for protest.

There is, nevertheless, an authentic context for some of the protests of the students, whose efforts represent still another in a series of warning

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activist minorities of all shades to take over or influence the student movement, or to reorient it against the US or Communists, or toward other Mexican problems, the struggle remained confined to the original complaint plus those directly related to the developing events. Most of the numerous reports linking the movement to ideologically or politically motivated subversives have remained unsubstantiated. The protest steadily sharpened its focus on the Diaz Ordaz administration, with attacks on prominent cabinet and cabinet-level officials and even scathing criticism of the President, who is traditionally inviolate in Mexico.

By October, the movement had achieved world-wide notoriety. The students had caused the worst civil disorders Mexico had experienced in over 20 years and jeopardized the Olympic Games scheduled to begin on 12 October. Far and away the worst, and for all practical purposes the final, incident came on 2 October when a large rally in the Plaza of Three Cultures in Tlatelolco district erupted into a wild gunfight that killed scores of persons and injured an estimated 1,000. This "Tlatelolco massacre," as it was quickly dubbed even by the Mexican press, effectively ended large demonstrations, and, although a student boycott of classes continued through 1968, student leaders were unable to organize further manifestations on the scale that had previously characterized the movement.

The Government Response

The official handling of the student strike was inept. The government, which had suffered unaccustomed bad press for [redacted] electoral fraud in Baja California earlier in 1968 and also in 1967 for the imposition of an unpopular governor on the openly rebellious citizenry of Sonora, became the object of criticism around the world because of the presence of the international press, in Mexico for the Olympics. The Diaz Ordaz administration lost considerable face during the prolonged and sometimes violent strike. It was criticized both by those who thought the government should have taken hold of the situation early, even if by force, and by those who thought a conciliatory attitude was in order. While the smooth staging of the Olympic Games did much to redeem the prestige of the government and the nation, it could not erase the internal political damage.

There was apparently no expectation that the student protest would become a crisis. The government's preoccupation with readying for the Olympics had already led it to warn the Communist Party and probably other extremist groups that there would be absolute intolerance for any activity that might mar the games. The authorities evidently discounted the possibility of a problem not inspired by subversives. Official blindness to real dissent or to spontaneous protest is in a sense characteristic

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in Mexico, where internal difficulties are commonly attributed to "outside agitation." One of the initial responses of the government to the student disturbances was to arrest Communist party leaders. Throughout the subsequent months of crisis, government officials laid the culpability variously at the doors of Cuba, the USSR, Communist China, and US security agencies.

These tactics did less to discredit the student movement than to discredit the government itself. Moreover, while force eventually did cause the collapse of the protest as a mass movement, and students have returned to classes, some of the legitimate causes espoused by the youths are now being given attention. New legislation has relaxed the machinery for releasing political prisoners, and hearings are being held with an eye to reforming article 145 of the criminal code by which political dissidents are held for the crime of "social dissolution." Almost all students have been released from jail. Educational reform is under study, and the head of the PRI has admitted publicly that the party has for a long time forgotten university youth.

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