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Transforming State-Society Relations in Mexico: The National Solidarity Strategy by Wayne A. Cornelius; Ann L. Craig; Jonathan Fox

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A few critical remarks on a well written, intelligent, and extensively documented book. Regime change, such as the one that took place in the twenties and in that is occurring at the present day, is not only the result of socioeconomic changes, but also of the emergence of new social classes and the challenges posed to the regime from the economic sphere, as Collier argues. In addition to those 'external' factors, there is an equally important element, namely the transformation of the regime from within by the political and economically dominant classes, to make it compatible with the new economic model that is being implemented. This has meant a transformation of the character of the Mexican state that has destroyed its populist roots of legitimacy, and has thus questioned its alliance with labour and other popular organisations. This remark is directly related to my view that Collier's notion of political regime lacks one main element, which is that besides a specific alliance and its sources of legitimacy, a political regime is also defined by the *character* adopted by the state.

A last minor remark that, nevertheless, reveals a disturbing process concerning the relationship between Mexican and Anglo-Saxon scholars is that of the literature that is being used by the latter. While the utilisation of Anglo-Saxon authors writing on Mexico is comprehensive, that of Mexican academics is very incomplete; only those Mexican authors that publish in the USA or in Great Britain, or those quoted in US and British publications are mentioned. It seems to me that this process is due to the fact that Mexican studies have become an academic speciality in the US and British scholarly scenes, and that the 'experts' on Mexico feel self-sufficient and have very little to do both with Mexico and Mexican authors. One would expect that authors as intelligent and serious as Collier could resist this trend.

*El Colegio de México*

ILÁN BIZBERG

Wayne A. Cornelius, Ann L. Craig and Jonathan Fox (eds.), *Transforming State-Society Relations in Mexico: The National Solidarity Strategy* (La Jolla, CA: University of California, San Diego, 1994), pp. xiii + 368.

The implications and nature of the poverty alleviation strategy of the Salinas government, the National Solidarity Program (PRONASOL), have been a subject of much academic and political debate since its inception. The latest round of controversy took place the very night of the August 21st presidential elections when the candidate of the conservative Partido Acción Nacional blamed his defeat on the electoral influence of Solidarity (as the programme is known in Mexico).

Although this volume analyses different aspects of PRONASOL, from its capacity to respond to situations of extreme poverty in urban areas to its impact in specific regions, the central theme that underpins most of the contributions are the political motivations and consequences of the programme. Does Solidarity reproduce the clientelistic relationships typical of the Mexican political system? Has Solidarity been a political tactic to regain votes from those communities that embraced the Cardenista alternative in the 1988 elections? These are some of the questions that the researchers in this book attempt to answer.

These concerns make Denise Dresser's essay 'Bringing the Poor Back In: National Solidarity as a strategy of Regime Legitimation,' the most influential

chapter in the book. Dresser claims that PRONASOL is nothing but a strategy of political survival for the Mexican regime. Her basic argument is that the programme is a response to the social and political dilemmas of the neoliberal development model. It entails a redefinition of the old clientelistic network as communities and individuals become consumers of PRONASOL services. At the same time, Solidarity has channelled resources to places where the official party had lost considerable ground in the last presidential elections.

Even though other authors in the volume agree with the notion that PRONASOL is driven by electoral purposes, they do not characterise it as clientelistic. Molinar Horcasitas and Weldon, for instance, consider that the programme shows the electoral responsiveness of the Mexican government. This is significant in a country where elections have not been the point of reference to assess political consensus. In their view, the Mexican state is using methods similar to those employed by democratic regimes in which there is an actual competition for votes, rather than constructing a neocorporatist alliance.

This analysis, however, overlooks the history of the Mexican political system. The emergence of organisational structures alternative to the PRI's corporatist network under Solidarity does not eliminate patronage and control. By the same token, the presidency's direct allocation of funds to specific projects and the creation of a parallel PRONASOL bureaucracy might be just a more efficient way to refurbish the political pact. After all, presidential discretionary power has been a central element in the articulation of the postrevolutionary political system.

It is precisely the contribution of the historian Alan Knight that points at the experience of previous antipoverty programmes in Mexico. Solidarity, he warns us, might be another project, in a longstanding tradition, to use government patronage to reconstruct the relationship between state and civil society at a time when the edifice appears ready for demolition.

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RUBÉN HERNÁNDEZ LEÓN

Deborah Levenson-Estrada, *Trade Unionists Against Terror: Guatemala City, 1954-1985*. (London and Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), pp. xv + 288 (with photographs), \$45 hb, \$15.95 pb.

In 1976, one hundred and fifty two workers at the Coca Cola bottling plant in Guatemala City inaugurated a hunger-strike to protest being fired for organising a union. Thus began a ten-year labour struggle that involved the brutal murders of eight union members, gained worldwide attention, tested the collective will of union members, yet ultimately resulted in one of Latin America's most significant labour victories. In succinct but fluid style, Deborah Levenson-Estrada tells this story within the context of an urban labour movement that 'produced a space in which democracy, egalitarianism and honesty have been at least valued'. She bases her narrative on interviews of more than one-hundred trade unionists. The work is often their story, but her summations provocatively challenge traditional assumptions about trade union success -- the economic bases of working class consciousness, the importance of middle class alliances, party politics, and the need for state power. In probing worker motivations in this predominantly Mayan country, she discovers nuanced influences from religion, family and gender as well as ethnic relations.