

THE EMBERS OF REVOLUTION, 1968–2000

My real commander is the people.
— SUBCOMANDANTE MARCOS

During a dinner in July 1995, Alejandra García Quintanilla reflected on her recent experiences with the Zapatista movement in Chiapas. A Monterrey native who had relocated to Mérida, Yucatán, and a scholar of Mexican history with a doctorate from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Alejandra wore a traditional Maya *huipil* dress. Her face was radiant as she described her involvement in running food and medicine into the highlands near the provincial center of San Cristóbal de las Casas, appropriately named after the Franciscan friar who had first brought the plight of indigenous campesinos to the world's attention in the sixteenth century. Before graduate school, Alejandra had spent time underground as a member of various clandestine opposition movements. Now she formed part of a vast network in civil society that assisted the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (Zapatista National Liberation Army, or EZLN). The year before, the EZLN had seized San Cristóbal and several nearby towns and villages, but the federal army had encircled the movement, which drew its name from Emiliano Zapata and called for a wide array of improvements for the country's indigenous and rural population. Nearing starvation, the rebels could only count on allies like Alejandra for their survival. "The EZLN," said Alejandra, "is all that is left of the revolution!"¹

In fact the efforts of Alejandra and others like her represented the embers of the Mexican Revolution at the close of the twentieth century. Veering from a neopopulism that vainly sought to recapture the magic of Lázaro Cárdenas to a neoliberalism that embraced global capitalism in order to make Mexico a First World nation, the PRI and the state it directed had struggled to regain traction after the Tlatelolco massacre. Amid this struggle, Mexicans such as Alejandra found new political meaning outside the self-proclaimed Institutional Revolutionary Party. Thus even as the PRI continued to decline, the symbols of revolution remained relevant to many Mexicans.

THE NEOPOPULIST REVIVAL (AND COLLAPSE)

In 1970, the year Mexico hosted its first soccer World Cup, the PRI was still reeling from the Tlatelolco

massacre less than two years before. In 1970 Díaz Ordaz gave the *dedazo* to former secretary of gobernación Luis Echeverría Álvarez, who inevitably became the party's standard-bearer in that year's presidential election. An attorney from Mexico City and from a politically prominent family, a priista who had never stood for a single political office, Echeverría had represented the government in its negotiations with student leaders just prior to the massacre. At first glance, Díaz Ordaz appeared to have made another mistake. But Echeverría played his cards well at this difficult juncture, ably shifting the official party's direction according to the needs of the moment. Associated with the unpopular and draconian Díaz Ordaz regime, the candidate rehabilitated his image by embarking on a national tour that evoked memories of the great campaigns of Madero in 1910 and Cárdenas in 1934. Echeverría's political pilgrimage covered thirty-five thousand miles and featured visits to approximately nine hundred municipalities in all twenty-nine Mexican states and the then-territories of Baja California Sur and Quintana Roo. Clad in the traditional tropical shirt, the *guayabera*, the PRI candidate reinvented himself as a populist, making frequent references to Lázaro Cárdenas as his mentor. At one rural campaign stop, Echeverría declared, "If the vote of the people favors me and I am elected President of the Republic, I will not be able to sleep at night during the six-year term unless I have the certainty of having done that day something for the agricultural progress and the welfare of the peasants."² In September 1970 the federal government declared that Echeverría had won the election with 86 percent of the vote. Although some of this margin was the work of PRI machine politics and even outright ballot box stuffing, the candidate's victory was impressive under the circumstances. As the journalist Elena Poniatowska recounted, Echeverría also reached out to the young in an effort to wash the stain of blood from the hands of the regime: "[His] government carried the stigma of Tlatelolco, which it tried to remove at all costs. . . . The president set out to conquer the students with a vehemence that would have been unthinkable without Tlatelolco. . . . The government recognized that the student movement, with all its faults and virtues, was . . . a vital force in the country."³

From the outset, the new president faced difficult times. In particular his government confronted the violent aftershocks of Tlatelolco. The killings had radicalized the student movement, and many of its adherents had turned toward Marxism, some of them going underground. Some joined urban guerrillas, and others participated in rural rebellions such as the ones commanded by Lucio Cabañas and Genaro Vázquez in the mountainous state of Guerrero—since the 1810s, a hotbed of insurrection. The northern part of this state had been one of the mainstays of Zapatismo during the revolution, and Cárdenas's home state of Michoacán bordered Guerrero from the west. Both Cabañas and Vázquez were Marxist schoolteachers inspired by the Cuban Revolution as well as Cardenismo and the iconic figure of Zapata. They were leaders of popular organizations that had confronted state-sponsored violence against militant campesinos during the 1960s, before themselves opting for clandestine action and armed struggle. In 1973 an urban guerrilla group, the September 23 Communist League, killed a wealthy industrialist, Eugenio Garza Sada, patriarch of the Monterrey Group and one of

the wealthiest men in the nation. Cabañas's forces kidnapped a federal senator, and in 1974 yet another revolutionary group held for ransom Echeverría's father-in-law, the former Jalisco governor Guadalupe Zuno Hernández.

Borrowing a page from the South American dictatorships that coincided with his rule, President Echeverría unleashed a veritable *guerra sucia*, or dirty war, against them. He sent over ten thousand federal troops (roughly 15 percent of the army) into Guerrero to carry out a scorched-earth campaign that killed hundreds of innocent civilians along with Cabañas and twenty-seven of his closest collaborators. As one campesino, whose neighbor had been brutally tortured and killed by the army in hot pursuit of Vázquez, lamented in a letter to the secretary of defense, "We have returned to Porfirian times!" A month later, soldiers ambushed the campesino, forced him to dig his own grave, and buried him alive after knocking him unconscious.⁴

The government also encouraged private efforts to crack down on the organized Left. For example, on June 10, 1971, a right-wing paramilitary group known as Los Halcones attacked peaceful protesters in Mexico City while police and security forces stood by. Later on, it was revealed that the Halcones were on the payroll of the government. Echeverría also ordered agents from the Dirección Federal de Seguridad (DFS) to infiltrate university student, staff, and faculty organizations to get advance warning of any planned protest activities. Founded in 1947 as part of the Secretaría de Gobernación during the Alemán presidency, the DFS aimed to defend the political order against subversion and terrorist threats, congruent with the prevailing Cold War doctrine of internal security.

While Echeverría thus brutally repressed left-leaning groups *within* Mexico, he sought to appease the Left by offering verbal support for left-wing and nationalist movements *outside* the nation. For a country that had experienced half a dozen foreign invasions since independence, no aspect of government policy was fraught with more symbolism than foreign affairs. Moreover the international panorama offered a unique opportunity for Echeverría to burnish his preferred image as a champion of the Left. In the early 1970s the United States was bogged down in Vietnam, with no apparent way out. In Latin America, Mexico increasingly appeared to represent a middle road between two opposing tendencies: the rise of military regimes in Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay, and of socialist ones in Cuba and Salvador Allende's Chile. Echeverría watched both of these tendencies closely: the military dictatorships, because Mexico was emerging as a destination for political exiles, and socialist regimes, because the Cuban and Chilean revolutionary processes represented far more radical experiments in social justice than Mexico's own fraying revolutionary tradition.

Increasingly Echeverría cast himself as a friend of social revolution in Latin America, particularly of Allende, who had come to power in a democratic election in 1970. Even more important, he offered his country as a safe haven for victims of the South American dirty wars. In September 1973, after General Augusto Pinochet's right-wing coup overthrew Allende's Popular Unity government—a bloody takeover that claimed the life of the president—Echeverría granted asylum to thousands of

refugees, including Allende's widow. After another coup ousted President Isabel Perón of Argentina three years later, Echeverría again opened Mexico's doors. Between 1973 and 1982 thousands of left-leaning Argentine and Chilean professionals entered the country. These refugees proved useful to the government for three reasons: many of them were highly educated and possessed skills in demand in Mexico; they proved as loyal to their host as the Spanish Republicans had been in the 1930s; and the president's welcoming stance toward left-leaning South American refugees diverted attention from his own scaled-down dirty war against the Left. Secure in his position, Echeverría confronted his critics on the Right, who charged that he was following Allende's path to socialism, by stating, "There will never be a Pinochet in Mexico."⁵

In the process, the president also emerged as a critic of the Cold War. Following in López Mateos's footsteps, Echeverría became one of the leaders of the "nonaligned movement" within the United Nations, and he maintained a dialogue with Cuba's Fidel Castro. He even posed for photo ops with the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, a symbol of anti-Zionist and anti-imperialist sentiment in the Middle East.

Simultaneously Echeverría participated in the front ranks of a campaign to negotiate a new economic world order. He became one of the world's primary exponents of an aggressive *Tercer-mundismo*, or "Third Worldism." Pointing to the unfavorable terms of trade of most developing nations, he called for global economic justice with vaguely defined references to a new commodity price structure. The president's trade policy was unabashedly protectionist, and he continued his predecessors' practice of levying punitive tariffs on imported goods. During his administration, many of these tariffs exceeded 100 percent, and the government impeded the entry of some manufactured products, particularly industrial goods that competed with domestically manufactured items. At the other end of the trade spectrum, Echeverría aggressively promoted the export of strategic minerals. When oil prices skyrocketed following the Yom Kippur War of 1973, he publicly rejoiced at what he viewed to be redress for years of depressed prices for raw materials. In the meantime he nationalized the tobacco and telephone industries, pointing to these sectors as examples of foreign exploitation.

Echeverría also made a number of substantive social reforms. His government revived the long-dormant land distribution program, parceling out more land to peasants than his four predecessors combined. In particular he targeted northern Sinaloa and Sonora, areas where large landowners had hitherto largely avoided expropriation. Under Echeverría's tenure, Congress lowered the voting age to eighteen; it inaugurated an ambitious profit-sharing scheme designed to increase the gross pay of workers; and it expanded the purview of the social security program to cover an additional ten million Mexicans. The administration established housing subsidies for workers, with the costs shared between employers and the federal government, and it set maximum prices for basic foodstuffs. In an effort to make amends with the student movement, Echeverría released most of the political prisoners captured during the Díaz Ordaz regime. Perhaps most important for scholars of the Mexican

Revolution, the Echeverría administration opened up a number of previously classified government archives to researchers, supported the establishment of more professionally organized regional archives, and gave generous assistance to research projects in history and the social sciences. With the collaboration of El Colegio de México, his government sponsored the twenty-three-volume, state-of-the-art *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana*. These policies encountered widespread support among the intelligentsia and earned Echeverría kudos from many eminent social scientists—scholars who otherwise might have found themselves in the opposition.

In 1973, however, a worldwide economic crisis hit Mexico hard enough to negate these efforts to reclaim for the PRI some of its past luster. Rather than helping all petroleum-producing nations, as Echeverría had hoped, the surge in oil prices in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War triggered a global economic slowdown that drastically reduced demand for Mexican export products. To make matters worse, the massive infusion of billions of dollars into the economy to fund Echeverría's social programs created runaway inflation. In 1974 credit became tight, raising the cost of the government's foreign loans that helped pay for the new social programs. Showing that he did not understand the roots of this crisis, Echeverría shifted his populism into a higher gear by raising taxes on the wealthiest and calling for mandatory wage hikes of up to 18 percent. The rich did not take such redistributionist measures lying down, moving billions of dollars out of the country and refusing to pay taxes at the higher rates. Facing a veritable mutiny by the business community, the government frantically attempted to prop up the peso in order to prevent its devaluation and a concomitant increase in consumer prices. Nevertheless this most serious economic downturn since 1948 ended with the peso losing half of its value. By 1976 a dollar bought twenty-five pesos, up from a 2:1 ratio in the 1920s and a 5:1 ratio as recently as the late 1940s. Rapid population growth made this crisis feel even worse at the grassroots level. In the 1970s the fertility rate of the average Mexican woman was 5.4 children, and the population grew at more than 3.5 percent annually. In other words, the economy needed to grow 3.5 percent each year just to accommodate the population growth, and as Echeverría found out during the last years of his rule, the heady days of 6 to 8 percent growth lay in the past. Rather than galloping down the stretch of his *sexenio* as the Second Coming of Cárdenas, he faded badly, finishing his tenure in ignominy.

Echeverría's successor, his boyhood friend and former law partner José López Portillo y Pacheco, nevertheless vowed to continue Echeverría's populist policies, hoping they might yet revive some of the promises—and legitimacy—of the PRI's "Institutional Revolution." A former law professor at the national university, López Portillo was the first scholar at the helm of the official party. The new president was extremely fortunate in that the recent discovery of vast oil deposits in Chiapas, Tabasco, Campeche, and the Gulf of Mexico afforded his government an opportunity to spend its way out of the economic doldrums. Once exploited, the newly discovered oil fields made Mexico the fourth largest oil producer in the world. Moreover petroleum prices had hit unprecedented highs following the 1973

crisis in the Middle East, and López Portillo intended to take advantage of this windfall. To supplement this revenue, the president hiked taxes, initiating a new value-added tax that added 15 percent to the price of each good or service sold in the country, except basic foodstuffs. Even the wealthy, always seeking ways to reduce their tax burden, did not know a way around the VAT. López Portillo then set about systematically spending these newfound financial resources. He greatly increased the size of the federal bureaucracy by establishing new agencies, among them six cabinet-level secretariats. In response to the decline in real wages, his government increased housing and food subsidies. It also launched a family planning program that helped reduce the fertility rate from 5.4 in 1976 to 4.6 in 1982. Equally important, López Portillo's initiative contributed to a shift in social values by attacking two deeply rooted notions: that it was *muy macho* to father many children and that women fulfilled themselves by giving birth to many children. This shift in values supported a further decrease in the fertility rate to 2.9 in 1993, thereby slicing the rate of population growth in half. While this drop in fertility occurred worldwide, Mexico went from exceeding the global average in 1976 to trailing it in 1993.

Like Echeverría, López Portillo pursued an activist foreign policy that displayed his country's independence from and criticism of the United States. In particular his government was a staunch ally of the Nicaraguan Sandinistas, a left-leaning movement that overthrew forty-two years of Somoza family dictatorship in July 1979. Significantly, after Anastasio Somoza Debayle's resignation, the Sandinista leadership arrived in the capital of Managua on a Mexican jet, singing Mexican revolutionary *corridos* and extemporizing a few ballads about their own victorious insurrection. Two years later López Portillo joined President François Mitterrand of France in granting "belligerent" status to the Marxist FMLN guerrilla in El Salvador, a diplomatic step that awarded the group recognition as a legitimate political force in their struggle against a repressive right-wing regime. López Portillo also continued Echeverría's practice of giving asylum to refugees from Latin America's military dictatorships; hundreds of thousands of Guatemalans took up residence in Mexico, chased out of their native country by the scorched-earth policy of a U.S.-backed military government. Unlike Echeverría, however, López Portillo ultimately found a determined adversary for his policies in the strongly anti-Communist U.S. President Ronald Reagan. After his inauguration in January 1981, Reagan assailed both the Sandinistas and the Salvadoran rebels as mere proxies of Cuba and the Soviet Union. Bypassing congressional approval, the Reagan administration gave military assistance to the repressive Salvadoran military as well as a Nicaraguan opposition group, the Contras, and the U.S. president made it clear that he would not tolerate Mexican interference in an area the United States had long considered its own backyard.

The economy proved a much greater disappointment. As López Portillo prepared to leave office in 1982, Mexicans learned that his government was mortgaged to the hilt. Mexico owed tens of billions of dollars to foreign banks at interest rates exceeding 10 percent, a product of the efforts of the U.S.

Federal Reserve to root out the double-digit inflation that had plagued the world economy for several years. In 1982 Mexico defaulted on these loans. López Portillo expressed anger at what he portrayed as a foreign plot to destroy the nation’s economy, insisting that he would “defend the peso like a dog.”⁶ However, the very next day he announced a catastrophic devaluation of the currency. In the course of the year, the peso lost 85 percent of its value against the U.S. dollar, and billions of dollars fled the country in search of safer investment opportunities. In December 1982, posturing as a latter-day Cárdenas, López Portillo nationalized Mexico’s major banks and made all capital transactions with foreign countries subject to government approval. To celebrate this achievement, his government even renamed one of the squares in downtown Mexico City the Plaza de la Banca Nacionalizada. These measures, however, only deepened the crisis. Nor did the U.S. government help out: offended by Mexico’s support for progressive movements in Central America, President Reagan stood by as the Mexican economy sank into its deepest quagmire since the Great Depression.

TABLE 8.1 *Estimated Real Wages during the López Portillo Administration, in US\$*

	INDEX 1976 = 100					
Year	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982
Legal minimum wage	110.0	125.5	146.6	172.5	230.4	309.2
Real wages	85.6	88.0	83.4	77.7	81.0	66.0

Source: Francisco Salazar Sotelo, “Balance global de la política económica en el sexenio 1976–1982,” in *Estudios cuantitativos sobre la historia de México*, ed. Samuel Schmidt, James W. Wilkie, and Manuel Esparza (Mexico City: UNAM, 1988), 48.

The quagmire commenced what many Mexicans still refer to as the *década perdida*, or “lost decade.” During the remainder of the 1980s, millions lost their jobs, and hyperinflation and capital flight aggravated the decline in real wages that had continued throughout López Portillo’s presidency despite the oil boom (see [table 8.1](#)). The crisis led to biting popular humor that further undermined the official myth of “the Revolution” propagated by the ruling party. For example, in reference to López Portillo’s earlier pledges to defend the country’s currency, cynics dubbed the Los Pinos presidential residence the Casa del Perro, or doghouse.

As if this serious economic downturn were not bad enough, mounting reports of mismanagement and corruption sullied López Portillo’s outgoing administration. To be sure, decades of sordid experience had inured Mexicans to news reports about corruption. Ordinary Mexicans knew when to pay

a *mordida*, or bribe, to an official or police officer; most of them regarded all government officials as a *bola de rateros* (gang of thieves). Since World War II, massive government-sponsored industrial and public works projects had afforded increasing opportunities for large-scale graft. By all accounts, however, López Portillo and his allies set new standards for illegal self-enrichment. As a British journalist estimated, during the oil boom “almost every purchase by *Petróleos Mexicanos* involved a kickback of 10 or 15 percent.”⁷ Most notorious was the head of the Mexico City police, Arturo Durazo Moreno, a.k.a. El Negro, or the black one, a term that referred both to his origins in a heavily indigenous part of Sonora and to his prodigious ill-gotten wealth during public service. At the time of his appointment, this childhood friend of the president had already earned a grand jury indictment in the United States for narcotics trafficking. As police chief, he built the biggest racketeering operation in the capital’s history. With these proceeds, he constructed two enormous residences in southern Mexico City, and Mexicans dubbed a third residence near the Pacific port of Zihuatanejo “the Parthenon,” a reference to its likeness to the famous temple in Athens. Durazo’s greed was rivaled only by his vanity. Even though he had not served any time in the military, he insisted that his charges call him “General de División,” the highest military rank. Other prominent Mexicans who took full economic advantage of their political roles included Carlos Hank González, the mayor of Mexico City, and the president himself. López Portillo lived in inexplicable luxury and appointed his son, his wife, his mistress, and four other family members to important positions in his government. By any measure, the corruption of the López Portillo years made all previous rulers—even Miguel Alemán’s self-enriching clique—appear relatively honest by comparison. In 1982 the president left office in infamy.

“REFORMING THE REVOLUTION,”

The collapse of 1982 administered the coup de grâce to the PRI-led “Revolution” as an economic and social program fourteen years after the Tlatelolco massacre had mortally wounded it as a political model. The crisis severely weakened the state as a player in the economy. In exchange for facilitating new credit, the International Monetary Fund demanded an austerity package to bring down government spending. To meet IMF targets, the administration of Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado (1982–88) undertook deep cuts in social programs. For example, de la Madrid slashed government subsidies for low-rent housing as well as basic foodstuffs such as rice, beans, and tortillas. Added to the decline in real wages, the cuts devastated both workers and the middle class. Worse still, the austerity package did not stanch the bleeding. Inflation ran well over 100 percent annually for several years, and the peso fell from a rate of 150 to the dollar to 2,200 in a span of five years. The rate of unemployment, as reported by the government, reached 25 percent in the middle of the decade; most likely it was much higher than these official figures. Not surprisingly people voted with their feet, and millions of migrants added to the large population of Mexican descent in the United States and Canada. U.S. census data suggest a doubling of that population during the 1980s. The 1990 census counted 13.5

million people of Mexican descent, and by the year 2000 that number had ascended to 20.6 million. These official figures included several million undocumented workers but likely underreported the true number, as many *indocumentados* refused to answer census surveys.

From today's vantage point, the 1982 debt crisis appears the most significant watershed in postrevolutionary history, the moment when the PRI gave up on its own rhetoric and accepted the fact that "the Revolution" was over. In this regard, de la Madrid's comments regarding corruption were revealing. Like his predecessors, the incoming president portrayed himself as a tough opponent of corruption and announced plans for the "moral renovation" of society. However, this Harvard-trained technocrat with a master's degree in public administration—the first Mexican president with a graduate degree awarded in the United States—went one step further, predicting the demise of the PRI regime if the party could not put its affairs in order. He announced that his government would not "accept corruption as the cost of our system's stability or efficiency in the management of the affairs of the state."⁸ He also denounced López Portillo's "financial populism," that is, his irresponsible management of public finances.⁹

A devastating natural disaster brought the human cost of corruption home to Mexicans at the midpoint of the de la Madrid sexenio. On the morning of September 19, 1985, an earthquake measuring 8.1 on the Richter scale shook Mexico City. Another quake struck the next evening. According to some estimates, the tremors left approximately 10,000 people dead, 50,000 injured, and 250,000 homeless. The city center was devastated, with roads impassable due to cracked pavements, scattered building debris, and broken water lines, and the hardest-hit areas resembled war zones. The aftermath of the earthquakes revealed fresh evidence of corruption. For example, the collapse of two state-owned apartment buildings in Tlatelolco near the site of the 1968 massacre laid bare massive violations of the building code in force at the time of construction in the early to mid-1960s. While the government-approved plans for the apartment buildings had strictly adhered to these standards, contractors had colluded with building inspectors in skimping on construction costs, splitting the difference with these officials for personal benefit. Corruption within the PRI had thus directly contributed to the loss of human life. Continuing this theme, rumors circulated that the de la Madrid administration was siphoning off some of the international relief assistance for its own use.

Moreover an inadequate emergency response to the disaster contributed to a general sense that the government was part of the problem rather than the solution. After each of the quakes, victims waited for hours for rescue workers to appear. The police response was similarly insufficient, leaving looters to descend upon the disaster zone after nightfall. This lack of response was particularly offensive to the residents of the capital because the government was assiduously preparing to host the 1986 World Cup. Rather than attending to earthquake victims, the de la Madrid administration preened before the world, constructing expensive soccer stadiums such as the one in Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl, the nation's largest slum with almost four million inhabitants.

Governmental ineptitude in the wake of the earthquakes ultimately empowered victims to take matters into their own hands, especially in the Tlatelolco neighborhood. Residents formed impromptu cleanup crews and dug through the debris in search of family members and neighbors. Doctors and nurses living in the area established makeshift clinics. Neighbors unafraid of violence banded together to provide defense against looters. Others collected food and blankets provided by neighbors who had escaped unscathed. In all, grassroots action rather than government-sponsored relief provided the most tangible assistance to the 100,000 residents of the Tlatelolco neighborhood. The 1985 earthquakes contributed to a new type of middle-class political mobilization in defense of urban neighborhoods. Outrage about government incompetence permeated this movement. In a letter to the head of the National Housing Fund, one group of citizens expressed “strong feelings of pain, rage, impotence, and uncertainty”: “Pain for our dead brothers; rage because this strategy could be avoided . . . ; impotence for not being able to rescue more survivors in the rubble; and uncertainty for the present and the future of our housing complex.”¹⁰

Along with the economic crisis, the earthquakes contributed to the administration’s abandonment of even a theoretical commitment to the goals of “the Revolution” as enshrined in the 1917 Constitution. In his last three years in office, as capital continued to flee and the peso declined further, de la Madrid openly embraced neoliberal strategies designed to tear down the social compact that lay at the center of the PRI’s political message. As formulated by the University of Chicago economist Milton Friedman, neoliberalism effectively challenged several key tenets of the PRI state: spending on social services, protectionist tariffs and import regulations, currency and price controls, and state ownership of significant sectors that controlled natural resources and infrastructure. De la Madrid moved to implement many of the foremost components of the neoliberal agenda. As a former employee of *Petróleos Mexicanos* (PEMEX), the president knew that the sale of state-owned companies would attack corruption and mismanagement at their roots. He also appreciated that the privatization of state-owned businesses could provide cash to a strapped national treasury. Therefore the government sold 40 percent of the approximately one thousand state-owned businesses to private investors, but not PEMEX, which remained an icon of economic nationalism for many Mexicans. Indeed at the same time that de la Madrid completed the sale of billions of dollars worth of the public stake in businesses, his government issued a 5,000-peso coin to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Cárdenas’s 1938 oil expropriation.

Not surprisingly the disgraced ex-president López Portillo later portrayed himself as the “last president of the Mexican Revolution” and argued that his selection of de la Madrid as his successor was a “mistake.”¹¹ To be sure, López Portillo had helped create the economic mess that made neoliberalism possible. But he accurately pinpointed the de la Madrid sexenio as the end point of “the Revolution” as a political program. Not only had the PRI lost its hegemony in the political landscape, but opposition movements from both the Right and the Left found spaces to operate after the 1982 debt crisis.

Ever so gradually, the PRI leadership, and particularly de la Madrid, realized that the days of their party's dominance were drawing to a close.

Most significantly, the PRI's turn toward neoliberalism led to a split in the official party and the emergence of a new Cardenista alternative on the eve of the 1988 presidential election. None other than Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, son of the former president, broke with his party and formed an opposition organization, the Frente Democrático Nacional (National Democratic Front, or FDN). Cárdenas announced his candidacy for the presidency in opposition to that of Carlos Salinas de Gortari, another Harvard-trained PRI technocrat. The conservative National Action Party (PAN), advocates of liberal capitalism and vocal critics of neopopulism à la Echeverría and López Portillo, also fielded a competitive candidate, the northern businessman Manuel Clouthier. But all eyes were on the younger Cárdenas, a highly visible politician whose departure from the PRI further highlighted the crisis of the ruling party. Although Cárdenas lacked his father's charisma, he symbolized the revolutionary past. His name conjured two icons: the courageous last Aztec emperor and the most popular president of the twentieth century. His supporters expected him to fix all that was wrong with Mexico. As one of his admirers wrote in a personal letter, "Long live Cárdenas[,] who will support the poor and . . . the humble[;] who protects the humble mexican[;] who will stand up for justice and truth because he is mexican like us[.] Death to foreign toadies[;] we will transform Mexico and defend it."¹²

Therefore the summer of 1988 witnessed the most closely contested presidential elections since 1940. Exit polls indicated that Cárdenas had done very well, and early returns suggested that he and Clouthier might both finish ahead of the PRI candidate Salinas. However, a few hours after the closing of the polls, the computer system that tallied nationwide election results crashed under mysterious circumstances. When the system resumed operation approximately a week later, Salinas had won over 50 percent of the vote in the narrowest victory for a PRI candidate to date. The PRI also triumphed in the national legislature, but taken together, the FDN and PAN had won enough seats to impede the customary PRI steamroller in Congress. Naturally the FDN alleged fraud, but in the absence of a fair and impartial national elections board, these allegations went nowhere.

In the end, the split of the official party between the neoliberal Salinas and the Cardenista alternative only accelerated the demise of what remained of "the Revolution." Although he came from a politically radical family, and even counted Zapata's biographer John Womack among his close friends while at Harvard, Salinas stepped up his predecessor's neoliberal agenda. Jetting about the nation in his private plane, the *Emiliano Zapata*, the new president announced his intention to "reform the Revolution" in order to make Mexico a First World nation. This effort signified tearing down the social compact embodied in the economic nationalism and redistributive reform of the 1917 Constitution, while preserving the paternalistic state that the PRI had created. Salinas made common cause with the Catholic and antirevolutionary PAN in relegating the revolutionary provisions of the constitution to the garbage heap. Under his aegis, Congress modified Article 27 to delete the strictures

on foreign investment in agriculture and the subsoil. It also dealt a fatal blow to the old Cardenista land reform by making provision for the conversion of all *ejidos* to private land holdings. Henceforth campesinos could buy and sell plots of land, and in time much of this land seemed destined to end up as the property of large domestic producers or landowning multinational corporations like Nestlé or Del Monte. Salinas sold off most of the remainder of the public sector, including Teléfonos Mexicanos (Telmex), a telecommunications firm that enjoyed a monopoly over the national market. The president also came to an agreement with Pope John Paul II that restored diplomatic relations with the Vatican for the first time since the revolution. In particular Salinas reversed the Calles-era laws and allowed churches to own buildings that had been nationalized during the revolution.

In the short term, Salinas's reforms met with considerable success. The administration lowered annual inflation from 159 percent in 1987 to 7 percent in 1993. The fire sale of the state sector of the economy not only stimulated private investment but was also a one-time infusion of much-needed cash to help the government address its spending priorities and international obligations. Delighted with these neoliberal reforms, the business sector reinvested billions of dollars in the Mexican economy, capital that for years had been parked abroad in multinational corporations, Swiss bank accounts, and real estate. After eighteen years of extreme volatility, annual rates of growth reached an average of 3.5 percent—a more modest expansion than that associated with the Mexican Miracle but one occurring in the context of slower population growth. International investors happily bought up Mexican stocks, grateful for opportunities in what they considered a prime “emerging market.” Finally, privatization afforded Salinas's cronies new opportunities for enrichment. For example, Salinas placed a close personal friend, Carlos Slim Helú, at the helm of Telmex. Slim acquired a commanding share in Telmex for a fraction of its value, and the company flourished quickly thanks to an infusion of foreign investment and the spread of mobile telephony. Unlike other governments, which coupled the privatization of the telecom sector with legislation encouraging competition, the Salinas administration kept the Telmex monopoly in place, allowing Slim to rack up stunning profits. From this base, he invested in other companies abroad, soon building the largest business empire ever assembled in Latin America. As of this writing, Slim is the world's richest individual. *Narcotraficantes*, or drug lords, also greatly expanded their influence in collusion with PRI bureaucrats.

The idea of reforming “the Revolution” was not only profitable but also matched the spirit of an age in which other ideological certainties surrendered to globalization oriented by the capitalist model. Salinas's term coincided with the disintegration of the Soviet Union and its bloc in Eastern Europe. Just a year into his administration, the world looked on in amazement at the razing of the Berlin Wall, long considered an immutable barrier between East and West. The Soviet state, like the postrevolutionary Mexican state, had emerged from a violent social revolution, and both Soviet and Mexican revolutionaries had founded ruling parties that claimed to represent the true heritage of their nation's upheavals. The similarities ended there, but in the late 1980s, priistas watched keenly as

Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev dismantled his party's hold over the Soviet Union and its satellites through the policies of *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring). At the very least, the collapse of the Soviet Union raised two significant questions for Mexicans: After seven long decades, was "the Revolution" worthy of upholding as a set of values? Did the crisis of Communism presage the inevitable decline of social compacts such as Mexico's predicated on a large state role in the economy? Without a doubt, the disappearance of the Soviet Union emboldened leaders like Salinas who saw themselves as capitalist reformers of a cumbersome and outdated system. Similar thoughts of reform occupied the rulers of the People's Republic of China, which transitioned into capitalist practice without seeing its authoritarian form of government disintegrate. With the collapse of Communism, the only alternative to Western capitalism had disappeared.

Another significant element in the reform of "the Revolution" was the attempt to rewrite the Mexican history textbooks used in the nation's elementary schools. Since the early 1960s, the government had commissioned and distributed free textbooks to all students. The Libros de Texto Gratuitos program mandated the use of these texts in both public and private schools, and it allowed students to keep the books after using them in class. For decades the official history textbooks used in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades had depicted the revolution as the culmination of the struggle of the Mexican people for democracy and social justice. For many poor families, whose children abandoned school after sixth grade in order to work, these books were the only available source of historical instruction. In Manichaeian fashion, the texts contrasted official national heroes such as the last Aztec emperor Cuauhtémoc, Hidalgo, Juárez, Madero, Obregón, Zapata, Villa, and Cárdenas with an assortment of villains that included the Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés, the nineteenth-century caudillo Antonio López de Santa Anna, various U.S. diplomats and foreign investors, and, of course, the dictator Porfirio Díaz. During an August 1992 public ceremony, Salinas and Education Secretary Ernesto Zedillo unveiled the latest edition of the textbooks. Written by Héctor Aguilar Camín and Enrique Florescano, two prominent historians close to the administration, this edition featured an interpretation that downplayed the negative aspects of the Díaz dictatorship. Instead the authors highlighted Porfirian modernization as a necessary precursor to Salinas's efforts to bring Mexico into the era of globalization. Likewise they drew a more ambiguous portrait of revolutionary leaders than their predecessors had, suggesting the leaders' authoritarian and militaristic tendencies along with their desire for reform. This effort to de-emphasize "the Revolution" as the heroic centerpiece of Mexican history displayed the degree to which Salinas and his allies (in particular his friend Aguilar Camín) had dissociated themselves from the PRI's core program.

But before the new textbooks could enter the classroom, a public outcry over the newly emerging interpretation forced the Salinas administration to withdraw them. This widespread reaction to the new texts revealed the fact that "the Revolution" as an idealized process and a blueprint still mattered deeply to many Mexicans. Even though a large number of Aguilar Camín and Florescano's revisions

matched the findings of contemporary scholarship, the public resented these efforts to rewrite official history in order to complement the administration's neoliberal policies. Those more familiar with historical scholarship marveled at the manner with which Aguilar Camín, formerly a revisionist historian with Marxist leanings, had reconciled himself with the neoliberal economic and political elite. Moreover detractors attacked the new textbooks for the positive spin they put on the role of foreign investment in the modernization of Mexico—an obvious validation of Salinas's globalizing objectives.

These objectives and the concomitant official burial of “the Revolution” found their strongest expression in the negotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Scheduled to begin on January 1, 1994, NAFTA tied Canada, the United States, and Mexico together in a trade pact that tore down tariff barriers and protectionist legislation. The Salinistas expected NAFTA to boost commerce and attract jobs to Mexico. It suited Salinas just fine that this treaty required significant revisions to the nationalist provisions of the revolutionary constitution, in particular the restrictions on foreign investments. Once again, as in the Díaz period, the Mexican government pursued laissez-faire economic policies—so much so that the old dictator would have probably turned over in his grave knowing that his successors could no longer award preferential treatment to capitalists of their choice. And just as during the Porfiriato, the impact of globalization would prove uneven across Mexico's regions. In the North and the major tourist centers, NAFTA provided a boost, as the majority of new investment poured into four northern states on the U.S. border. But NAFTA served to further divert attention from the problems of the agricultural economy in the heavily indigenous South, which stagnated with the elimination of federal subsidies.

The final piece of the Salinista strategy to reform “the Revolution” consisted of co-opting the opposition. This tactic intended to countervail the presidency's authoritarian propensities, which reminded many Mexicans even more of the ideological affinities between Salinas and Porfirio Díaz. The PRI's sharp neoliberal turn constituted a break with its own programmatic principles—ideas now more faithfully represented by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas's new Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Party of the Democratic Revolution, or PRD). The PRI had become a center-right party. Not much now distinguished the PRI from the PAN, aside from the latter's pro-Catholic ideology; in Congress, both parties collaborated closely in approving neoliberal reforms. Following up on a gradual political opening that had occurred during de la Madrid's last years in office, Salinas and his allies promoted pluralism by allowing PAN candidates to win election to gubernatorial posts. Over time, this pluralism included the PRD as well. The victory of a PAN candidate in the gubernatorial elections in Baja California in 1989 marked the first such defeat for the official party since its founding; in subsequent years, the PRI allowed the PAN and the PRD to claim an increasing number of seats in Congress. Nonetheless Salinas and his allies kept a tight hold on their party's power in the executive branch.

The Salinato also sought to co-opt its critics by means of the president's signature, if rather moderate, antipoverty program, Solidaridad. The idea was to put a human face on the administration's mar-