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## Chamber of Deputies, Senate Ratify Political Reforms

by LADB Staff

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In votes taken in late July and early August, the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate overwhelmingly approved legislation formalizing the agreements reached among the leaders of the four major political parties and President Ernesto Zedillo's administration. The legislation, which modifies 18 separate articles in the Mexican Constitution, reduces the power of the executive branch to control the elections. Among other things, the newly approved law provides for direct election of the mayor of Mexico City, implements comprehensive campaign-finance reform, and increases the percentage of seats of opposition parties in the legislature (see SourceMex, 07/31/96).

The agreement was reached after more than 18 months of difficult negotiations among the Interior Secretariat (SG), the governing Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), and three opposition parties: the National Action Party (PAN), the Democratic Revolution Party (PRD), and the Labor Party (PT). The reforms still need the approval of the legislature in each of Mexico's states to become law.

In a nationally televised debate, the presidents of the four parties acknowledged that the reforms must be accompanied by individual commitment to democracy during the 1997 congressional race. PRD president Manuel Lopez Obrador said the reforms do not guarantee an end to electoral controversies. "There were a series of electoral reforms in Tabasco, and look what happened," he said, referring to the turmoil that still surrounds the state's November 1994 gubernatorial election (see SourceMex, 06/14/95 and 08/30/95).

Meanwhile, according to PAN Senate coordinator Gabriel Jimenez Remus, the party went along with the reforms, even though negotiators felt that several measures, such as financing of campaigns, did not go far enough. "There are many areas that were not included in the reforms," Jimenez Remus said. "However, honest dialogue and negotiation cannot wait until all the demands of each party are satisfied." Jimenez said the PAN would have liked more specific language regarding a formula for increasing representation of minority parties in the Senate.

For his part, Hector Sanchez Lopez, coordinator of the PRD delegation in the Senate, lamented the fact that negotiators set aside proposals that would have allowed greater citizen participation in the democratic process, such as referendum, plebiscite, and citizen-ballot initiatives. Still, according to some political analysts, the legislative approval of the reforms represents a political victory for Zedillo, who proposed the talks soon after taking office.

As expected, Zedillo and other PRI leaders were pleased with the outcome of negotiations. "These reforms were not about compromising principles," Zedillo said. "The reforms were accomplished through open debate." Other PRI members also supported the changes. "These reforms are aimed at making elections transparent and insuring that our institutions are legitimate," said PRI president Santiago Onate Laborde. For his part, Interior (Gobernacion) Secretary Emilio Chuayffet Chemor

pledged that the administration will continue to promote political reforms beyond those already spelled out in the accord reached with the representatives of the four parties.

Despite the broad agreement among those participating in the negotiations, however, the reforms did not receive universal support. For example, in an editorial published in its weekly newspaper, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Mexico City criticized the reforms as too limited. According to the editorial, the reforms were merely an effort by the PRI to reach an accommodation with the opposition parties, and not the beginning of a move toward true democracy. "The time has come to stop looking for solutions to a political regime that has clearly proven to be anti-democratic," the editorial said. "Mexico needs more authentic alternatives."

The issue also became a central theme in negotiations between representatives of the Zedillo administration and the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) in early August. The government delegation, led by Marco Antonio Bernal, urged the EZLN to endorse the reforms, which will eventually be expanded to include mechanisms for greater citizen participation. However, EZLN negotiators declined to offer any endorsement of the reforms, suggesting any changes would have to be "truly democratic," and not just another scheme by the government to "fool the citizens of the country." (Sources: Agence France-Presse, 07/31/96, 08/01/96, 08/02/96; Excelsior, 08/02/96; Novedades, The News, 08/02/96, 08/05/96, 08/06/96; La Jornada, 08/02/96, 08/05/96, 08/07/96)

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