

2-26-1997

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LADB Staff. "Nearly 4,000 Major Demonstrations Organized in Mexico City in 1996." (1997). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex/3705>

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Nearly 4,000 Major Demonstrations Organized in Mexico City in 1996

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Mexico

Published: 1997-02-26

According to the Mexico City legislative assembly (Asamblea Legislativa del Distrito Federal, ALDF), almost 4,000 large-scale demonstrations were organized in the Mexican capital in 1996, continuing a trend that has increased significantly over the past several years. Everardo Gamiz Fernandez, who chairs the ALDF's citizens affairs committee (Comite de Atencion Ciudadana), said more than 70 separate organizations, labor unions, and institutions had a hand in organizing the demonstrations. Many of the demonstrations were staged in Mexico's central square or along major avenues of the capital. However, some demonstrations took place in front of the headquarters of cabinet secretariats or business organizations, such as the Mexican bankers association (Asociacion de Banqueros de Mexico, ABM).

According to Gamiz, many of the demonstrations were economic in nature and involved protests against low salaries, poor housing, and lack of job opportunities. Some protestors sought government action on overdue debt or taxes, while others demanded better environmental protection, public services, and education. Majority of protests involve groups from outside of capital Gamiz noted that more than two-thirds of the protests were organized by groups or organizations based outside of Mexico City. "In a way, the protests reflect the lack of mechanisms and willingness by the federal government to attend to the needs of the population," said Gamiz.

Some demonstrators, such as the debtor-rights organization El Barzon, have managed to capture national attention through ongoing protests. El Barzon has taken its complaint about the debt to the headquarters of the bankers association (Asociacion de Banqueros de Mexico, ABM), the banking and securities commission (Comision Nacional Bancaria y de Valores, CNBV), and the Finance Secretariat (SHCP). El Barzon and other organizations have also brought their cases before the Chamber of Deputies, at times sneaking into the legislative chamber to present their viewpoints through dramatic presentations.

According to the ALDF, the demonstrators have received a mixed reaction from Mexico City residents. While some sympathetic residents have joined in the protests, many others complained to city authorities that the demonstrations have snarled traffic and contributed to loss of income for businesses in the affected areas. Authorities estimate that last year's protests resulted in traffic snarls on 67 of Mexico City's largest avenues and boulevards, which in turn contributed to an increase in air pollution.

In fact, the issue of street protests was a major topic of discussion during a debate by the three candidates seeking nomination from the governing Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) for the post of mayor. At the debate, all three PRI candidates including eventual winner Alfredo del Mazo pledged to impose regulations on street protests, such as setting limits on the hours, locations, and

routes that can be used for such demonstrations. (Sources: Associated Press, 01/21/97; Novedades, 02/12/97; Excelsior, 02/13/97)

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