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## **PRI Observes 70th Anniversary by Committing to Open Presidential Primary**

by LADB Staff

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On March 4, the governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) celebrated its 70th anniversary by announcing it will open up the selection of the next presidential candidate to the party membership. In a motion supported by President Ernesto Zedillo, PRI leaders said the party will no longer appoint the party's presidential candidate via the traditional "dedazo," but instead allow the party's representative to be selected through a more democratic process. "I would say that the PRI has an enormous capacity for renewal, for self-correction, for adapting to new circumstances, and for building for the future," party president Mariano Palacios Alcocer said. "That is why we remain a party in power."

The PRI, however, has yet to announce a process by which the party's candidate will be selected. But Palacios Alcocer has proposed a national consultation with the various PRI factions, including organized labor, to determine how the candidate will be selected. Party leaders said they expect to announce the procedures for the selection sometime in the first two weeks of May.

### ***PRI factions, opponents fear a modified 'dedazo'***

In announcing his support for a more democratic process, Zedillo said he deserved the right to "offer his opinion" in support of a particular candidate. Zedillo's statement raised strong concerns that the new "democratic" process pushed by the president and party leaders is only a charade designed to mask the party's intention to appoint a candidate. Leaders of opposition parties said the selection process could turn into a modified dedazo. "It's evident that there has been a surgical reconstruction of the president's finger," said Felipe Calderon Hinojosa, outgoing president of the center-right Partido Accion Nacional (PAN).

Some political analysts say Zedillo and his inner circle, including Palacios Alcocer, have already selected Interior Secretary Francisco Labastida to represent the party in the 2000 election. But some PRI insiders warn the president risks alienating some factions of the party if the selection is not truly democratic. "There's the risk of a split if any group of PRI members believes the process is being manipulated," said Deputy Oscar Gonzalez Rodriguez, who helped found one of several party factions pressing for reforms.

The danger of a split is very real, since candidates like former Puebla governor Manuel Bartlett Diaz and Tabasco Gov. Roberto Madrazo Pintado are adamant that they be allowed to compete fairly for the nomination. Bartlett and Madrazo both enjoy strong support among some factions of the PRI, but each also carries enough political baggage to hamper his election chances in 2000. "The PRI leaders keep postponing the [nomination] assembly because they want to force Bartlett and other dissident candidates to close ranks behind Labastida, who has emerged as the official candidate," said political scientist Luis Rubio. "They don't have the political monopoly they once had, but they still want to control the process."

The signs of dissent within the PRI are also evident in the Congress, where factions such as Grupo Galileo in the Senate and Corriente Critica, Corriente Renovadora, and Grupo Reflexion in the Chamber of Deputies have broken ranks with the party over key issues. Among other things, the dissident groups have taken issue with the Zedillo administration's positions on the privatization of the petrochemical sector, the bailout of the bank-rescue program (Fondo Bancario de Proteccion al Ahorro, FOBAPROA), and the party procedures for selecting gubernatorial and congressional candidates.

More recently, the groups have criticized the administration's proposal to open up the electric sector to private investment (see SourceMex, 1999-02-03). "These disagreements were long kept under wraps," said columnist Julio Boltvinik of the daily newspaper La Jornada. "But that is not the case anymore."

### *Opposition parties also face some internal divisions*

The opposition PAN and the center-left Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD) are also facing internal divisions in the months leading to the presidential election. The divisions within the PAN involve a power struggle between supporters of Guanajuato Gov. Vicente Fox Quesada and those who oppose Fox's nomination as the party's candidate in 2000. Fox's detractors appear to have united behind Diego Fernandez de Cevallos, who represented the PAN in the 1994 election.

Fox, who is expected to win the party nomination, has strongly criticized Fernandez de Cevallos for proposing that the PAN form a coalition with the PRD and other parties for the 2000 election. But political observers expect the PAN to enter the election as a united party, particularly with the March 6 election of Sen. Luis Bravo Mena as the new party president. Bravo Mena assumed the party leadership from Calderon Hinojosa, who completed his term. Bravo Mena, who has support among all party factions, has also favored forming alliances with the PRD and other parties, particularly in gubernatorial, congressional and local races. One of his first acts in office was to appoint several commissions to look into areas where the opposition parties could cooperate.

At the same time, Bravo Mena said forming a coalition with the PRD in the presidential election is not possible because of the strong difference between the parties' political philosophies. But some PRD members are pushing the party to form a coalition with the PAN, the newly formed Partido del Centro Democratico (PCD), several minor parties, and "democratic" elements of the PRI to select a common candidate to defeat the governing party in 2000. The most vocal proponents are Govs. Alfonso Sanchez Anaya of Tlaxcala, Leonel Cota Montano of Baja California Sur, and Ricardo Monreal of Zacatecas state, all former PRI members who won election by bringing together several opposition parties.

Meanwhile, PRD president Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said his party is proposing a primary election among all opposition parties to select one "unity" candidate to face the PRI. Lopez Obrador told the weekly news magazine Proceso he would gladly throw his full support behind Vicente Fox of the PAN if he won the primary.

A coalition candidate backed by all opposition parties could be tested in the Nayarit election on July 4. Antonio Echevarria Dominguez, a former PRI member, is representing both the PAN and PRD in

that election. Echevarria, who joined the PAN in early 1997, appears to have strong support among the PRD rank and file in Nayarit.

The PAN and PRD are also supporting a common candidate in the gubernatorial race in Chiapas in 2000. That candidate is Pablo Salazar Mendiguchia, a former PRI member who has served on the special congressional committee on Chiapas (Comision de Concordia y Pacificacion, COCOPA). Mexico City Mayor Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, who is expected to easily win the PRD nomination, has also endorsed the concept of a common candidate.

But Cardenas, who has not formally declared his candidacy, could face a spirited challenge from former congressional leader and long-time rival Porfirio Munoz Ledo. The two have already butted heads. In early January, Munoz Ledo angrily denounced a newspaper advertisement, placed by 93 PRD members, endorsing Cardenas for the PRD nomination. Munoz Ledo, who recently resigned his leadership position in the Chamber of Deputies, challenged Cardenas to openly declare his intention to run and not "hold a campaign through cronies."

Meanwhile, the PRD is also expected to select a new party leader on March 14 to succeed Lopez Obrador. Sens. Mario Saucedo and Amalia Garcia and Deputies Rosa Albina Garavito and Jesus Ortega Martinez are among 13 prominent party members running for the post in a nationwide election. (Sources: Spanish news service EFE, 02/01/99; Reuters, 02/02/99, 03/04/99; Notimex, 03/04/99; The Washington Post, 03/05/99; The Dallas Morning News, 03/04/99, 03/06/99; Proceso, 02/14/99, 03/07/99; The New York Times, 01/31/99, 03/04/99, 03/08/99; The News, 01/21/99, 03/05/99, 03/08/99; El Universal, 02/08/99, 02/23/99, 03/05/99, 03/08/99; Novedades, 02/11/99, 02/16/99, 03/05/99, 03/08/99; Excelsior, 02/09/99, 03/05/99, 03/08/99; El Economista, 03/04/99, 03/05/99, 03/08/99; La Jornada, 03/05/99, 03/08/99)

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