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## **Economist Rosario Robles Berlanga Becomes First Woman to Govern Mexico City**

by LADB Staff

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On Sept. 29, economist Rosario Robles Berlanga was appointed mayor of Mexico City, becoming the first woman to hold that post. Robles succeeded Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, who resigned as mayor to devote full time to his 2000 presidential campaign. Both Robles and Cardenas are members of the center-left Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD). The Mexico City legislature (Asamblea Legislativa del Distrito Federal, ALDF) approved Robles' appointment by an overwhelming margin of 50-0, with legislators from the governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) and the Partido Verde Ecologista Mexicano (PVEM) abstaining. Robles will serve out Cardenas' term, which will expire Nov. 30, 2000.

Some PRI members praised Robles, while taking the opportunity to blast Cardenas. "She can put together a much better government than the past administration did," said PRI mayoral candidate Roberto Campa Ciprian. But Robles, who was secretary of government in the Cardenas administration, pledged to continue the policies of her predecessor, particularly regarding crime prevention, pollution, and unemployment. "We will continue to promote an austere government, with our expenditures oriented primarily toward solving the needs of our people and making this a livable city," said Robles, who served in the Chamber of Deputies in 1994-1997.

Robles also promised to expand anti-corruption efforts begun under the Cardenas administration. Corruption was rampant among former PRI mayors, who were appointed by the president. Cardenas' predecessor, Oscar Espinosa Villarreal, is accused of diverting city funds for his own political gain and misplacing, destroying, or falsifying financial records to hide such acts (see SourceMex, 1998-02-11). But unlike Cardenas, who was embroiled in constant disputes with members of the PRI and the center-right Partido Accion Nacional (PAN), Robles has pledged to work closely with the opposition parties. She has proposed a political pact with all parties in the ALDF, which also includes the PVEM and the Partido del Trabajo (PT).

### ***PRD deeply divided ahead of mayoral primary***

The election to succeed Robles, meanwhile, has resulted in bitter splits within the PRD and the PRI. The split is especially evident within the PRD, where the three declared candidates are angry at attempts to draft former national leader Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador to represent the party in the 2000 mayoral race. The PRD has scheduled a primary election in Mexico City on Nov. 14 to elect its mayoral candidate. The declared candidates for the nomination are federal legislators Pablo Gomez and Demetrio Sodi de la Tijera, and former Cardenas aide Marco Rascon. Gomez heads the PRD delegation in the Chamber of Deputies.

Lopez Obrador has expressed reluctance to seek the nomination, but has not ruled out his candidacy. He must decide by Oct. 14, the deadline for candidates to register for the mayoral race, which will be held in July 2000. Some PRD factions have already publicly endorsed Lopez Obrador

as "the best candidate" to keep the mayor's office in PRD hands. "He has the greatest possibilities of winning the election in this city," said Alfonso Ramirez Cuellar, head of the Mexico City chapter of El Barzon debtors' rights organization. Lopez Obrador's candidacy has also been endorsed by prominent PRD members in Mexico City, including ALDF member Marti Batres and local party leader Carlos Imaz. But one declared PRD candidate, Pablo Gomez, called the move to draft Lopez Obrador a "disastrous adventure," since he does not meet the residency requirements and would be disqualified.

The city's election bylaws say mayoral candidates must have resided in the city for at least five years to be eligible to run for mayor. Sodi de la Tijera acknowledged that Lopez Obrador has strong support among the PRD base in Mexico, but said he is not necessarily the choice of many party members in Mexico City. "Sectors of the party are bothered by [the effort to draft Lopez Obrador], even though he still commands strong respect," said Sodi de la Tijera.

Sodi warned that a loss in the Mexico City mayoral election could hurt the PRD's chances in the presidential race. "The PAN is gathering support in the northern and central areas of the country, and the PRI has its constant base throughout Mexico," Sodi told the weekly news magazine *Proceso*. "Our strength is in the metropolitan area of Mexico City, and a loss here would be fatal to our party's chances."

Another PRD member, Alejandro Ordorica Saavedra, has also thrown his hat in the ring. Ordorica will not represent his party but will run as a candidate for the Partido Autentico de la Revolucion Mexicana (PARM), which drafted him in late September. Ordorica is a close associate of PRD Deputy Porfirio Munoz Ledo, who will represent the PARM in the 2000 presidential race (see *SourceMex*, 1999-09-29).

### *PRI also faces bitter mayoral primary*

The PRI, which will hold a Nov. 7 primary election to select its mayoral candidate, is also facing a spirited contest between ex-finance secretary Jesus Silva Herzog and Campa Ciprian, the former head of the PRI in Mexico City. Former federal legislator Silvestre Fernandez Barajas is also seeking the nomination. Silva Herzog, who also served as Mexican ambassador to Washington and tourism secretary, is considered the choice of many PRI members in the capital. To counter this strong institutional support, Campa has embarked on an aggressive campaign to discredit his rival and appeal to the city's younger generations.

During a televised debate Sept. 29, Campa questioned whether Silva Herzog would have the necessary vigor to run the city. "In five years, I will only be 47 years old, while Jesus Silva Herzog will be 70," Campa said. "It's not that I do not respect experience, but I think that youth is necessary to confront the grave problems facing Mexico City." Campa has also accused Silva Herzog of meeting secretly with the PRD and scheming to bribe voters. His attacks on Silva Herzog are similar to the campaign strategy employed by PRI presidential candidate Roberto Madrazo, who has attempted to portray Francisco Labastida as the candidate of the PRI (see *SourceMex*, 1999-09-15).

Silva Herzog, who is portraying himself as an honest and straightforward candidate, disputed Campa's attacks as outright lies. But rather than attempting to discredit Campa, Silva Herzog's campaign has centered around his ability to unite various factions of the PRI and work with other

parties. Silva Herzog has also pointed to his experience in promoting economic development. "A government without resources has its hands tied," he said, "therefore we need to reactivate the economy and promote employment through private and government investment."

In the PAN, the party's former leader in Mexico City, Gonzalo Altamirano Dimas, is one of two candidates who has declared his intention to seek the party's nomination. Altamirano has been one of Cardenas' most vocal critics. Some PAN members, however, are not pleased with the two candidates and have proposed drafting either federal Deputy Santiago Creel Miranda or former presidential candidate Diego Fernandez de Cevallos.

### *PRD wins Acapulco mayoral election*

The opposition parties have talked about running a common candidate for the mayoral election in Mexico City, but this is unlikely given the failure of a proposed alliance at the national level (see SourceMex, 1999-09-29). But the PRD won a key mayoral race Oct. 3 in Acapulco with the full backing of the PAN, the PT, and two smaller state parties. The other opposition parties agreed not to field candidates in the Acapulco race to give Zeferino Torreblanco a better chance against PRI candidate Ernesto Rodriguez.

Torreblanco won with more than 53% of the vote. The PRD's victory in Acapulco, however, was overshadowed by major losses elsewhere in the state. The PRI won 59 of 76 mayoral races, including in the state capital of Chilpancingo and the city of Iguala, which were governed by PRD mayors the past three years. The governing party also unseated the PAN in the tourist resort of Taxco.

The PRI also swept elections in the state legislature, winning 22 of the 28 directly elected seats. Earlier this year, the PRI narrowly won the gubernatorial race when Rene Juarez Cisneros defeated Felix Salgado Macedonio of the PRD (see SourceMex, 1999-02-10). In that race, the PRD accused the governing party of violating electoral laws and committing massive fraud. However, the PRD failed to convince electoral authorities to overturn the election results. (Sources: Notimex, The Miami Herald, 09/29/99; Novedades, 09/22/99, 09/30/99; Proceso, 09/19/99, 10/03/99; Associated Press, 09/29/99, 10/04/99; Reuters, 09/30/99, 10/04/99; La Jornada, 09/20/99, 09/30/99, 10/05/99; Excelsior, 09/30/99, 10/05/99, 10/06/99; The News, 09/29/99, 09/30/99, 10/06/99; El Economista, 09/17/99, 09/30/99, 10/06/99)

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