

bers. The government wanted them to come to the city and provide labor that would transform Mexico into an urban and industrial nation. It got what it was after, and then some. The city's population grew from 1.8 million in 1940 to 18 million today. The number of residents is expected to reach 22 million by the year 2000.

"The big issue is that the city grew, for historical reasons, in a way that it shouldn't have," says Irene Pisanty, plant ecologist at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. "If the people in the countryside keep on starving, they will keep on coming here. At least here they can beg or rob."

Pisanty says the government should provide "more formal and real help to the countryside." Within the city itself, "it would be a matter of giving ecology the primary place. But you can't stop producing things. You can't stop PEMEX from working. We have to export oil. If oil is not exported, what will happen?"

Where will money come from? Mexico's severe economic crisis undoubtedly hampers the ability of all segments of society to combat pollution. *South* magazine estimates that the 100 Necessary Actions carry a price tag of \$100 million. Ecologists would like to see private cars supplanted by mass transit and the dirtiest factories moved outside the Valley of Mexico; but such measures are very expensive. The government is laboring under a \$100 billion foreign debt and triple-digit inflation. The nation's gross domestic product fell 3.8 percent in 1986 and another 2.0 percent in the first quarter of 1987. Authorities are afraid to do anything that might jeopardize a hoped-for economic upturn. So troubled industries stay where they are and working people continue to drive old cars that belch forth exhaust.

Despite President Miguel de la Madrid's much-touted policy of decentralization, the number of factory shutdowns can be counted on the fingers of one hand. In a February speech before the PRI's National Executive Committee, Secretariat of Urban Development and Ecology (SEDUE) Secretary Manuel Camacho Solis explained why: "If it took us 50 years to create the capital goods that we have today, we cannot simply let them decline. We cannot dismantle what we have today in order to stay as we were—only with four times the number of inhabitants and higher expectations."

On days when air quality readings cross into the "very poor" range, the 271 worst industries are, by agreement with the government, supposed to cut emissions by 30 percent. No one believes that they do. This past summer the dissatisfied Mexican Ecological Movement (MEM) launched a campaign of symbolic "closures" that entailed blocking factory entrances.

Roughly three-fourths of Mexico City's air pollution comes from motor vehicles. City residents keep cars if they can because mass transit is filled to bursting and it can take two or three hours to get to work by public transportation. The government has reached an agreement with domestic auto manufacturers providing for emission controls on 1988 models. (Catalytic converters are no longer being considered, reportedly because PEMEX gasoline still contains too much lead to be used with them.) Few families, however, can afford to buy new cars and many find the cost of tuning their old ones prohibitively high. MEM estimates that only one out of every nine cars is in good condition.

Almost worse than the cars are antiquated city houses, which set a bad example. "The government can't tell individuals not to pol-

lute while they run buses that are the worst polluters," the Group of 100's Aridjis says.

The government is gradually replacing old buses with new ones, and the metro is being expanded. But the economic crisis supposedly keeps it from doing more.

Ironically, that same crisis could be what opens up the political process, according to Manuel Guerra, director general of the Pact of Ecological Groups and the Autonomous Institute for Ecological Investigations (IN-AINE). The PRI traditionally has controlled allies and opponents alike by passing out slices of a never-ending pie. But that pie shrank when oil prices dropped in 1981.

"There were no more slices," Guerra says. "They had to give something else—and that was political participation. The great risk for us is that the pie will start growing again."

"They can't put us in jail": It is only in this decade that ecologists have gained a voice. During the boom years of the '70s few needed environmental warnings. But since the economic downturn, and with the subsequent fraying of the public nerves, dozens of groups have sprung up throughout the country—and have found audiences.

In Mexico City four or five major coalitions dominate the discussion. Most often quoted in the press is the Group of 100, which has unusual leverage due to the fame of its members, including Octavio Paz, Elena Poniatowska and Gabriel Garcia Marquez. In Mexico, as in most Latin American countries, intellectuals command respect and influence in political circles. Poet and writer Aridjis, for instance, has held two ambassadorships. "They can't put us in jail," he notes.

In December 1982 the government responded to the ecological current by creating the Secretariat of Urban Development and Ecology. The very name betrays weakness, if not insincerity. "It is clear that in this ministry there exists a complex of interests," complains a MEM news release. "One cannot be plaintiff and judge. One cannot be just and democratic given two irreconcilable enemies such as ecology and urban development. As if determined to sabotage its own credibility, SEDUE also shares ad campaigns with PEMEX, indisputably one of the nation's worst polluters.

Then in 1985, the government created a National Commission on Ecology, rather like a presidential commission in the U.S., except that its independence is undermined by the membership of cabinet ministers who run the show. The commission has met only three times in two years. The "21 Measures" announced in February 1986 were generally regarded as useless—"the most shameful decree in the history of Mexican decrees," one ecologist called it—and the 100 Necessary Actions will have to prove their worth.

Pressure from ecologists led to a recent agreement with the city outlining practical anti-pollution measures, such as a sticker campaign for voluntary 20 percent reduction in private auto use. The legislature also recently approved constitutional reforms that pave the way for broad legislation on the environment, something lacking until now.

Ecologists regard these steps as a modest beginning. "What we really need is a national strategy of conservation," says the Mexican Conservationist Federation's Manuel Fernandez, "one that can guide public policy over the next 30 years or so, regardless of how many cabinet ministers may come and go."

Ecologists in Mexico are a fractious lot, with similar aims but diverse tactics that range from confrontation and mass mobilization to limited collaboration with government and industry. Every group claims to be

independent; all are highly critical of the government. They work together on various projects but snipe freely at one another.

This is not accidental. The PRI, a vast political machine that has ruled Mexico since 1929, knows very well how to confuse and coopt its opposition. Corruption is only one of its tools. In the late '60s and early '70s when social unrest fueled the left, the PRI bought its own leftist party—the Socialist Workers' Party, or PST—to participate along with the others.

The Mexican left has been hopelessly fractured ever since. Suspicions and counter-suspicions now plague the ecological movement. It has become a hall of mirrors in which no one can be sure where the others are standing.

The Mexican Conservationist Foundation, for example, is regarded as a "client of industry." Meanwhile, some say the MEM was set up by the government to forestall and control the rest of the movement. "The MEM makes waves on behalf of the progressive wing of the PRI," says one observer who requested anonymity. "Everything is planned. It has to do with power-sharing in Mexico."

When ecological leaders including Aridjis and Guerra signed a pact with the city, National Ecologist Alliance President Jorge Gonzalez Torres, himself accused of hidden ties to the government, expressed nothing but scorn. "The government wants to capture and control ecologists," he says. "They make shows without doing anything."

Guerra defended the action, suggesting that ecologists must take advantage of political openings created by power-jockeying among PRI functionaries. In this case Mayor Ramon Aguirre Velazquez presumably wanted to steal the ecology show from SEDUE Secretary Camacho Solis.

So why shouldn't ecologists use this to gain a little ground? "It was a positive development," Guerra says. "The government more or less recognized, for the first time, that we exist and that the programs we propose are not illogical."

To some extent, of course, every group

must work within the system in order to be effective. "The Mexican political system is very intelligent," Guerra notes. "It is not a monolithic structure. To the contrary, it is very dynamic. If you are outside it, you're an outcast. If you're inside it, you have many options."

Another question plagues the movement: can grassroots support be mobilized? The same one-party system that has made corruption and inept governance the rule has discouraged citizen participation. Most ecological groups see consciousness-raising as one of their chief tasks. For organizations like the research institute INAINE, this means inviting high-ranking industrialists and government officials to workshops on the environment. For MEM and the Alliance it means staging rallies and mass demonstrations.

The Alliance's Gonzalez is trying to create an Ecological Party in time for the 1988 presidential election, although he knows it won't win. "The party was born in the face of the necessity to do whatever could help to develop a social consciousness about ecology and to give people the opportunity to participate," he says.

Many of his fellow ecologists are characteristically suspicious, and worry that the new party will undermine the entire movement. "The best thing from the government's point of view is to create a political party with Jorge [Gonzalez] on top of it," one critic speculates. "Because once you create a political party in Mexico you can be sure the government will coopt the head of the party. Politics in Mexico is a very, very discredited profession, even more so than in the U.S."

It is said that pollution is the price Third World countries must pay for industrialization and development. Perhaps so, but leading Mexican intellectuals like Aridjis think the price has gone too high. "We have pollution that has exceeded the levels of tolerance," Aridjis says. "And if nothing is done, people will die. They are already dying." □

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On geography, history, weather and pollution

Pollution is part of the weather in Mexico City, where 30,000 industrial plants and 2.5 million motor vehicles noisily co-exist with 18 million people.

Geography and history are both to blame. Geography put the city on a dry lake basin more than two kilometers above sea level—where breathing is relatively difficult—and surrounded it with tall mountains that block the movement of air masses. History led one-fourth of the nation's population to this spot during rapid industrialization and uncontrolled growth, putting intolerable pressure on air, soil and water.

Nearly five million tons of chemical wastes choke the air each year, at least 75 percent from cars, buses and trucks and the rest from factories. There are 3,720,000 tons of carbon monoxide, 525,000 tons of hydrocarbons, 411,600 tons of sulphur dioxide, 153,800 tons of suspended particles, 132,000 tons of nitrogen oxides and 18,250 tons of lead, according to government-approved figures. Ozone, too, is abundant.

Meanwhile, at least 12,000 tons of garbage are produced daily, most of it left open to the skies. Solid and liquid toxic wastes of industrial and biomedical origin amount to an estimated 2,500 tons a day.

Since 30 percent of residents lack city services, runaway sewage is also a problem.

As anywhere, there are good days and bad days, and each season in Mexico City brings its peculiar hazards.

Winter is prime time for breathing in chemicals, thanks to thermal inversions. From October through January, cold air often settles over the valley like the lid on a saucepan, trapping beneath it warm and increasingly toxic air.

In February, March and April come spring winds, which clear away smog but blow in dust—some 20 tons per square kilometer per month. Dried fecal matter from slums becomes airborne and can contaminate food and water.

Ozone is the curse of April through June due to ultraviolet radiation from the summer sun that speeds photochemical reactions among nitrogen oxides, hydrocarbons and atmospheric oxygen. Then the rainy season of May through September leaves the skies washed clean but drenches sidewalks and trees with acid rain.

Only 2.8 square meters of green space remain per person, compared to 7 in New York, 16.7 in Paris and 35.9 in Chicago. —R.S.

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**ONLY INTERNATIONAL
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Persian Gulf fratricide

On September 20 the Reagan administration proudly announced the seizure of an Iranian ship, which was allegedly laying mines in the international waters of the Persian Gulf. This U.S. military action was accompanied by outraged administration denunciations of Iran for its wanton disregard of civilized behavior and its lack of respect for the rights of all nations to enjoy freedom of the seas. And, indeed, laying mines and blowing up non-belligerent ships engaged in peaceful commerce is not only reprehensible, but violates international law.

But wait. Isn't this the same administration that only a few short months ago was condemned by the International Court of Justice for laying mines in international waters off Nicaragua and for blowing up a non-belligerent ship engaged in peaceful commerce with that nation? What are we to make of this? ■

So what else is new?

"If Judge Bork isn't in the mainstream, neither am I."
 —former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Warren E. Burger ■

Facts and meaning of the contragate scandal

In a thoughtful article on the contragate scandal in the *New York Review of Books*, Theodore Draper explores James Madison's idea that "there are more instances of the abridgment of freedom of the people by gradual silent encroachment of those in power than by violent and sudden usurpation." As Draper points out, this very old idea has had dramatic relevance all too frequently since the end of World War II. First there was McCarthyism. Then Nixon and Watergate. And now the Iran-contra revelations.

But McCarthy was an outsider, who, though successful for a time in bullying the executive branch, never had access to its resources. His was a public demagoguery, as quickly brought down—when it had served its purpose—as it had shot up. And Nixon's Watergate, though "bad enough," was relatively easy to contain because it involved no issue that could be "camouflaged as a blow in defense of the republic." Contragate, on the other hand, involved the secret powers of the executive branch in pursuit of an agenda at odds with the policy of Congress and the wishes of the American people. The Reagan conspiracy, Draper writes, embodied a "toxic formula for putting the American body politic at maximum risk." ■

And Draper goes on to prove his assertion. Pointing out that by the time the Boland Amendment of 1984 was passed, "the Reagan administration had committed itself to the care and feeding of the Nicaraguan contras at all costs." He concludes that where there was a will to evade the amendment, there was always a way. "With enough ingenuity and bad faith, almost any law can be evaded or made meaningless," he writes, "especially by government officials who dedicate themselves to getting around the plain intent of the law."

That, of course, was exactly what Reagan intended. And it is what he succeeded in doing—with regard both to contra aid and to Iranian arms sales. These were policy decisions, made at the highest level. And they were carried out by subordinates who understood the president's intent, whether or not they received specific orders for all of their illegal acts. That is why Draper forcefully criticizes the Tower Commission report. Calling it a "crass cop-out," he says that by giving the impression that Reagan's "management style," rather than his policy decisions, was the source of the trouble, the report "seriously underplayed the culpability of the president and exaggerated the responsibility of his advisers."

All of this, in our opinion, is true. The Reagan administration misused its power in violation of its constitutional limits—not because of the irresponsible acts of rogue elephants in its midst, but because of ideological intransigence at the top.

Yet it is vital to remember that this abuse of executive power did not come out of the blue. It is the result of a long process that has shifted power from Congress to the presidency in this century, and of imperial policies inherently at odds with democratic government. Since World War I, when the U.S. emerged as a leading imperial power, more and more legislative prerogatives have been surrendered to the president—starting with the establishment of the Bureau of the Budget in 1921. After World War II, when the U.S. assumed the role of protector of the world imperial system, the president was given increased power in the conduct of foreign affairs by the creation of both the CIA and the National Security Council.

The Reagan scandal was not an aberration of policy. What Reagan tried to do in Nicaragua was entirely consistent with the policies of all administrations since Eisenhower. During the Eisenhower years, the CIA overthrew the democratically elected government of Guatemala on the excuse that it represented a Communist threat to our security, and the administration decided to oppose Vietnam's attempt to escape from French colonial domination. The difference is that in the early '50s, the U.S. was still an empire on the rise, whereas it is now an empire on the decline. Policies that were once almost universally applauded are now beginning to inspire second thoughts. Powers mindlessly surrendered to the president when "bipartisanship" was the watchword for the American Century are now appropriately being recaptured by Congress, so that our policies can be publicly debated. We are at the beginning of a hopeful process. ■