

# ECONOMICS AND DEMOCRACY: MIGUEL ALEMÁN

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**MIGUEL ALEMÁN VELASCO, GOVERNOR** of Veracruz from 1998–2004, came to the University of Texas in November 2008 to give a talk on political and economic challenges for Mexico. He also participated in the dedication of an Olmec

sculpture donated to LLILAS by the Universidad Veracruzana (see related story, p. 30). The dedication was held in conjunction with the conference *Olmec: The Origins of Ancient Mexican Civilization* organized by the Mexican Center of LLILAS. Governor Alemán was interviewed on November 18 by Renata Keller, a Ph.D. candidate in UT's Department of History.

*RK: I'd like to begin by discussing the recent worldwide economic crisis. What do you believe the Mexican government and Mexican business sector should do to minimize the effects and protect the nation's economy?*

**MA:** Well, as a matter of fact, we just had the sixth big summit of Mexican businessmen in Monterrey four days ago. It's a three-day meeting, not only with Mexican people, but also with people from Central America and Colombia and Caribbean countries. We all have similar problems, so we like to discuss them and propose solutions. Most of the people at the summit are the heads of their own enterprises, so they have the flexibility to make their own decisions and they can act immediately. At the summit, we talked about our problems and we listened to all of our nearby neighbors, including the United States and Canada. This year, the crisis was so large that we decided to invite India, Brazil, and China as well, so it was very interesting to see what they are doing and in what ways they are suffering. We anticipated the crisis a little here, we saw a small crisis starting and we thought: "Oh this is minor, but the one that is coming is going to be a major one and very serious."

We had a similar local crisis in Mexico in 1994 and 1995. The government had to do a bailout like the United States recently has done, but on a smaller scale, and there was no money to trade, actually, in large corporations. . . . But the government created a program like the bailout here. Many people hated it, but it has served as a shield for Mexico in

this crisis because the crisis hurts us very very much—when the United States catches a cold, we get pneumonia in Mexico.

This time it has been hard for many corporations, but mainly large corporations, not the middle-level and small corporations. These were not hurt by the exchange or they were not hurt by the world market because everything was controlled somehow. In addition, the local stock market was hurt for public corporations in Mexico. Unfortunately, the ones that were also in New York were the ones that suffered more, but I think somehow most of the businessmen were ready for something like this. Some of us did not give in and start to buy, what are they called, some kind of assurance [futures]. [But those who did] are the ones who were really hurt. But what we have to do is exactly what we did in '94, we have to look for solutions, work it out for ourselves—build projects, expand, encourage more education to prepare the students for technical training in areas that are useful. We have started doing this and it's working.

*RK: How do you see increased cooperation between Mexican universities and U.S. universities contributing to that effort to improve technical education? Do you see value in such an exchange?*

**MA:** That's very important, especially when students from the United States go to Mexico and Mexican students come to the United States, because not only will you learn what you want to learn to be more active in the world economy, but also because we get to know each other better. It's incredible, but sometimes we know more about China than about the United States or Canada, and you know more about Europe than Mexico. So I think that that's what is very good, the exchange of the students for a six-month period or one year or whatever. And of course if you pursue a career it's fantastic. The university is where you really learn; after you thought you had learned something in high school or grade school, it's the university that really makes you learn. It also depends, of course, on the teachers and other factors, but it's you yourself who wants to learn, that's why it's so important. That's where you really decide your life, that moment, and know what you want to do.

# AN INTERVIEW WITH VELASCO

by RENATA KELLER

*RK: In your opinion, what have been the virtues and the defects of Mexico's democratic transition?*

MA: I think that we have learned. I belong to the PRI; we were seventy years in power, we lost in 2000, and I think we learned from our mistakes. We also made important strides and created very important institutions that are working, so that's why we changed our three basic documents completely to reconstruct our party for the twenty-first century. And the other political parties are doing the same because the people have changed and, fortunately, the young people are getting interested in politics. This is what makes a nation grow up and look to the future; otherwise, you keep talking about history and you're looking backward instead of forward.

*RK: And what do you see as the remaining challenges in the process of electoral reform?*

MA: I think that we are learning very quickly about the electoral process and now we have one new institution, the Electoral Federal Institute. We know that we have a guarantee that what the party is doing and what the party is thinking will be respected. There is also the checkup they have to do on the candidates and on the votes, so you feel more at ease, more comfortable in the knowledge that the clean elections are really getting the one who won elected, even by one vote sometimes. I don't know if everybody's happy, but it's working.

*RK: What challenges does Mexico's system of higher education face?*

MA: Well, I would say political interests—teachers with their unions are more interested in politics than education. Private schools and high schools are more interested in making money than teaching, and the state's own schools are the only ones that are really making a big effort. I know Veracruz is doing it, with the university and all the way down, but some states and Mexico City are very difficult because of the unions.

*RK: What do you think about the recent reforms to Mexico's petroleum policy?*

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MA: I think that this reform was needed. It's not a very extensive reform, but I would say it's the first good step and it was taken in time, especially now. And I think it served the purpose very well for making Pemex completely a real corporation that the government owns but an autonomous, real petroleum organization.

*RK: What remedies would you recommend for the increasing violence between the drug cartels and the authorities?*

MA: Well, that's a very complex matter and requires a very complex answer. First, we have to realize that Mexico is a passageway. The drugs come from outside of Mexico, with the exception maybe of marijuana, some plantations of which are in Mexico. The market is mostly in Europe and the United States, the money comes from the United States, and the arms too. We have six thousand or more troops on the border and if the bad guys [drug cartels] have the money and the arms, they will get the drugs and



Mr. Alemán, LLILAS Assistant Director Marco Muñoz, Fundación Miguel Alemán official Lorenzo Lazo, and Benson Latin American Collection staff member Michael Hironymous review the original manuscript of Santa Anna's memoirs in the Benson's Rare Books and Manuscripts Reading Room.

sell them, and it never stops, so you have to fight against them. And the first one who has to do this is the government. And they are doing it, so everybody else is cooperating in order to really fight this war. We're making arrangements with the United States so that they stop selling certain weaponry in these places, like machine guns and hand grenades and bazookas, because [the drug cartels] were really armed. And also the money has to be controlled by the banks if it doesn't come in illegally. And then we have the Mexicans who want to come to United States to find a better solution to their problems, their jobs and income, so we have to solve that at home and produce more jobs, and well-paid ones. But everything, for me, is about education. If you really have good education, people will know more and make good decisions instead of just easy ones. So that's one solution.

*RK: What role should the United States play in this security crisis with the drug cartels?*

*MA: Well, to help as they are now in terms of stopping the sale of arms and controlling more of the money that comes out of the United States into Mexico. Sometimes [the drug cartels] buy restaurants or hotels to launder the money. But I think with the intelligence of the different agencies, the U.S. can detect this easily and let us know. We are working with them now, in order to take what comes into Mexico, through Mexico, from Central and South America, even by submarines because now [the cartels] use small subs. The subs are*

*detected, [the U.S. intelligence agencies] let us know, and we send the navy or the army to get them. This is very effective. The other thing is going to be the Merida Plan, which is similar to what they did in Colombia. Once the Senate and the Congress agree, I think it's going to be one of the good solutions for this problem.*

*RK: Do you see Barack Obama's election as an opportunity for increased collaboration and reciprocity in our nations' bilateral relations?*

*MA: Yes, I think so, but not in a four-year term. Five years, maybe, because he's going to be very busy for the first two years in making changes in the United States and answering all the questions and promises that he received and made during his campaign. So if he doesn't do that, the people of the United States aren't going to be happy and he will not be able to help anybody. So, first come the people of the United States. In the third year, maybe he can start a plan not only for Mexico, but also for the rest of the world, and he has to start bringing back the soldiers from Iraq. And then you are in the fourth year, which could be a reelection year, so maybe in the fifth year.*

*RK: What specific changes would you like to see in U.S.-Mexico relations?*

*MA: I would like to see something organized for professional exchanges with Mexico, especially in education. How can we help each other to improve education, for instance, in my country? That would help very very much. ☀*

## BOURGET'S HUACA EL PUEBLO DISCOVERY

UT Archaeology Professor Steve Bourget heads the Huaca el Pueblo project, one of the most important predominantly Moche sites in the lower part of the Zaña Valley in Peru and part of the Ucupe Archaeological Complex. Bourget received a three-year grant from the National Science Foundation for the Huaca el Pueblo project to establish the first complete chronological stylistic sequence at a given site in the northern Moche region, based on changes in architectural features and material culture.

Excavations at the site in 2004, 2007, and 2008 revealed that it had been continuously occupied from the Formative Period through the Late Horizon. Following a series of earlier tomb excavations of high-status burials that provided insight into Moche political structure and social organization, a major discovery took place here in 2008.

A high-status Middle Moche tomb, christened the Lord of Ucupe by the local population, was excavated, representing the first Middle Moche period elite burial found outside Sipán. Dating to the transition from the Early to Middle Moche period, the tomb manifests both stylistic traditions. The large funerary chamber contained the bodies of three males and a female with a five-month-old fetus. In addition, a cache of extremely well preserved metallic, mostly copper, and ceramic objects was found in the main tomb. Textile fragments also found there provided a radiocarbon date of AD 340 to 540.

Bourget continued his excavations at Huaca el Pueblo with a field school during summer 2009. **For more information on the project, visit <http://www.utexas.edu/courses/arh400/quinoweb/speakers.html>**