CHAPTER SEVEN

Revolution for Middling Mexicans and Its End, 1938–1982

Three major transitions from 1938 to 1982 reshaped national life in revolutionary society. The first saw the switch of official government programs from a rural to an urban focus, with the promotion of industry and services in place of the agrarian redistribution of land and water rights. The second came with the emergence of a new generation of city-reared, civilian, college-educated leaders who, beginning in 1946, replaced the rural-born revolutionary veterans who preceded them. The third resulted from the accelerated migration from the countryside to the city, not just to the capital city but to Guadalajara, Monterrey, and Puebla, and to resort towns, especially Acapulco.

The change in generations affected politics but was not accompanied, as many have argued, by a return of conservative politicians who reclaimed the government. Rather, it resulted at first from the pragmatism of President Lázaro Cárdenas, with his determination to do the best possible for his people, and then with the emergence of new leaders who benefited from the revolution, especially from improved working conditions and opportunities for education. The middle sectors—not really a class and certainly not all identified with bourgeois behavior—followed these programs, which they viewed as theirs. The position of many of these middling groups was summed up as "It's Our Turn Now." This motto reflected the view that government reform programs had already provided for the agrarians and for the workers, and it was now time to do something for middling Mexicans.[1] This program that aimed at the city and increasingly the middle sectors rested in the hands of the revolutionary generation from 1938 to 1946. It later became the primary focus of the new generation that came to power in 1952.

Before the shift to urban programs could make much headway, Mexico became embroiled in the global conflict. On May 22, 1942, Mexican entered World War II with a commitment to a world free of the aggression and imperialism of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and militarist Japan. These three Axis nations threatened the revolutionary programs in Mexico and other nations, especially the Soviet Union. Mexicans participated as a nation in the Pacific battles with an air force squadron, and individually with many Mexicans enlisted in the U.S. military. Mexicans served with valor and won many citations, including the Medal of Honor.

On the home front, Mexicans experienced changes through the participation of women in many occupations, including a woman's parachute nurses unit, expanded roles in management at the telephone company where they traditionally worked only as operators, and in much larger numbers in teaching and journalism. They also worked beside men with the shifting of the economy to produce essential products for the war effort. Farmers enthusiastically changed their crops from corn to cottonseed to produce oil for use as a lubricant and other products. The agriculture industry's efforts in that direction even resulted in the prospect of famine, only averted with the shipment of corn from the United States and Canada. Mexico also provided silver, lead, and other minerals to the Allies, along with mahogany used in the construction of patrol boats and airplanes. Mexicans went to the United States to work in agriculture, war industries, and railroads under a guest system. These individuals, called braceros, made a fundamental contribution to the war effort, as they and U.S. women became the primary workforce because U.S. men had been mobilized into the military.

Once the Allies, including Mexico, secured victory, Mexicans found that they both benefited and suffered in the international situation of the postwar years. The nation and its people initially benefited as the savings forced on both the government and individuals provided a great deal of capital for major national construction programs and individual consumer purchases. Mexico emerged as a leader in the tier of nations just behind the allied powers of the United States, the USSR, Great Britain, and France. Recognition of Mexico's international standing came with the election of Jaime Torres Bodet as secretary-general of the United Nations. Torres Bodet served in this powerful position and was instrumental in the creation of the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) that focused on the world's children and young people. This international organization could not prevent the Cold War when the two power blocs led by the United States and the Soviet Union emerged. Mexico, although aligned generally with its northern neighbor, did not acquiesce in the all-or-nothing red scare position of the United States. Therefore, Mexico became a scene of a good deal of intrigue between agents of the two blocs.

"Teacher, tell rural people that victory is in the harvest." The growth of the population and the demands of World War II together moved the national government toward a new emphasis on production in both the city and the countryside. Hoover Institution Political Poster Database, MX 54

Mexico as a nation witnessed changing attitudes toward life among some of its population, especially those who benefited from the bracero program in the United States. The program resulted in Mexicans, even those in subsistence agricultural regions, moving directly into the cash economy because of the remittances received from the braceros abroad. The braceros returned with changed ideas. Although they did not adopt U.S. social or political practices, they took on their host country's ideas about consumption, material goods, and definitions of the good life, with a notable enthusiasm for home appliances.

President Miguel Alemán, who took office in 1946, represented the new generation and brought into his government other men like himself. These new men were called "pups" because of their youth. The new president was the son of a revolutionary general and governor of Veracruz who had been murdered when he supported the Escobar Rebellion against the Calles regime in 1929. Alemán, a civilian, college graduate, and city person, came to the office determined to create a framework in which the revolutionary traditions could function in a way that reflected the realities of the urban nation. He surrounded himself with individuals of similar background and like-minded politics.

More than 70 percent of his administration were college graduates, one-third of them lawyers.[2] They represented the first technocratic generation, which served as the basis for a new type of politician. Ramón Beteta, who became the first cabinet member with a college degree in economics (earned at the University of Texas), exemplified this group. His goals found expression in programs to sponsor industrialization and development. In practice, he attempted to achieve industrialization through a program of "import substitution industrialization." This method of development rested on the theory first argued by the Argentine economist Raúl Prebisch, who held that a country should produce those goods that it imported because those clearly had a market. The existence of the market solved the consumption side to development and drove production. In Mexico, this led to government support for the production of appliances and textiles—all bearing the trademark "Hecho en México" (Made in Mexico). This approach renewed the revolutionary party's concern with consumption, which had previously motivated regulations on rents and food prices.

As much as the program focused on domestic control of the economy, the most widely accepted expression of the new project came in the opening of the first Sears store in Mexico City. The Sears corporation drew on surveys of Mexican responses to radio and other media during World War II to shape its advertising campaign, and the leaders of the Sears international program in Latin America insisted the store should be placed in the hands of Mexican managers as quickly as they were trained in Chicago and had gained experience. Moreover, Sears agreed to stock appliances and textiles with the "Made in Mexico" label. The evening before the grand opening, the archbishop came to bless the store,

sprinkling holy water on many of the products. The opening of Sears on February 27 proved to be one of the sensation events of 1947. Sears was instantly a success—more than 120,000 people came to the store the first day. Faced with such large crowds, the management distributed tickets so that everyone had a chance to shop. Sales on opening day totaled $600,000 and continued at that rate for weeks afterward. Eventually, Sears opened fifty-five stores across the republic.[3]

Using cash saved during the war, Mexicans in the capital city also bought apartments and homes. Revealing the class of the new owners, these houses were constructed without the small room used by maids or other domestic servants. These new bungalow homes with three bedrooms clearly targeted the middle sections of society. The middle-class desire for either a house or a condominium reflected new expectations of urban people about property ownership. Oddly, this attitude coincided with the popularity of the board game based on Monopoly in the United States, called "Turista Nacional," which had street names based on those in the national capital.

The Alemán government launched major construction projects that had multiple effects on the economy. Along with paved highways, this administration focused on new buildings, including the beautiful university city on the southern side of the capital, to unite the institutions and colleges of the National Autonomous University (UNAM), which had been dispersed across the capital city. Juan O'Gorman designed a striking library for the center of the new UNAM campus, with windowless walls covered with a mosaic of pre-Columbian images. Critics joked that the wonderful building had everything but books. The government commissioned many other official buildings across the city, and private architects undertook other projects with concrete as the basic construction material.

Besides the focus on the national capital, the president sponsored the development of the beach resort city Acapulco. His efforts included building a paved road to the Pacific coast, pressing the legal system to approve the dispossession of landholders in the area, and giving assurances of government assistance to contractors. Once the paved airstrip, improved port, and major hotels had been built, the president himself spent a good deal of time there and generally invited the stars of Hollywood, like Johnny Weissmuller, star of the Tarzan series, and political leaders to join him. Widespread tourism, including cruise ships from San Francisco and Los Angeles, followed.

The rush to construction of buildings and highways opened profitable economic opportunities and, in some cases, resulted in various forms of official and unofficial corruption, such as information leaks on building locations, use of substandard materials, bribes of housing officials, and many others. The flurry of construction provided building and service employment and generally led to an era of prosperity in cities and resorts.

In the midst of this extravaganza of construction, a steady flow of workers continued to the United States under the terms of the bracero law. These approved guest workers made a substantial contribution to the flourishing U.S. agriculture, especially in the Pacific States and Texas. The workers regularly sent money to their families, where their remittances had substantial effects, especially in terms of the construction of new permanent homes. The workers also returned with many goods purchased in the United States, ranging from pickup trucks to sporting equipment to electronic appliances.

The national rage for consumption of goods and the middle-class lifestyle soon prompted critics to produce satires of the new Mexicans of the middle sectors. Cartoonists in particular offered parodies of the clashing class views of individuals and families changing from campesino workers, revolutionary veterans, and returning braceros into bourgeois families in the new suburbs or in the new multifamily condominium buildings. The most popular of these cartoons was Gabriel Vargas's *La Familia Burrón*. Created in 1948, it continued to be the nation's most popular comic strip through the 1950s and 1960s. The Burrón family featured the wife, Borola, who had married down from a rich to a poor, working-class family, and the husband, Don Regis, a barber, who struggles to make ends meet. The family captures the overlapping modern and traditional cultures of the time, such as when Don Regis wakes up in the middle of the night with heart pains and his wife wants to rush him to doctor—by which she means finding a street vendor who sells amulets against heart attacks. The family's dysfunctional relationships brings to mind the American television show *The Simpsons*.

The works of the popular cartoonist Abel Quezada offered sarcastic images of the newly rich, especially corrupt business and political leaders, represented by diamond rings in their noses. His drawings also included celebrities such as the movie and professional wrestling star El Santo. Cartoon portrayals aside, the economy continued to grow.

The national growth rate of about 6 percent provided a tremendous sense of confidence that inspired various entrepreneurial efforts.[4] No better example of these entrepreneurial dreams exists than the effort to create Mexican Major League Baseball. The ambitious goal of Jorge Pascual and his five wealthy brothers was to challenge the major leagues

in the United States. In 1946, the brothers organized their league and used their checkbooks to tempt major leaguers from the United States. None of the established stars came to Mexico, but the Pascuals successfully enticed more than a dozen big leaguers, including Sal Maglie and Mickey Owen, for what was called in the United States the "Mexican Hayride." The brothers also sought out players from the U.S. Negro Leagues and signed a number of outstanding African American players to their teams. The episode for most of the players lasted only about five months before they began seeking reinstatement in the United States. Although it did not take off, the project demonstrated the entrepreneurial thinking of businessmen who recognized the market for sports entertainment with baseball and soccer teams across the country.

Baseball was clearly an urban game, and Mexico had become an urban nation. The capital, along with the other large cities, took on a different tone characterized in some ways by the rise to prominence of a new age-group. As part of the developed world trend, teenagers became a recognized segment of the city population. Some of them appeared dangerous because of their association with gangs and crime, which led to widespread discussion of juvenile delinquency. The appearance of these individuals in movies made them all the more threatening. In Mexico as in the United States, James Dean in the title role of *Rebel without a Cause* became the archetype of restless teens. For Mexico especially, director Luis Buñuel filmed the classic urban teenage movie *Los Olvidados* (*The Forgotten*) about street gangs with all the alienation and violence of the bitter urbanism of the capital.

Nearly as widespread as these movies was the popular music that represented the drudgery and hopelessness of the lives of the poor. Typical of these songs were lyrics that referred to the overcrowded slums that, after the movies of the 1950s, were referred to as the *quinto patio*—the way back patio of tenement buildings. Despite the president's construction programs, the center of the capital city had an abandoned, slumlike character. Workers, faced with commutes to jobs, found the poor transportation system created a daytime nightmare. The most important change for the city came with the selection of a new mayor.

The capital became Ernesto Uruchurtu's obsession. As the new mayor, he reorganized the bus service in the city, largely by threatening to crack the heads of the bus drivers and their unions. He also launched a program to beautify the city through urban renewal and the creation of green spaces, both parks and gardens. He, like so many officials before and after, battled the ubiquitous street peddlers, attempting to facilitate the flow of both motorized and pedestrian traffic. As he went about the business of renewing run-down sections of town and planting gladiolas in parks and around monuments, he also initiated a moralizing campaign aimed at prostitution and crime, particularly theft and sale of stolen or misrepresented goods, and corruption. Uruchurtu's campaign in the capital city to some extent overshadowed national development programs, as Mexico became a megacity and a major tourist attraction.

The idea that tourism was the smokeless industry appealed greatly to both government administrators and private entrepreneurs who began to push for air travel as well as automobile visits to Mexico. PEMEX, the national petroleum industry, opened an office of tourism that published free pamphlets on attractions, roads, hotels, and other services in order to promote automobile tourism to ancient ruins, beautiful beaches, colonial cities, and the national capital. This campaign had a great success.

National programs moved forward as well, particularly under the direction of President Adolfo López Mateos (1958–64), who, at only forty-seven years old, brought a youthful vigor to his presidency. Widely considered to come from the same model as U.S. president John F. Kennedy and his highly visible wife, Jackie, López Mateos and his wife, Eva Samano, appeared regularly, creating ample photo opportunities of the handsome couple. Moreover, he was the first president whose election included the votes of women. After obtaining the right to vote in 1953, they cast ballots in large numbers in their first presidential election.

Women's suffrage represented a long struggle on the part of women, who worked to obtain their rightful participation in politics throughout the 1920s. President Cárdenas had intimated that he intended to amend the constitution for female suffrage, but he backed away from this commitment after the expropriation of the oil industry because he feared the issue would divide the country at the moment it needed unity to face foreign oil companies. After World War II, with a victory against the Nazi and Fascist regimes, justice and equity for all, including women, became a major program. Finally, this resulted in the 1953 amendment to the constitution.

López Mateos modeled his administration on that of Lázaro Cárdenas. The parallels between the two are striking, particularly in three areas: López Mateos reinvigorated the agrarian redistribution program to provide more land (some 30 million acres, especially in the tropical south) to rural Mexicans than any president other Cárdenas.[5] Like his predecessor, who nationalized the principal energy industry in 1938 by taking national control of oil production, López Mateos in 1962 replaced U.S. and Canadian companies with national control over the critical energy industry, electricity. Moreover, the president, like his

The National Petroleum Corporation (PEMEX) was created as a result of the 1938 expropriation of the foreign oil companies by the national government. One campaign to increase gas and oil consumption promoted automobile tourism throughout the country through the distribution of the monthly PEMEX Travel Bulletin; this issue promotes the Chichimec route. Private collection

mentor, initiated a major educational program, in which his government provided both new schools and free textbooks. The Ministry of Education under Jaime Torres Bodet provided materials for prefabricated school buildings, and communities supplied the land and the labor. The free and compulsory textbooks immediately resulted in criticism from both the right and the left, as both the church and the radicals opposed the official history provided by the textbook authors, but the standardized textbook program continued and became a major source of the national culture.

The youthful, handsome López Mateos, in the fashion of Cárdenas, created a populist program that tied his government to popular culture. Noteworthy was the government's purchase of the movie industry, which had been subject to a good deal of supervision from Hollywood studios. Regulation of the movies resulted in federal control of theater ticket prices to ensure that this popular entertainment would be essentially available to all Mexicans. The production of films aimed at recapturing the popularity and screen magic of the earlier golden age.

Moreover, the president followed the cardenista model in moving against unofficial labor and political movements. Despite his support for low-cost housing for workers in the capital city and major health programs against tuberculosis, polio, and malaria, his responsible reform program did not include tolerance for unofficial strikes. He used troops, in the most dramatic moment, to break the railroad workers' strike of 1959 with the arrest of major railroad union leaders, especially Demetrio Vallejo, and to manipulate the powerful teachers union. His approach was adopted by his successor, Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, who intervened to break up a doctors' strike in 1964 and 1965.

López Mateos and Diaz Ordaz adopted a policy of support for the Cuban Revolution of Fidel Castro, up to the point at which Castro invited the USSR to build missile sites on the island. Then the Mexican leaders opposed the Soviet militarization because it could easily lead to nuclear war. At the same time, the leaders of the official party in Mexico, even though they had genuine respect for Fidel and offered continuing support to his revolutionary social and economic reforms, did not intend to allow Castro-like political groups to threaten their authority in Mexico. For the most part, the government leaders relied on the ambiguous law against social dissolution that allowed for arrests, clandestine imprisonment, and even, in some cases, death, without any accounting to relatives or the public.

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López Mateos administration and the Olympics witnessed a widening gap within the nation between the incomes of the rich and poor, but more significantly between the growing population (increasing at a stunning 4.5 percent per year)[7] and the government's inability to provide social services to a people more than half of whom were under eighteen years old. Another widening break existed between right and left, both increasingly dissatisfied with the official party and the existing government. The unexpected development during this decade was the conversion of the youth culture (the rebels without a cause) of the first years after World War II into a counterculture, more political engaged and more cosmopolitan in outlook.

The student movement, centered in the capital city in the National Autonomous University (UNAM) and the National Polytechnic University, was run by students increasingly disenchanted with the official party and the national government. Mexico's selection to host the Olympic Games epitomized what many student associations found objectionable about the regime. These groups were similar to student organizations in the United States that opposed the space program. The students emphasized the growing number of Mexicans living in poverty and insisted available funds should go to a program to alleviate both economic and social inequities. Government officials and many other Mexicans took great pride in the opportunity to stage the Olympics and demonstrate grandeur of both the nation and its people. These administrators intended that no one disturb the national image that would be broadcast, in color for the first time, on international television.

The opposing views of government responsibility clashed in the summer of 1968, in ways that reflected the international university student movements of that year, which included strikes and demonstrations in Paris, Warsaw, Santiago, Tokyo, London, and, above all, Chicago and Washington, D.C. At the same time, the university activists challenged specific Mexican issues. An unrelated student issue resulted in fights between student gangs and demonstrators at the UNAM, and the national executive and his cabinet decided to authorize the use of the military to end the violence before it disrupted the general peace in the city, just prior to the Olympics. Sending soldiers or police onto the campus violated the autonomy of the university and immediately mobilized the university against the government.

Students created a leadership committee, with members from various organizations and campuses. Following the best revolutionary tactics, they rotated the persons in charge on a daily basis, so no one or two persons could be arrested and disrupt their activities. The student leaders planned silent, nonviolent demonstrations that would disrupt traffic, business, and government in the capital. They also wanted to educate the city's residents with their political views and goals by sending groups of students to perform street theater. They wrote a list of demands that they broadcast on handbills and campus radio and wanted to present to the president in person:

> Freedom for the political prisoners
> Freedom for the imprisoned students
> Delimitation of responsibilities
> Dissolution of the Riot Police
> Repeal the anti-subversion law
> Indemnify the families of the dead and injured...[8]

These resolutions ranged from restoring and respecting the autonomy of the universities, to the shifting of national funds from Olympic construction projects to public housing, to the release of Demetrio Vallejo, the leader of the railroad strikers in 1958–1959, who was still in prison. The student movement soon exceeded a hundred thousand in number.[9]

The coordinating committee that directed the student activities had an explicit nonconfrontational policy. This was made patently evident when the committee called for a major demonstration at the Plaza of Three Cultures, or Tlatelolco. Committee members did not call for a march on the Zócalo, the main plaza in front of the presidential offices; rather, they arranged for their demonstration in a less provocative location. They intended to have a succession of speakers and demand again that the president receive their petition. On October 12, 1968, the organizers saw a crowd of some 5,000 demonstrators in the plaza, and their presentations began in an orderly way. Suddenly the students heard the sound of approaching helicopters and, shortly afterward, bursts of gunfire into the crowd. The students panicked and tried to rush from the plaza; meanwhile, military and paramilitary troops continued to fire on them and to take prisoners. Within a matter of minutes the demonstration ended, the plaza littered with shoes, other personal items, and some bodies a mute testimony to official, planned military repression.

October 2 stands as a day of infamy. Many aspects of the tragedy remain matters of debate. What can be said with certainty is that President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, his secretary of the interior (whose duties included domestic security), Luis Echeverría, and the chief of staff of the military had several meetings to discuss ways to prevent any social disturbances, especially student demonstrations similar to those in the United States and other countries, that might threaten the hosting

of the Olympic Games. The men agreed to crash the young people with violence and arrest. Official and unofficial investigations have attempted to fix the blame for giving the order to kill the students. Recently, reports from secret agencies pointed to Echeverría, who was placed under house arrest, but the courts dismissed the charges. Other evidence suggests that the final decision came from the commanding officer at the meeting, partly in reaction to the hemming and hawing on the part of the president, who seemed to hint he wanted it done without explicitly saying so. This kind of effort to achieve deniability characterized other leaders at the time, such as disgraced President Richard Nixon in the United States.

Some aspects of the massacre will never be exactly known. How many students and other demonstrators did the army and the paramilitary murder? How many demonstrators disappeared into prison and detention camps, never to reappear? Even without answers to these questions, the indelible effects of these tragic events on the nation and the culture have become increasingly apparent.

Luis Echeverría, selected president in 1970, attempted to escape blame for the Tlatelolco events by promoting a populist regime, reminiscent of the Cárdenas years. He eased into the office in the wake of Mexico's successful hosting of the World Cup in 1970, which had turned popular attention to soccer as the Brazilian team won its third World Cup championship, led by the brilliant Pele. Despite the distraction, Echeverría soon found himself confronted by a second clash between paramilitary units and student demonstrators, the Corpus Christi violence of 1971. Nevertheless, Echeverría initiated a vigorous campaign to appeal to young Mexicans by slightly opening the political system, lowering the voting age, proposing reforms in the electoral system, and revising the representation system in Congress.

More expression of his populist intensions came with the introduction of the guayabera dress code. Often called the Yucatán wedding shirt, the guayabera hung loose, was worn untucked, and was designed for tropical climates. Echeverría chose it as the Mexican equivalent of the Mao jacket and the Castro fatigues, another fashion rejection of the formal suits and ties of European and U.S. leaders. He appealed to local sentiments when he traveled across the country, insisting on regional, semifolkloric music to introduce him. So, for example, when he went to Michoacán, a band played "Qué lindo es Michoacán" (How Beautiful Is Michoacán), in Sonora: "Sonora querida" (I Love Sonora), in Veracruz, "El Siquisirí"; and in Chiapas, "El rascapetate."[10]

The president also tried, as part of his populist effort, to be identified with the celebrities of the left and youth. Thus he attended the celebration when David Alfaro Siqueiros, one of the trio of famous muralists that also included Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco, completed the world's largest mural, *The March of Humanity*. Through twelve panels, the artist fused his leftist views of international progress with of a narrative of Mexican origins. Even though the mural attacked the political rhetoric that revolutionary ideals still guided the national regime, the inauguration, with the president in attendance, occurred at the specifically designed Polyforum in Mexico City in December 1971.

Echeverría's populist efforts extended to the promotion of the national handicraft industry through a national marketing agency, called FONART, which paid higher prices to the artisans. His administration moved directly into the economy, creating parastate agencies to provide entrepreneurial leadership, direct production, and distribute goods and services. When he took office, the government had owned PEMEX, the railroads, and electricity; when he left office, the government owned 1,155 companies. This program, among others, increased the national debt from $4.2 billion to $20 billion over his six-year term, but few noticed because booming oil sales created additional government income.

Echeverría's populist programs paid special attention to individuals and families, through public works programs, especially road building and rural electrification, and health care campaigns, relying heavily on the mass media of radio, television, and cinema to promote his administration. His wife, María Esther Zuno, took the lead in popularizing slogans urging women to choose how many children to have, and for parents not to have more children than they could feed and educate. Still, population growth remained at a staggering level, above 4 percent per year, and a majority of Mexicans remained younger than eighteen years old.[11]

As the population increased and the economic situation declined, Mexicans witnessed a growing number of armed challenges to the regime.[12] In the countryside, several outbreaks of rural guerrillas resulted, especially the Lucio Cabañas campaign in Guerrero. Of even more concern were urban guerrilla attacks, with kidnappings and bank robberies in cities such as Guadalajara and Monterrey. Taking hostages became, a feature of urban guerilla attacks throughout the hemisphere; victims included U.S. and British consuls, government officials, and the president's father-in-law, Guadalupe Zuno Hernández. Echeverría and his successors reacted with firmness to these challenges while they

attempted to maintain their revolutionary reputations. Even for those who did not take up arms against the president, cynical doubt existed about Echevarría's programs and sarcastic commentary about the repose of the nation's wealthy citizens flourished. In a 1974 edition of the popular comic strip *La Familia Burrón*, the extremely rich Aunt Cristela moved to Paris to escape Echeverría's attacks on multimillionaires.[13]

In the midst of the Cold War, the spread of Castro-like rebellions, and the response of military leaders who seized power and carried out wars of arrest, torture, and murder of radicals and suspected radicals in the hemisphere, Echeverría sought to become a leader of those nations that were not aligned with the United States or the USSR, and who opposed the military dictatorships. He sought to become the secretary-general of the United Nations, or some similar international body. He founded the Tri-continental University as a political base. His efforts proved unsuccessful, in part because hints began to appear that the official party and his regime had followed policies that seemed to have undercut national prosperity and populist reforms.

Echeverría's administration had a Janus-like character, with one face turned toward the populist program aimed at the left with programs for youths, women, and workers, especially in the countryside, and the other face turned toward the right, with entrenched officials committed to consolidation of authority by elimination of challengers. Echeverría either ordered or allowed the use of security forces to move against both urban and rural guerrillas, the imposition of so-called *charro* or cowboy union leaders tied to the government, and the breaking of any serious labor challenges to his administration. Labor secretary Fidel Velázquez played principal in the politics of suppression.

Most dramatic was the struggle between government labor officials and electrical workers. After losing their fight for control of the union, more than 100,000 electrical workers and supporters organized a strike at the Federal Electrical Commission on July 16, 1976. The government officials used army units and hired thugs to halt the demonstration as they occupied the power plants and took into custody hundreds of strikers, who were then interned in San Luis Potosí.

Parallel to the politics of the official party and president, business leaders, especially in the north and west, sought ways to protect themselves against government policies (both the Echeverría agrarian programs that recognized land invasions and peso devaluations). A number of these businessmen moved into the Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN), where their views in many ways contradicted the party's Catholic social action mentality. Vatican II, a meeting from 1962 to 1965 of all bishops of the church, had focused on the needs of people, changed the Mass from Latin to local languages, and inspired priests to work for social reforms to eliminate poverty. The PAN had quickly taken on social work projects. Shortly afterward in 1975, business interests won control of the party, eliminated the social orientation, and focused on what they regarded as more entrepreneurial programs. They also pushed the party to challenge the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in local and state elections. These policies soon resulted in a growing number of PAN elected officials.

Echeverría's presidency ended as it began, with a high tide of opposition to the regime, made worse by world conditions, including oil price declines and general economic downturns that hurt Mexico. In this situation, Mexicans had to endure inflation that forced two devaluations of the peso in 1976 from 12.50 to 30 pesos to the U.S. dollar.

José López Portillo, the next president, chose to see only positive economic indicators provided by new oil strikes, especially off the Gulf Coast, as he ignored the warning signs implicit in Echevarría's devaluation of the peso. For the first three years of his term, the optimistic view held, even though the signs of deep problems grew more strident in the countryside and the need for food imports increased. Then the economy began to collapse, and throughout the remainder of his administration economic difficulties harried the president. The downturned economy eroded the lifestyle of the middle sectors and pushed the poor into the cities or across the border in search of work. López Portillo steadfastly declared he would not allow another devaluation; he insisted he was, in his words, "defending the peso, like a dog defends its bone."[14]

His best intentions aside, he found Mexico's economic choices were severely limited because of the huge international debt the government had accumulated based on its petroleum dreams. The economic tailspin forced dramatic actions. López Portillo tried to capture popular imagination, as had Cárdenas and López Mateos, by asserting national control over a sector of the economy. While his predecessors garnered great support after the nationalization of the petroleum and electrical industries, López Portillo received nothing but blame and censure when he nationalized the banking system. Shortly before he left office, he added to the grave situation by devaluing the peso once again to sixty-nine pesos to the dollar. This devaluation, coupled with the nationalizing the banking system and freezing the conversion of accounts into dollars, had a devastating effect on the economy. A complete change of lifestyle for the general public followed.[15]