

CONFERENCE IN MEXICO CITY - JUNE 2001

MONEY IN POLITICS

by Fernando Mark Rondon

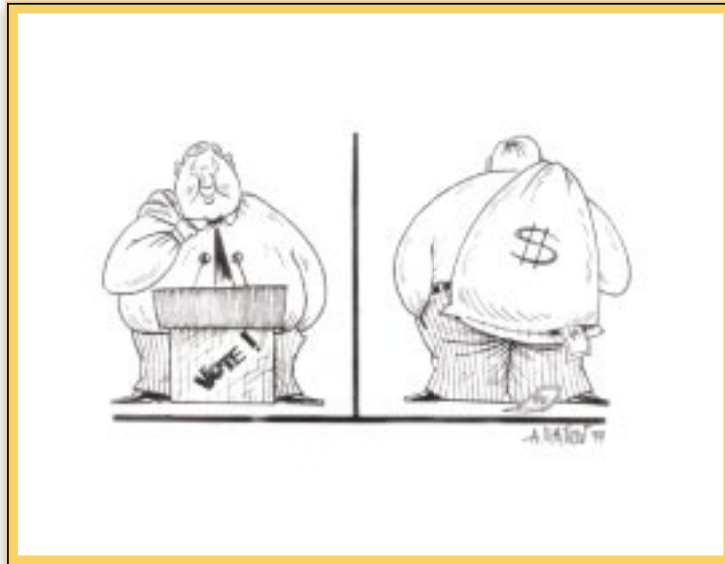
As voting systems become increasingly reliable in many new democracies, attention has turned to what has been termed “follow-on” issues for strengthening democracy. IFES has advanced this agenda by providing needs-based assistance in solidifying the rule of law, building civil society, and improving the quality of governance delivered by newly democratic institutions. IFES’ initiative on the role of financing in electoral campaigns, elections administration, and related areas of democratic process exemplifies this “follow-on” agenda, which moved into high gear recently as the Foundation co-sponsored an international seminar on Money and Political-Electoral Contests: Challenges for Democracy, June 5-8, in Mexico City.

In an example of broad international collaboration, the Seminar hosted by the Mexican Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) and Electoral Tribunal (TEPJF), was co-sponsored by the United Nations (UN), International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, Spanish Ministry of Interior, Tinker Foundation, Elections Canada, and IFES. IFES intends to use lessons-learned from the Mexico City Seminar to help support elections and political reform worldwide and for its collaboration with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in producing a guide to campaign finance issues.

Conscious of the risks that poorly regulated political spending poses to democracy and the opportunity such forums provide to help one another face these challenges, the co-sponsoring institutions sought a comparative analysis of case studies of money in politics in several countries. Special emphasis was placed not only on funding mechanisms and legal regimes pertaining to political parties, campaigns and candidates, but also on specific legal control, auditing and enforcement measures. Seminar participants also explored ideas to promote greater equity and transparency in political financing.

This emphasis on practical challenges was exemplified by the presentation given by David Mason, Vice Chairman of the U.S. Federal Elections Commission, entitled Thoughts on Advanced

Corruption Fighting. Mason contrasted the federated U.S. approach with the more unitary systems of most countries, and applied this framework to the controversies over the most recent U.S. presidential election, which have yielded many proposals for changes in the presidential selection process and in voting practices. Political scientist Herbert Alexander rounded out the U.S. case study by examining controversies over party building, the role the media in elections, and activities of special interest groups. Alexander concentrated on how the American political focus on candidates, rather than parties, interacts with parallel campaigning by interest groups spending large sums of “soft money” outside the control of candidates or parties.



While the IFES contribution to the Seminar highlighted the U.S. case study, IFES also sponsored presentations by Dr. Rodolfo Munné, President of the National Electoral Chamber of Argentina and Dr. Tarcisio Viera de Carvalho, Attorney General of the Federal District of Brazil. The Seminar compared systems in Latin America, Europe, Asia, and Africa as well as case studies of Great Britain, Spain, France, Argentina, Colombia, Brazil; Canada, the United States, and Mexico. Comparisons were made of political parties’ perspectives in different regions, as well as those of civil society

organizations from Peru; the Dominican Republic; and Argentina. Workshops concentrated on electoral authorities’ roles in auditing and enforcement, as well as civil society’s role in monitoring political spending. The Seminar included input from the International Political Science Association, whose member Dr. Michael Pinto-Duschinsky (also a Member of the IFES Board of Directors) commented that the Seminar yielded some of the most sophisticated work to date on issues troubling many democracies. In addition to those making presentations, a large number of Mexican civil society experts, members of academia, and news media figures attended the seminar. IFES Board of Directors Chair Patricia Hutar, President Richard Soudriette, and IFES Americas staff also participated.

Fernando Mark Rondon is Deputy Director of IFES’ Americas Division.