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Mexico

# "End of an era" for state unionism

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### **Fidel Velazquez Sanchez, head of the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM) died on June 21, at the age of 97.**

According to Mexican Labor News and Analysis, "Velazquez probably did more than any other single individual to keep Mexican workers in a position of subordination to the Mexican government, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and the employers."

"Don Fidel's" death will lead to a succession struggle within the CTM, and could open the way for a more democratic labour movement in Mexico. The Mexican labour movement has recently divided into three different currents: the CTM, the rival Foro group of unions, and their allies in the May First Inter-Union group. Velazquez's death will encourage the process of political redefinition and reorganisation taking place in the labour movement.

[<https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/MexUnions2.jpg>]

The death of Velazquez, so soon before the July 6 national elections, will also hurt the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party and help the principal opposition parties, the National Action Party (PAN) and the Party of the Democratic or Revolution (PRD). The PRD and its candidate for mayor of Mexico City, Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, have the most to gain from Velazquez's death.

Velazquez spent over 60 years as one of the principal leaders of Mexican unions and 50 years as head of the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM). He drew the unions into a close relationship with the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and the Mexican state. He was twice elected Senator for the PRI.

Velazquez defended the PRI and the state against every progressive social movement that arose in the last 60 years. Velazquez backed the PRI-state in crushing the industrial union movement of the 1940s, supported the PRI-government in using the Mexican Army to break the railroad workers strike in 1959. He backed the PRI-government's use of the army in the massacre of 300 students at Tlatelolco in 1968, and supported the smashing of the electrical workers union and the Democratic Tendency in 1975. It was Velazquez who first called for expelling Cuauhtemoc Cardenas and the Democratic Current from the PRI in 1987. Velazquez also opposed the Chiapas Rebellion of 1994 and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) which led it.

Throughout his career, Velazquez was an opponent of all rank and file initiatives from below, and squashed any signs of independence or autonomy on the part of the workers. Under Velazquez the CTM became famous for "protection contracts", negotiated to protect employers from more militant unions, for "ghost unions", known only to the state and the bosses and unknown to the workers, for the use of gangsters and thugs to beat and even assassinate democratic or independent movements. By the 1990s, Mexicans were the lowest paid industrial workers in the world, most earning between three and ten U.S. dollars per day.

Velazquez's square head, dark-rimmed glasses, and big cigar became over the decades a symbol of the conservative, corrupt, and violent labour bureaucracy, and of the most reactionary sectors of the Institutional Revolutionary Party. Velazquez came to be seen as the biggest and oldest of the "dinosaurs", who represented all that was worst about Mexican labour unions and politics.

Velazquez's successor as head of the CTM, Leonardo Rodriguez Alcaine, 78 years old, continues the policies of his predecessor. But Rodriguez Alcaine may find that the CTM-organisation begins to crumble beneath him, now that

"Don Fidel" is gone. [\[1\]](#)

*Source: Mexican Labor News and Analysis.*

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[\[1\]](#) See Miguel Angel Granados Chapa's *El siglo de Fidel Velazquez*, Mexico: Pangea, 1996.