

A Surprise on Mexican TV

The opposition on the air

The picture is grainy, the sound scratchy and the graphics frozen; virtually the only images are talking heads. Yet "TV-Democracia" is on the air in Mexico, and that alone is remarkable. Its programs are an ingenious election-year effort by the opposition to bypass the established media in a country where the ruling party gets the lion's share of air time.

"TV-Democracia" is the electronic brainchild of Javier Livas, of Monterrey, a congressional candidate of the Partido Auténtico de la Revolución Mexicana, an opposition party. Since last month he has been taping the program at his home, then sending it to the United States to be broadcast on Friday nights from the Westar 4 satellite to Mexico's estimated 20,000 dish antennas. The antenna owners are a small and unrepresentative section of Mexican society. But that's not the point, says Livas. "If we don't open up television, we're finished," he says. "The government cannot stop the images that are coming through satellite transmissions."

Mexico's oppositionists maintain that their growing popularity hasn't gained them any more access to Mexico's most influential medium which remains firmly

in the grip of the government and the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). Television and radio have devoted 90 percent of their presidential-campaign coverage to the PRI candidate, Carlos Salinas de Gortari—even though opposition candidates are likely to get between 35 and 50 percent of the vote. The opposition's main target is "24 Horas" ("24 Hours"), the most popular news show.

Mexico's two biggest opposition parties have joined Livas in seeking air time. Presidential candidate Manuel Clouthier has launched a Boycott "24 Horas" campaign, and his right-of-center National Action Party (PAN) is buying time on Westar 4 for slick footage from Clouthier's fiery campaign. Because of the high cost of dish antennas (\$2,000 to \$4,000), opposition parties are also looking for ways to multiply their limited satellite audience. The PAN is encouraging the spread of videocassette recordings made from its Westar 4 broadcasts. And supporters of left-wing presidential candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas are circulating a campaign video take.

The PRI seems unfazed by the opposition's electronic maneuvering. "They're preaching to very, very few people," says Juan Enriquez, the Salinas campaign's international communications director. "It's a very expensive way to reach a very few people." PAN officials argue that at \$900 an hour, broadcasting over Westar 4 is cheaper than paying \$105,000 for 60 seconds of time on Televisa. As Salinas is quick to point out, all parties receive free air time. But these are not part of regular



Shut out: Poster protesting '24 Horas'

programming, and most Mexicans quickly switch channels.

What the opposition really wants is news coverage. What it gets is sometimes ludicrous. One night, Zabludovsky spent precious minutes on "24 Horas" interviewing two out-of-wedlock sons of revered former president Lázaro Cárdenas. They wanted Mexico to know that they opposed the campaign of their half-brother, Cuauhtémoc.

PETER KATEL in Monterrey

With a Hat Like That

It's the phone calls from fashion magazines that prove it. Scott Zegas, a New York hatter, says that not a week goes by without someone wanting to rent a Panama hat for a photo session. Haberdashers are selling the feather-light, cream-colored Panama in growing numbers, too. Perhaps skin-cancer concerns are prompting a resurgence of the world's premier hot-weather hat—or perhaps men want a little bit of the suavity of Sydney Greenstreet, the swagger of the two Roosevelts.

The good news for hat lovers is even better news for the weavers of Ecuador, where Panama hats are actually

made. The comeback may not be enough to recall the hats' heyday of 1944, when they were among Ecuador's leading exports. But it will mean more work for the 27,000 men and women who now weave only part time, and hope for what has been a dying industry. Currently, Ecuador exports 250,000 straw hats a month around the world, beginning with unfinished hats worth about 60 cents each. Even higher quality Panamas called *finos* wholesale for about \$10 (ultimately selling for up to \$85 in the United States), and take a month of painstaking labor. Since the country's minimum wage is



BETTMANN ARCHIVE



CULVER PICTURES

From Ecuador, actually: Teddy Roosevelt, Sydney Greenstreet

roughly \$40 a month, only older workers are willing to make the finest hats. As a result, exporter Eduardo Duvalde of Cuenca says, the

weavers' art "is not passed down from fathers to sons anymore." And that may be a problem that not even a rising U.S. market can overcome.