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During his terms in office, MacLean had undertaken a series of bold steps to increase the city government's efficiency. When he had taken office, MacLean had found that tax revenues were sufficient only to support perhaps a third of the city government's 5700 employees. Because he had improved the city's financial picture through staff reductions and improvement of tax revenue-generating systems, MacLean was able to attract significant financial aid from the World Bank. But though MacLean had succeeded in reducing the number of city employees from 5700 to 3700, the pressure for further cuts remained. One obvious target for cuts: the heretofore untouched municipal police department.

The Municipal Police and the Informal Markets

The municipal police had a long and storied history in La Paz. Until the 1930s, the mayor and police chief were one and the same, known as the "intendente," the traditional name for a high-ranking administrative official during the time of Spanish colonial rule. In 1991, the chief, a mayoral appointee, continued to be known as the intendente, the top-ranking official in a military-style pyramid organization which included ranks of major, captain, lieutenant, sublieutenant, subofficial, sergeant, corporal and gendarme. Although the non-officers were represented by the city's Municipal Employees Union, posts in the municipal police, at all levels, had considerable status, particularly among the majority Aymara population, who dominated the force. Qualifications were ostensibly demanding: a candidate was required to be between 20 and 25 years old, to have completed high school and to have served one year of military service. Promotion was to depend not only on length of service but scores on aptitude tests, training courses attended and level of education.

Salary levels, however, were not high, ranging from $105-$120 (US) monthly for gendarmes, to $483 a month for the chief.1

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And despite its history and status, the powers of the municipal police force in La Paz were sharply limited. Most notably, police, although some did carry guns, had virtually no responsibility for criminal investigations or arrests. Instead, everything from traffic offenses to murder investigations were the province of the national police, whose powers had expanded during the long period of Bolivia's authoritarian rule. Police could detain suspected criminals but could not jail them. The force did, however, have three major areas of responsibility: protection of public buildings, (including 28 police who served as a rotating, 24-hour guard at all the entrances and parking lots around City Hall); maintaining a presence in public parks and, most significantly, patrolling and regulating the city's sprawling outdoor markets which had mushroomed since the early 1980s in response to Bolivia's economic crisis and an influx of the rural population to the city.

La Paz was a city with no fewer than 250,000 people in its informal sector, 40,000 of whom were street vendors, selling everything imaginable, from fruit to watches to underwear. Vendors jammed the sidewalk and accounted for a significant part (the total informal sector was as much as 57 percent) of employment in La Paz—by one estimate perhaps as much as $200 million a year. Dominated by Aymara vendors, the informal sector included about 65 established public markets and an estimated 3000 permanent kiosks, as well as vendors who staked regular claims to specific corners and peddled goods on their backs. "Look around this city," observes one La Paz physician. "It's one big market. You can get everything on the street—shampoo, food, televisions. Who needs a department store?"

It was the job of the municipal police to regulate this booming chaos—to collect rents from vendors in established markets and charge street vendors a 50 centavo daily fee, to check for health violations, whether in the storage of meats or the preparation of cooked food, and to ensure that weights and measures were legitimately calculated. Police also regulated prices that vendors charged for goods—and they continued to do this even after Bolivia's economic reform plan freed price controls in the mid-1980s. It was a job which had become dramatically larger—and more important—over the course of the 1980s, with the growth in the outdoor markets. The police were not the only city officials with authority over the markets—MacLean had established a community services unit in the Department of Urban Improvement to mediate disputes among vendors and to attempt, with only modest success, to establish new, cleaner markets in city-provided facilities. But it was the police who were on the front lines each day and were responsible for the most basic regulation: fee collection and sanitation inspection.

Corruption, Incompetence and a Call for Change

Mayor MacLean had long suspected that the police role in regulating the outdoor markets was an invitation to corruption. Temptation appeared to surround them. Relatively poorly-paid police were required to collect large sums of money and had the power to shut down businesses which failed to pay rents or meet sanitation requirements. Too, they came into contact with significant wealth. Each of the well-organized markets had its own maestra mayor (market head), elected to a one-year term.

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Police are also known to abuse their authority to seize food suspected of contamination. One La Paz physician told consultants: "A patient of mine, the daughter of a municipal policeman, used to show up for her appointments with gifts of kilos of meat wrapped in paper bags or wheels of cheese. They were extras she said; they'd just go bad if she didn't give them to me."

Extortion by police was not limited to food and money, however. The consultants found that it included sex as well, in a setting where the majority of vendors were women and the majority of police were men. Says MacLean: "When we began really looking at the problems in the police force, we found that some of the officers had special relationships with the cholitas in the markets, sexual relationships. Most of the police are Aymara, just like the market women and many of them are the fathers of their children. Others are lovers of market officials."

Still, what shocked consultants most was not such examples of corruption but what they found to be, by objective measure, the incompetence of municipal police officers. Even if they chose to do their job in the proper way, the vast majority, consultants found, lacked the ability to do so.

Like many Bolivians (an estimated 30 percent) a large number of market vendors were illiterate and thus the city relied on police to evaluate scales and sanitation. Franks and Enfraze found, however, that—despite the ostensible requirements for the job (which were often superseded by nepotism and favoritism)—the vast majority of police lacked skills necessary to do their jobs. Tests administered by the consultants revealed that 20 percent of the municipal police force was functionally illiterate, meaning they could not answer such basic questions as to the identity of the country's president or solve simple problems in weights and measures. Another 60 percent was found to be partially literate but at such a low level of education that consultant Enfraze believed that training them would be just as lengthy and costly as training illiterates.4

For the consultants, the combination of overstaffing and corruption led inescapably to a single, powerful conclusion: before any improvement could take hold in the municipal police force, 80 percent of its members—those who were not competent to do their jobs—should be dismissed or reassigned—either to the understaffed parks or to city public works crews. There were other recommendations, as well: a three-month training period for new recruits, as well as a training program to be worked into the schedules of veteran officers. The consultants envisioned a police force which would receive special training with weights, measures and health standards and would attend seminars designed to discourage corruption.

Getting rid of or retraining police was not the consultant's sole answer to corruption. They also recommended a change in the incentive structure to eliminate police discretion. This included eliminating some police functions (such as regulating price controls) and transferring other functions to more capable divisions (such as fee collection and health inspection). In effect, this would, over time, mean the end of the extensive police presence in the open air markets.

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Reaction

Mayor MacLean did not doubt that what the consultants said was true. "When I came into office," he recalled, "the Intendencia, as it was called, was a pocket-hole of corruption that had long been ignored. It had its own little mayor, the intendente, who had all the discretion in the world, especially in the informal sector." For a number of powerful reasons, the consultants' proposals were attractive to MacLean. As chief executive, he wanted very much to bring order to the chaotic open markets; the crowded sidewalks were clogging the city and the unsanitary conditions in the markets were dangerous. MacLean had a vision of housing the markets in new, concrete structures built by the city, where services might be performed by "micro-enterprises" comprised of entrepreneurs from poor neighborhoods. (An example of such an enterprise might be a garbage removal company, whose organization might be facilitated by the city but which would be privately owned.) For fiscal reasons, too, the plan made sense. MacLean was still under World Bank pressure to reduce the city's payroll. The increased revenue that would result from an honest market operation was sorely needed, as well.

At the same time, MacLean knew that any change in the police or markets would spark tremendous controversy. Those involved in the markets were accustomed to the existing "system" and would likely resist change—and organize public protest. He'd already had a taste of such public reaction. When he had recently proposed changing the title of the top police position from that of "Intendente" to "Chief of Police," MacLean recalls that "the cholitas [Aymara vendors] wouldn't hear of it. 'We want our intendente', they said. They want him to have the same powers as always, even though that power has been abused in the past. The vendors have had to prostitute themselves, to pay bribes. But it's a system that's worked for them. It's helped many of them get choice selling positions in the markets. And it's all they know.'"

Indeed, even before the reform plan was made public, the directors of the individual markets (the "maestras mayores") got wind of some of the proposed changes and organized public opposition. In early 1991, they staged protests at City Hall in which they objected to the possible removal of police from the markets and the idea of written regulations governing market operation. They asserted that the markets had been effectively self-governed and that government regulation was unnecessary. The market leaders also demanded that the position of police Comandantes—second in command under the Intendente—be made a career, lifetime appointment. It was their hope that such a person would be loyal to the existing system, which would then continue no matter who was appointed as intendente. The vendors' proposal was supported by Carlos Palenque, the City Council opposition leader, who successfully pushed through council a non-binding resolution calling on MacLean to make the Comandante's position a lifetime appointment.

In response, MacLean proposed that the market police be replaced by officials from the Department of Urban Improvement (Mejoramiento Urbano). These officials, who would both inspect the market and informally resolve disputes, were eventually to replace police completely. But when MacLean, in March 1991, actually sent in the officials on an experimental basis, vendors rallied against them. Police had to protect them from physical harm.
So it was that Mayor MacLean, facing re-election in December 1991, had to consider how hard to push anti-corruption proposals he and his consultants had developed. He had other reasons besides the public protests to be cautious. His caution was, in the wake of the consultants' report, reinforced by an unlikely source: a new, MacLean-appointed "Intendente." Shortly after the consultants brought their recommendations to the mayor, MacLean had chosen Carlos Barrientos Teran, his own former chief of staff, whom he trusted and knew to be honest—to be the new police chief. But Barrientos was less than enthusiastic about the consultant's key proposals: large-scale dismissals and reassignments, especially of the significant group of veteran officers not far from retirement. "Some of these people have been on the force 15, 20, 30 years," he told the mayor. "Everyone knows them as police officers. Suppose one day an officer comes home from work with a hard hat instead of his police uniform. What will his children say? What will his neighbors say? How will he live with himself?"

It would be up to Mayor MacLean whether to accept the recommendation for large-scale changes in the police force. Even if he decided to order the dismissal of the unqualified 80 percent, he would have other decisions. Should he replace them all with new, better-qualified recruits? Or could La Paz make do with a smaller municipal police force? Which police functions could he eliminate or transfer to other departments, and how would he carry that out? Moreover, should he change the system of regulating the city's key "industry"—its open-air markets?
ORGANIGRAMA DE LA MUNICIPALIDAD

UNIDADES SUPERIORES Y DEPENDENCIAS DIRECTAS DEL ALCALDE
LISTADO DE DIRECCIONES
Y UNIDADES OPERATIVAS

1. ASESORIA LEGAL GENERAL

2. AUDITORIA INTERNA GENERAL

3. SECRETARIA GENERAL
   3.1. Dirección del Despacho del H. Alcalde
   3.2. Dirección de Secretaría
   3.3. Dirección de Registro Único de Trámites
   3.4. Coordinación de Alcaldías Provinciales
   3.5. Coordinación con el H. Concejo Municipal

4. OFICIALIA MAYOR ADMINISTRATIVA-FINANCIERA
   4.1. Dirección de Sistemas (Centro Municipal de Computación-CEMCO)
   4.2. Dirección Administrativa y de Empresas Municipales
   4.3. Dirección de Bienes Patrimoniales
   4.4. Dirección de Catastro Urbano Municipal
   4.5. Dirección de Ingresos Municipales
   4.6. Dirección de Egresos Municipales
   4.7. Dirección de Administración de Recursos Humanos
   4.8. Dirección de Policía Urbana
   4.9. Instituto de Capacitación Municipal - ICAM

5. OFICIALIA MAYOR TECNICA
   5.1. Dirección de Acción Comunal
   5.2. Dirección de Desarrollo Urbano
   5.3. Dirección de Estudios y Proyectos
   5.4. Dirección de Forestación y Áreas Verdes
   5.5. Dirección de Mejoramiento Urbano
   5.6. Dirección de Mantenimiento de Obras Públicas
   5.7. Dirección de Control y Manejo de Cuencas
   5.8. Dirección de Supervisión y Coordinación
   5.9. Dirección de Servicios Mecanizados
   5.10. Dirección de Saneamiento Urbano
   5.11. Dirección de Tráfico y Vialidad

6. OFICIALIA MAYOR DE CULTURA
   6.1. Dirección de Cultura
   6.2. Dirección de Comunicación Social
   6.3. Dirección de Educación Comunal
   6.4. Dirección de Extensión Institucional
   6.5. Dirección de Relaciones Públicas y Prensa

7. DIRECCION DEL PROYECTO DE SALUD

8. SUB ALCALDIA DE LA ZONA SUR

9. PROYECTO DE FORTALECIMIENTO MUNICIPAL (P.F.M.)

MUNICIPALIDAD DE LA PAZ