

Preston E. James Eminent Latin Americanist Career Award

Angel Bassols Batalla

When one speaks of Mexican economic geography, one speaks of Angel Bassols Batalla, recipient of the 1992 Preston E. James Eminent Latin Americanist Career Award.

For more than four decades Dr. Bassols has devoted himself to both theoretical and practical aspects of regional and developmental issues in Mexico and other Third World countries. He has worked as a practitioner and as an academician, influencing decisions made in the planning of state and private projects and teaching thousands of students. He has traveled extensively and is arguably one of the most globally knowledgeable geographers. Regardless of the topic or region under discussion, he always draws parallels to other areas. He is a geographer's geographer, a cosmopolitan scholar.

The son of the distinguished diplomat and politician Narciso Bassols, Dr. Bassols was born and raised in Mexico City. There he did not stay, however. Because of his father's position, young Bassols was afforded the opportunity to travel, even at a young age. These travels naturally helped mold the scholar. Perhaps the most important of his early travels involved living with the Yaqui Indians during his teens. In southern Sonora he was struck with environmental, economic, social and political conditions much different than those he experienced in Mexico City. These national disparities, as great as they were, however, paled in comparison to the global disparities he witnessed a few years later.

In 1945 Dr. Bassols accompanied his father to Moscow where he later took up his post as Mexico's ambassador to the Soviet Union. Because of the on-going war in Europe they traveled from Mexico City to Moscow via New York, Morocco, Egypt, and Iran. In the Soviet Union his ideas on economic spatial disparities, based largely on personal observations, were galvanized with formal study of geography at Lomonosov State University. He completed his bachelor's degree in 1949 and returned to Mexico to begin a professional career.

From 1950 to 1954 Dr. Bassols worked as a researcher at the Dirección General de Geografía y Meteorología, and wrote two books, one on his experiences in the Soviet Union, and one on various Mexican topics. In 1954 he accepted a research position with Ferrocarriles Nacionales de México. During his four year tenure with the railroad he published three more books, a geographical bibliography of Mexico, a volume on general geographical issues, and the first of what would be several state- and regional-scale monographs, this one on the "geoeconomy" of the State of Mexico.

In 1959 Dr. Bassols entered academia, accepting a position as investigator at the Instituto de Investigaciones Económicas at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) where he remains to this day as an Investigador Emérito and a recipient of the Premio Universidad Nacional 1991. Not satisfied with his training, however, he "went back to school", albeit not in one place, and over several years. He took courses at such diverse places as Columbia University in New York and Benares University in India. He received his master's and doctorate from the Université de Haute-Bretagne (Université de Rennes II) in Rennes, France in 1973 and 1977, respectively. With advanced degrees in hand, Dr. Bassols was confirmed as a professor in the Escuela Nacional de Economía, now the Facultad de Economía at UNAM. He also held the position of Profesor de Geografía in the Facultad de Filosofía y Letras (Colegio de Geografía) at UNAM. As a teacher he is known for three courses that have been offered regularly, "Problemas Regionales de México" at the graduate level, and "Geografía Económica Mundial y de México" and "Geografía Regional de México" at the undergraduate level (the latter being the only course offered by him at this time). As a writer he has published books on economic regions, natural resources, social struggles, development, geographical problems, and the history of geography. Most of these focus on

Mexico, but he has also published books about Europe, Ethiopia and Vietnam. Of his more than three dozen books he is best known for *Geografía y subdesarrollo* (title for the last edition), first published in 1971 and now in its fourteenth printing, and *Geografía económica de México: teoría, fenómenos geográficos, análisis regional*, a college text first published in 1970 and now in its sixth edition.

Throughout his career, Dr. Bassols has traveled widely, so much so that he finds it easier to list the countries he has not visited rather than those he has. Perhaps blending the work of his father with his own intellectual motivations, he has become an, if not the, ambassador of Mexican human geography. He has been involved with the International Geographical Union, participating in a major way at congresses in New Delhi (1968), Moscow (1976) and Washington (1992). He served a term as Member of the IGU committee on Geography and Environmental Problems. At home he has held various positions in the Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística and other Mexican professional associations.

Dr. Bassols has contributed greatly to the discipline of geography, especially in the areas of economic geography and development, not only in Mexico, but, indeed, for the entire world. His career is literally unmatched. Latin Americanist geographers owe a huge debt of gratitude to Dr. Bassols for his dedication and his contributions.

William E. Doolittle and Carlos Córdova F. de A. [end p. 114]