# The Emergence and Entrenchment of a New Political Regime in Mexico

*by*
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*Mexico in the eighties was torn between two political systems: one statist, populist, and authoritarian and the other neoliberal, technocratic, and no less authoritarian. Large and powerful business groups, both Mexican and foreign, that had adopted neoliberal dogma managed to impose the latter through the fraudulent election of Carlos Salinas de Gortari as President of the Republic in 1988. The technocracy, first under the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party—PRI) and then under the Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party—PAN), became entrenched in power and did not hesitate to conduct a preemptive coup to prevent Andrés Manuel López Obrador of the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Democratic Revolution Party—PRD) from winning the presidency in 2006. The reason is not hard to understand: López Obrador represented something that the ruling class was unable and unwilling to concede: the need to dismantle the new regime and return to greater state intervention and the safeguarding of national sovereignty, especially with regard to natural resources. The dilemma of two overlapping political regimes was resolved, by trickery and fraud, in favor of neoliberal technocracy in 2000, with the victory of the right-wing PAN. The problem is that the center-left party, with Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and López Obrador, does not seem up to the historic challenge that it confronts.*

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The elections that took place in Mexico on July 6, 1997, had two unprecedented results: (1) for the first time in the country's history, the leader of the government of the Federal District was elected by direct, universal, secret suffrage, a vote that was incidentally won by a center-left opposition grouping, the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Democratic Revolution Party—PRD), and (2) for the first time since the official Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party—PRI) was founded, it failed to obtain an absolute majority in the Chamber of Deputies.

These results reflect the existence of two overlapping political regimes: an old one that is statist, populist, and authoritarian and a new one that is neoliberal, technocratic, and no less authoritarian (but in economic rather than political terms). The first was founded under the rule of Álvaro Obregón

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(1920–1924) and the second, albeit ambiguous and ill-defined, emerged in 1982 under Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado. I view these regimes as overlapping because when the technocratic neoliberal model was launched, the statist-populist apparatus had not yet disappeared. Many champions of the old regime, with or without making concessions to changing times, were active both within and outside the federal government, a number of state governments, and the PRI itself, which had been a pillar of the regime ever since its creation in 1929 as the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (National Revolutionary Party—PNR). At the same time the promoters of the new regime (likewise members of the PRI), who had first made their mark as members of the economic team of the administration of José López Portillo (1976–1982), saw their hegemony fortified by winning the presidency of this highly presidentialist and centralized country. The fact that the defenders of the neoliberal technocratic regime had not altogether defeated the representatives of the old regime may explain why they had to resort to conducting a technical coup by imposing, first as the PRI candidate and then as president, another neoliberal technocrat: Carlos Salinas de Gortari. It fell to him to clarify the nature of the new regime and to lock it into place using every means at hand.

For the purposes of this essay, by "political regime" (as distinct from "government") I mean a form of the state that depends on the correlation of social and political forces within a given country and at a given moment, along with certain traditions that have to do with an overall political culture even if it is not necessarily regarded as such. I understand the PRI, a crucial agent of the old regime, to be the *party of the regime* (as opposed to the party of the state), that is, of the regime founded by Obregón, which was to endure for several decades. It was the old regime that explicitly founded the party and assigned to it the task of supporting whatever administration was in office. In 1930 Lázaro Cárdenas spoke of it as the "dynamic organism of the regime," not of the state or of the government.[1] When the regime that created it went into crisis, so did the party, as we began to see from 1988 on and especially in 2000, when it lost the presidential election for the first time in its long history of political predominance.

In 1997 all the signs were that the overlapping of the two regimes would have to work itself out with the victory of one or the other, and it seemed that the presidential election due in 2000 might signal the beginning of the end for the old one. And so it turned out. The Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party —PAN) won control of the federal government and raised Vicente Fox to the presidency of the republic. Thus the overlapping of the two regimes lasted only a relatively short time before one of them prevailed—the one whose hegemony had already been apparent when Carlos Salinas was in office.

Salinas and his successor, Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León, had no qualms about handing power to the PAN provided that this ensured the continuation and consolidation of the neoliberal technocratic apparatus.[2] It is this form of the state that prevails today, and all the artillery of its successive governments has been deployed to prevent the return to power of statism and populism of any kind. There can be no other explanation for the bombardment—and this is not too strong a word—of the PRD leader Andrés Manuel López Obrador,

which has not yet been called off. The new regime has been imposed, and it must be kept in place by hook or by crook, with the support of PRIistas and/or PANistas, no matter, so long as it suits the purposes of its principal representatives and their prominent constituents. Like Salinas's government, the current administration of Felipe Calderón Hinojosa and the latter's imposition as president can be understood only in the light of the threat embodied by López Obrador, at the time of the last election, to the existence of the neoliberal technocracy. He had to be stopped, and they stopped him.

## THE OLD REGIME

The statism of the old regime was not a product of the theories of Wigförss or Keynes (who came much later): it arose out of objective, pragmatic necessity. The revolution had destroyed much of the national economy, and the major capitalists had emigrated or been ruined. None of the social classes were in a fit state to take the helm and engage in the necessary economic, social, political, and even cultural reconstruction; this reconstruction would be possible only with state intervention. The state was the only entity with the resources to rescue the country from its parlous condition and safeguard it from the external imperial ambitions of the day. And to speak of "the state" implied the need for a new regime, different from that of Porfirio Díaz, involving an inevitably authoritarian, centralized government in the accomplishment of the gargantuan task ahead. I cannot imagine the country's being reconstructed, during those years, by any weak, flexible democratic government, although such a government might have been desirable in theory. The enemies of the revolution (not merely of this or that revolutionary leader) were still around and often armed; warring interests and ambitions loomed in many states and regions of the country as very real, specific threats. By this I do not mean to side with the Sonora group or condone its method of taking power; I simply mean that they did what any other group would have done had it possessed the authority and the will to rebuild the nation and turn it into a new and modern state. A democratic regime implies not only a government bound to respond to the majority will but also a popular majority with sufficient consciousness to express itself as a society, and there was none in those days. Even so, the authoritarian, statist regime also had to be a populist one; the revolution had been fought against a dictatorship and with the participation of millions of Mexicans, some 1 million of whom had lost their lives in the struggle.

The populist authoritarian (as well as statist) regime was not a monolith at all times; it adopted different modalities at different periods. It remained stable from the Obregón administration to that of Luis Echeverría (1970–1976), but the emphasis on populism was not the same at all times, despite attempts to give that impression. One of these attempts was the so-called redistribution of land under Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, in which more than 24 million hectares of barren, agriculturally useless land were handed out (Blanco, 1979: 48); similarly, Miguel Alemán contrived to achieve an illustrious reputation as a champion of the working classes even though he was in reality a major promoter of industrial capitalism to the detriment of working-class living standards.

Strictly speaking, not all the governments of the period I have mentioned were populist, but all of them strove to appear so and relied for this semblance upon the mass corporate organizations of rural and urban workers under government control, usually directly managed by the president's office—as well as, of course, upon the support and the discourse of the official party.

In my view, the populist authoritarian regime exhibited two principal modalities: a Bonapartist one, which prevailed between 1920 and 1940, and a populist authoritarian one that maintained Bonapartist forms but emptied them of their essential content.

The Bonapartist modality, to sum it up very briefly (Rodríguez, 1991), was characterized as such (1) by its origin as the outcome of a crisis of tremendous magnitude (the 1910 revolution) and by the fact that none of the social classes was in a position to take power or to exert a decisive influence upon it and (2) by the fact that a politico-military clique formed in the heat of revolution took power without identifying with any one social class in particular. While it put in place a dominant model based on private ownership of the means of production, maintaining a relationship of support/control with the workers and an unmistakably populist discourse, there were periods (e.g., 1926–1934) when the government—especially that of Plutarco Elías Calles (who was known as the Jefe Máximo)—was overtly right-wing and in favor of privileges for sectors of the new bourgeoisie allied to power.

The populist authoritarian modality[3] emerged when the bourgeoisie began to accrue enough power to shape public policy (which still, under Cárdenas, was developed "in spite of" it). This modality emerged during World War II, became ever more clearly defined in subsequent years, and reached its apogee during what has been called the "world development decade," an era known in Mexico as the phase of "stabilizing development" (roughly from 1959 to 1970, although globally the recession began in 1967).

The main common characteristics of the long-lived populist-authoritarian regime (in both the modalities I have described) consisted, as I have said, in state interventionism (and not only in the domain of economics); the steady growth of the civil service (well beyond administrative requirements); the absolute authority of the executive, centered on a president with meta-constitutional powers (Carpizo, 1978); political centralism at the expense of the municipal freedoms and the federalism envisaged by the constitution; corporatism as the fundamental form of social organization and of all relations with the central power; restriction of liberties including freedom of expression and association, freedom of the press, and freedom to demonstrate; scant respect for human rights; corruption at every level of government and public administration; and, to cap it all, fraudulent elections and the manipulation of results at every level of political representation, as well as a systematic clientelism on the part of the official party in its dealings with the citizenry.

In exchange for the vices embedded in the system, a mostly steady rate of economic growth was sustained alongside a relatively low rate of unemployment. This economic growth, however, despite hovering around an annual 6 percent from 1935 on, did not translate into higher wages for the workforce, not even after the industrial "takeoff" facilitated by World War II. The discontent generated by the deterioration of living standards, which affected industrial workers and those employed in traditional service sectors most acutely

during the 1950s (Gutiérrez, 1983), was dealt with more by repression than by political negotiation.

Another characteristic of the governments of this period was nationalism—economic, cultural, and ideological—despite momentary or partial subordination to the dictates of Washington.[4] There was a clear notion of defending the nation-state and, by the same token, a strong concept of nationality rooted in the traditional values discerned in Mexican history, no matter how debatable the interpretation that was given to this history.

The situation of the various political parties during this time—above all after 1922, when Obregón got all the political factions to fall into line against Carranza's men—was subject to the orders of the president of the day, both in terms of party line and in terms of discipline. Once the PNR, which became first the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (Party of the Mexican Revolution—PRM) and then the PRI, had been created by the top echelons of power, elections were organized to benefit it—in other words, to favor the government and the president's associates in general (except during the Calles period, known as the Maximato).[5] Opposition parties were blocked from expanding by the falsification of electoral results across the board: from the municipal to the central levels and from the local councils to the Congress.

The multiparty system of the 1940s was more apparent than real, since it was tightly controlled even at times when it became necessary to have an opposition. Thus, for example, when the nascent PRI was preparing to send Miguel Alemán (known to be a right-winger) to the presidency in 1946, the government in office feared that he would stand unopposed, since the PAN (founded in 1939) did not field a candidate. Therefore the recently passed electoral law had to be endowed with a temporary clause stating that this once, but never again, parties might register even if they did not qualify, including the Partido Comunista Mexicano (Mexican Communist Party—PCM), which had been in crisis since 1940; worse still, another man of the regime, Ezequiel Padilla, was hastily rustled up to stand against Alemán from the right, using as a vehicle the short-lived Partido Nacional Democrático (National Democratic Party—PND). It was obvious, then, that the regime encouraged the presence of an opposition when it suited its purposes, just as it eliminated opposition when it did not: witness the fate of the Partido Fuerza Popular (Popular Force Party—PFP) in 1949 or that of the Federación de Partidos del Pueblo Mexicano (Federation of Parties of the Mexican People—FPPM) between 1952 and 1954.

During this period, the party of the regime and the civil service, which was mainly in the employ of the federal and state administrations, constituted instances of shared and often complementary power. At the end of their term of office, people elected to government posts, unless they were in disgrace politically, commonly moved on to occupy senior positions in public administration and vice versa. The party chairman and other high-ranking officials were (right up until 1997) appointed by the president of the republic, the executive and therefore head of the civil service. Thus, despite its heterogeneity and the existence of factions within it, the PRI constituted a kind of ladder to power and the only effective site of power politics in Mexico. The presence of such factions leads us to compare the conflicts between them to those of smaller parties within a big umbrella party, but given that the party's whole

existence, as well as the gift of political promotion, rested with the chief executive, the president was untouchable for the duration of his term and able to exercise powers that in practice exceeded those conferred on him by the constitution.

Until the Salinas government (1988–1994), the opposition never stood a chance of winning a state governorship or gaining a majority in either the federal or the state legislature. The various electoral reforms undertaken prior to that of 1977, ordered by López Portillo, were at first designed to prevent the opposition from becoming at all competitive, as was the case with the reforms of 1954, dedicated to Henriquismo (Rodríguez, 1975); later, their role was to allow the opposition a limited entrée into the Chamber of Deputies in accordance with formulas that effectively made it impossible for the opposition to challenge the absolute majority of the PRI (as was the case with the reforms of 1964, creating "party representatives," and those of 1973, ostensibly to facilitate the registration of new opposition parties but giving them no real scope to compete).

This control possessed by the incumbent chief executive over the party of the regime, the electoral process, and the Congress also gave him absolute control over the judiciary—since senators were responsible for approving or rejecting the names put forward by the president for appointment to the Supreme Court and, by extension, over the entities that depend upon that court.

The power circle of the old regime cannot be closed without bringing in two further variables that, though mentioned last, are far from least in importance: businessmen and workers (rural and urban).

During the Bonapartist era, capital depended on state support for its formation, growth, or development. With the advent of World War II, industrial capital became the linchpin of capital accumulation in Mexico and other Latin American countries such as Brazil and Argentina. It enjoyed the backing of the regime's governments in the form not only of the infrastructures they provided but of extremely attractive tax breaks (e.g., exemption from taxation for new and essential industries) and the no less important advantage of state control over workers' organizations, prohibiting strikes and independent unions. (The crackdowns of 1947 and 1956–1959 even sent the army into the streets to suppress revolts, in particular the insurgency of the railroad workers.) By dint of such methods postwar governments helped to bring down real wages by more than 50 percent between 1939 and 1948. Wages returned to their 1939 levels only after 1967 (Pascoe and Bortz, 1978).

In other words, the governments of the populist authoritarian period were clearly on the side of capital against the interest of workers, while at the same time reinforcing the bourgeoisie as a class—thus undermining the possibility of maintaining the state form I have dubbed "Bonapartist." This form entered into decline during World War II while still preserving some of its traits; what vanished was more a certain style of power than any essence of the regime.

## THE CRISIS OF THE OLD REGIME

Although various political crises erupted during the populist authoritarian era, none of these were definitive of the crisis of the regime, although they probably influenced it. The crisis of the old regime was more than just another

political crisis, though it was that as well. It was massive and, although the old regime was not yet altogether defunct, seemingly definitive (Rodríguez, 1986: 9):

> A political crisis becomes an expression of political power when *other* forces place into contradiction, even at risk of fundamental modification, the forms or modes of domination or the dynamics of these forms of domination (including economic and ideological domination) that the state exercises in order to preserve the status quo, which is its principal and generic goal in any modern nation.
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> The principal forces that can plunge institutional political power into crisis are (1) exogenous—the dominant economic forces of global capitalism or of a foreign power—and (2) endogenous—the social classes whose struggle puts into crisis the modes of domination that a political regime uses to guarantee the stability necessary for the accumulation of capital at a given moment. Previous and lesser political crises had been provoked mainly by endogenous factors. By contrast, the crisis of the old regime and the superimposition onto it of the new one can more readily be explained by exogenous factors and the substantial alterations that have overtaken capital accumulation in the context of what today we call the globalization of the economy under the auspices of neoliberalism.

I have said that by "political regime" (as distinct from "government") I mean a form of the state that depends on the correlation of social and political forces in a given country and at a given moment. These social and political forces may, of course, be external, internal, or a mixture of the two (e.g., the association of transnational and national capital). In the case of political crises that predated the terminal crisis of the old regime, the internal social and political forces were those that threatened the existing forms or modes of domination that were indispensable for the regime to function. The social and political forces that have thrown the old regime into crisis, chiefly economic forces this time, have for some time determined not only the forms of capital accumulation on a global scale but also the part played by nation-states that are under attack as such to clear the way for the neoliberal model, which admits no frontiers other than those of the dominant, hegemonic countries, first among them the United States.

To put it another way, political crises that predated the crisis of the old regime were a product of class struggle and were resolved by the authoritarian regime by means of repression involving the army if need be (most importantly in 1947, 1956–1959, 1968, and 1976),[6] as well as by the intensification of military and paramilitary operations (of which the Brigada Blanca was among the most infamous) against the guerrilla movements of the 1970s. If such movements did not provoke a political crisis despite the threat to the system that they represented, it is because they did not imperil the modes of domination characteristic of the regime up to that time.

The crisis of the old regime had a far more complex origin than the previous political disturbances. It was connected internally to the promoters and devotees of economic globalization (the national technocracy), to the overhaul of the world economic model and its ideological framework of neoliberalism, to the economic and other orders of crisis that unfolded during the mid-1970s, and to the effects of this crisis on society in terms of loss of cohesion, solidarity, and combative spirit.

Technocrats had existed prior to the epoch under consideration, for they are the product of the conditions that obtain at certain points in the development

of the productive forces within society. Some are more functionally relevant than others to the situation of the moment, but they are all *predicates of the subject* rather than the subject itself. Technocrats, then, are the (most often functional) result of a particular dynamic of capital accumulation following the loss of legitimacy and credibility of a regime—in this case the postrevolutionary regime that I have labeled statist, populist, and authoritarian and that showed its true colors—its lack of any alternative to the repressive option—on October 2, 1968, the date of the Tlatelolco massacre.

Such is the irrationality of the capitalist system that it deems it expedient at such points to replace the image of the charismatic strongman with that of the technically proficient man or team: people who possess, at least in theory, the scientific and technical know-how to clean up the mess. In other words, it swaps the "political sage" for a person or persons supposedly equipped to resolve not so much intuitively as *scientifically* the intractable problems raised by a "modern, complex society."

The accession to power of the technocrats was not a product of internal (national) negotiations among economic groups, social classes, and the government but the consequence of objective situations that favored or "compelled" (as the rulers of the time would have said) an even more forceful intervention for the benefit of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the Inter-American Development Bank. These objective situations included mounting external debt, the petrolization of the economy (encouraging speculation rather than productive investment), the trade deficit (more than 150 billion pesos by the last year of López Portillo's administration), growing inflation, depletion of the central bank's currency reserves (aggravated by, among other things, petrodollar volatility and capital flight due to repeated devaluations), and, needless to say, the devaluation of the peso against the dollar itself. As a result, the price of public goods and services soared, public-sector and social spending fell, and most people saw their purchasing power considerably reduced, in part because the 1976–1982 government capped wages below the rate of inflation (a measure still in force)[7] (Rodríguez, 1996: 113–119) as part of the official policy of protecting capital profits. Even during the short-lived oil boom, real wages crept up only to 1970 levels, whereas the cost of living had multiplied by six over the same period.

The Mexican government's inability to repay the foreign debt or even to service it, to negotiate fresh loans, to guarantee monetary circulation and domestic saving, and to bridge the trade deficit gave it no choice but to comply with the strictures of the IMF[8] and its sister institutions—that is, to bow to the demands of the capital interests that already dominated the world economy. By agreeing to all conditions the technocrats of the recently created Ministry of Planning and Budget, the Finance Ministry, and the Bank of Mexico emerged as the politically victorious faction, the heroes who would rescue the country from economic irrationality. The technocrats would serve the needs of globally dominant capital and ensure that Mexico played the part assigned to it by the market in the new international division of labor ruled by the logic of "structural adjustment."

During the López Portillo administration there was a strong perception of the crisis of the old regime, accelerated by the reconversion of capital worldwide in the wake of Nixon's 1971 announcement of the nonconvertibility of

the U.S. dollar and by the economic crisis (the oil crisis) that marked the mid-1970s. Within the government, the ongoing battle between technocrats and neo-Keynesians was reflected in the incongruities between the Global Plan—the pursuit of efficiency, regardless of the social consequences—and the Industrial Plan drawn up along Cambridge School lines, which proposed job creation and wage hikes. These divergences were in fact a bone of contention within the PRI itself, as could be seen from the internal strife over who would be designated as the presidential successor; they caused further rifts inside the official workers' and peasants' organizations, where democratically inclined factions formed breakaway fronts against government policies. In formal terms, the deterioration of the regime became plain to see when Miguel de la Madrid scraped through the elections with the lowest vote in the history of the PRI, a record beaten only by his successor Salinas, despite the massive fraud that alone secured him the presidency.

In general, the technocratic current neglected party-political militancy in the PRI or elsewhere; this is why its representatives had rarely been elected to seats in Congress, for example. The last PRI president who had also served in the Senate and in the Chamber of Deputies was Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (1964–1970). From Echeverría onward—and excepting Luis Donaldo Colosio, the successor-designate who was assassinated in March 1994—all the official party's presidential aspirants came from the ranks of the civil service, having never "got their shoes dirty," as their nontechnocratic party colleagues were wont to say.

Once the technocrats had grabbed all the most powerful posts, including the presidency, old-style politicians found themselves sidelined or sacked on the pretext that they were not suited to the "needs" of modernization. When this pruning process was compounded by the so-called contraction of the state that led to the wholesale privatization of public enterprises and the trimming of countless jobs from the federal bureaucracy, opportunities to "live off the budget" were drastically curtailed—a situation that fueled discontent and anger at the very heart of the Institutional Revolutionary apparatus.

The construction of a new regime, launched by the technocrats in power, would eventually accelerate the crisis of the old one, which was dysfunctional for the model of accumulation globally dominated by neoliberal ideology and obsolete outside that model—unable to respond to the demands of the great majority of the population, one of which was for a democracy that reached beyond mere electoralism.

## THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE NEW REGIME

As I have said, by the late 1990s Mexico had two overlapping political regimes, and one or the other had to give way. Mathias and Salama (1986) argue that when a political regime is so altered by its alliances with particular social classes or class fractions as to spawn a "deviant" form of the state, it will be short-lived, since a contradiction will exist between the living entity (the capitalist state in a capitalist country) and its materialization (the political regime and by extension the government). The contrary will equally be true, but the resulting regime need not be so ephemeral because there will not be

the same contradiction between entity and materialization. "The contradiction is not between the state and its form but rather between the objective necessity of capital reproduction and the underlying social relationship, on the one hand, and the concrete difficulty in materializing it, on the other. This contradiction is, therefore, a product of the forms taken by the class struggle and its intensity" (Mathias and Salama, 1986: 16). In the case of Mexico, the lengthy economic and social crisis plus the political triumph of neoliberal technocracy were decisive factors (and perhaps not the only ones) in the low intensity of the class struggle. The crisis translated into higher unemployment, among other things, and this inevitably weakened the working class and popular organizations as a whole, including those affiliated with the PRI. The threat of unemployment, an inescapable reality then as now, undermined workers' organizations along with the subordinate social classes, whether organized or not. Now that the statist, populist groups had lost their grip on power, the neoliberal technocrats were well-placed institutionally to force change upon the political regime, adapting it to (or aligning it with) the logic of the state in an increasingly globalized world according to the agenda known as neoliberalism. The handful of PRI dissenters, some sticking with the party and others leaving it to form first the Frente Democrático Nacional (National Democratic Front—FDN) and then the PRD, failed to amass sufficient leverage to challenge the technocrats in Congress or to reverse the imposition of Salinas as head of state. The Salinas government, more than its predecessors, enacted the objective necessity of capital reproduction in the new global model of accumulation. The battle continues to be fought between an antistatist, antipopulist neoliberalism and the defenders of state intervention as a tool for regulating and mitigating the devastating impact of capitalism on the increasingly impoverished lower classes. The technocratic neoliberals in the government were those who finally changed the political regime, except that what they imposed was not so much a "deviant" form of the state (which would have been ephemeral) as a form that was compatible with a logic of the state attuned to the world economic model and embracing Mexico's role as a Third World country in thrall to the great powers, especially the United States, and to the multinational institutions over which Washington has always held sway.

It was Salinas's government, as I have said, that secured the new political regime, and as a result the PRI had to change its own outlook by order of the man who was assumed to be the natural head of the party: the president. State intervention had to stop or be cut to a minimum; social policies had to be reconfigured as quasi-charitable works (a discretionary option, like the National Solidarity Program),[9] and national development, in keeping with the prescriptions of neoliberal globalization, could no longer be a priority. The PRI and the PAN or, more exactly, the government and the PAN ceased to be poles apart and became complementary. The government was ideologically neoliberal, and the PAN was liberal and therefore not opposed to neoliberalism, the liberalism of our time. Salinas, who grasped this perfectly, had no difficulty in making an ally of the PAN: an indispensable ally for achieving the constitutional reforms that would "fit" us for the new ideology that was being adopted and defended with all the resources of the state.[10] Thus the bank was soon reprivatized and Constitutional Articles 27 and 130, among others, were

redrafted. Article 27 permitted, after 1992, the division and sale of communal lands (*ejidos*) and abolished the expansion of small and indigenous landholdings.[11] Article 130, aiming to woo the Catholic Church and through it prevail upon the population, removed the requirement of Mexican nationality for the clergy and gave the vote to ministers of all faiths. These reforms turned the ejido (and before long, other communal goods) into a commodity for the benefit of capitalists and turned the Catholic Church (the most influential religion in Mexico) into a real and growing power with a legal right to political activity that it exercised in favor, not surprisingly, of the new regime and its governments. In addition to creating FOBAPROA,[12] Salinas's government welded Mexico—as the subordinate, dependent partner—into the economies of Canada and the United States by means of the North American Free Trade Agreement without consulting the people.

Salinas's power continued to be felt well beyond his own term. When he chose Ernesto Zedillo to succeed him, Zedillo soon overcame any differences of opinion with his patron to pursue the same orthodox neoliberal agenda. Rumor has it (and I am unable to confirm or disprove this) that Zedillo wanted to go his own way, which would explain why he kept Raúl Salinas de Gortari (the "troublesome brother") in jail. This is very likely, but Salinas's power did not end with Zedillo's. After the victory of the PAN under Vicente Fox in 2000, the former president regained his influence, and there is reason to believe that he is still actively leaning on the political forces to continue the implementation of his grand design: to turn Mexico from a country into a business, with all that that implies. This chimes in with Fox's defining his mandate as a government of businessmen for businessmen.

Under Salinas, the PRI ceased to be the party of the regime. When the old regime went into crisis, so did the party. The culling of the civil service in the name of smaller government meant that the plunderfest was over for many. The development of more competent opposition parties meant that PRI members were losing slots and salaries that had once been their undisputed preserve. They lost states and municipalities, local and federal councils, seats in the Senate (barely compensated for by first-minority senatorships and proportional representation) and positions in many former state companies and decentralized public enterprises that had been privatized. Ideologically, too, the PRI faithful found themselves at sea, unmoored from the discourses they were so familiar with and no doubt from their inner convictions as well. Suddenly they were surrounded by "social liberalism" instead of "revolutionary nationalism," immersed in a postmodernism that enthrones concepts such as civil society, pluralism, democracy, freedoms (including market freedom, naturally), capitalism as destiny, and at best a third way that pretends (falsely) to maintain its distance equally from socialism and capitalism (Wood, 1995) when it is in reality as much committed to the latter as the most overt conservatism. Salinas, more than De la Madrid, destroyed the old PRI, and Zedillo went on not only to maintain a "healthy distance" from "his" party but also to allow (deliberately, we must suppose) the PAN to win: a change of the party in power, perhaps, but a continuation of the neoliberal project in unchanging submission to the United States. It is not for nothing that he was rewarded, in 2001, with one of the 11 seats on the board of the Union Pacific Railroad and in April 2002 was appointed director of the Center for the Study of Globalization

at Yale. What were his merits? Among others, to have put before the Senate a bill to privatize the Mexican railroad system, including the North Pacific sector, giving rise to the partnership between the Union Pacific Railroad and the Grupo México (which also happens to own most of the mining companies in Mexico). The Grupo México, it should be added, boasts noted members of the Salinas set on its board of directors. Was there really a divergence between Salinas and Zedillo? I doubt it, since the Grupo México was founded in 1998. A divergence with Fox? I doubt that, too, since an important role was played in the railroad privatization scheme by the so-called union leader Víctor Flores Morales, who, after serving as a plurinominal PRI deputy during the second half of the Zedillo administration, went back to heading the Congreso del Trabajo (Labor Congress—CT) by virtue of the illegal recognition he earned from the ultrarightist minister of labor and social security for having marshaled the CT behind Fox's government on March 30, 2005.[13]

In this process of change, some who still defended, if not the old regime itself, its more worthwhile aspects (national development, broad-based social policies, etc.) but also democracy moved into opposition, leaving behind a small (in fact tiny) band of allies within the PRI. This opposition constituted the PRD. When for the second time it seemed on the verge of winning, in 2006, Fox's neoliberal technocratic government resorted to the same course as in 1988: to make sure that anti-neoliberalism not occupy the presidency of the republic.

The economic model propounded by the technocrats is the relative globalization of the economy in the ideological-political framework of neoliberalism (Hirst and Thompson, 1996). Such is the necessary superstructural pattern for underwriting the requirements of so-called economic globalization—itself a myth, as Hirst and Thompson have shown, since genuinely transnational corporations are relatively few: the majority of large firms are nationally based and entertain multinational commercial relations.[14] Another feature that seriously challenges the concept of globalization is that capital mobility has not produced a massive transfer of investment and jobs from the developed to the developing countries; direct foreign investment is highly concentrated among the advanced industrial economies, and except for a small minority of newly industrialized countries the Third World remains on the periphery of both investment and trade. In other words, trade, investment, and financial flows are concentrated in the triangle formed by Europe, Japan, and the United States[15] (although China should probably be added to the club by now), enabling these countries to bring strong government pressure to bear on financial markets and other economic trends. If we must speak of globalization, it should be with reference to the financial domain. Thanks to the almost universal deregulation of capital markets and currencies, few countries can remain immune.

Mexican technocrats seem unable to grasp this *relativity* of economic globalization. They appear to think that the benefits of globalization really do spread over the globe and will benefit economies like ours, when in reality all that is being achieved is the destruction of the constitutive unity of the state and the national wealth while social and economic inequality deepens—both within countries and between them—because of runaway unemployment and cuts in public spending, above all social spending.[16] These social, sectorial, and regional inequalities have forced governments to adopt increasingly authori-

tarian measures that negate in practice the very liberal values they claim to defend. Democracy, in their self-serving view, is for elites and confined to an electoral cycle in which political parties are privileged as abstract forms of social organization; meanwhile, society itself is restrained by various means from organizing and having a democratic say in issues of public relevance and interest.

Neoliberal governments have given precedence to economics over politics, but something has gone badly wrong, since the economy has been a fiasco for all but the largest fortunes in Mexico (national or foreign). The gamble, in keeping with the logic of economic globalization, was on an export economy and direct capital investment. In order to create these conditions, the standards of living and the life expectancy of most Mexicans had to be sacrificed, something that even the president has acknowledged. We have heard this before: for the evangelists of the new right, inequality is the prerequisite for growth and what they are pleased to call progress.

The economic crisis, which lasted for some time, facilitated (as do all crises) the concentration of capital (there were 22 Mexican billionaires in 1994, compared with just 2 in 1991)[17] while plunging the bulk of society into ever greater poverty, down to levels not seen since 1929. Elsewhere I have attempted to explain this lack of resources in society as an effect of the crisis, emphasizing as one of its most immediate and destructive effects the *individualization* of society, its loss of cohesion and dwindling solidarity—the inability to pull together, even within specific social classes. The sense of shipwreck has spread a feeling of "Every man for himself," and the traditional individualist selfishness that, according to Hegel, bedevils civil society has flourished as never before.

Individualization is further exacerbated by the very real danger of mass unemployment, which has already completely overtaken the concept of the "industrial army in reserve" (which once meant that people could potentially be employed, but now there are no jobs, nor will there be any, for the thousands who have been made redundant or have yet to employed at all). And individualization has made it easier to attack existing workers' organizations, some of which have been dissolved while others have seen their collective labor contracts severely reduced and elsewhere unions have simply been banned (e.g., in maquiladoras). In the absence of robust organizations prepared to defend workers' interests, wages have been slashed with record ruthlessness: the head of the IMF himself remarked that in no other country would the population have stood for the austerity programs rolled out by the Mexican government. Even the *New York Times*, not a journal noted for its leftist tendencies, wrote: "The income gap in Mexico is among the largest in the world, and continues to widen in an astounding way. Excluding the African countries, Mexico displays the biggest gulf in the world between rich and poor, according to UN and World Bank figures"(*La Jornada*, July 21, 1996). A recent study found that in 2006 the richest 10 percent owned 39.3 percent of the national wealth, while the poorest decile possessed 1.6 percent.[18]

The political outcome of this deplorable situation has been that the unions have lost all legitimacy, as has, by extension, the official party, to which most unions belong. Such has been the downturn that the PRI was beaten in the 2000 elections and came in third in 2006.

While the decline of the PRI was reflected for some years in the form of electoral abstention that yielded few votes for the opposition, over time the balance changed: abstention continued to grow, but the opposition began to gain ground at the PRI's expense. The tipping point of this process was the end of De la Madrid's administration, that notorious sexennial of zero growth, as economist Héctor Guillén Romo (1990) put it.

Prominent members of the PRI, including one of its former presidents (Porfirio Muñoz Ledo), developed a different vision of how the country should develop. Finding their political intentions blocked within the party, they walked out to found the most successful electoral opposition in Mexican postrevolutionary history: the already mentioned FDN. The FDN was made possible, among other reasons, by widespread discontent with the economy (devaluations, galloping inflation, monetary speculation, flat growth, and declining standards of living), affecting even the parties that traditionally supported the government of the day (the Partido Popular Socialista [Popular Socialist Party—PPS], the Partido Auténtico de la Revolución Mexicana [Authentic Party of the Mexican Revolution—PARM], and the Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores—PST] and other smaller formations) to turn them into authentic opposition alternatives[19] for the 1988 elections.

The victory of the FDN (covered up by the government, which fiddled with the computer system and avoided any posthumous investigations by burning about half of the ballot boxes) and the increase in the number of votes for the PAN kindled an unprecedented interest in elections as a path to power, an opportunity to try to change the destiny of the Mexican people, trapped between neoliberalism and something quite different that only superficially resembles a throwback to populism, corporativism, and state interventionism.

The 1988 elections were an unintended watershed in Mexico's electoral history,[20] marking the transition from one party system to another and inaugurating a new party-electoral phase that we are still living through today. Formally speaking, the transition was from a multiparty system with a single dominant party to a multiparty system in which the PRI no longer had the resources to regain its former eminence even if it were to reconquer the federal government. The opaque politics of the past have given way to more truly competitive jousts, notwithstanding the way the PAN now mobilizes its own media and corporate henchmen to use the same old fraudulent tactics pioneered by its predecessors. Any notion that our elections had become transparent or honest evaporated in the face of the hunger for power evinced by those who took over from Zedillo.

That was the end of the overlapping of the two regimes. The old political regime dragged the PRI down with it, and the neoliberal technocrats transformed the party. The new regime that appeared to be in crisis by the end of 1994 (with the famous "December errors") was rescued at immense cost, some of which was of course underwritten by the U.S. government.[21]

## CONSOLIDATION AND CONTINUITY OF THE NEW REGIME

Despite this massive rescue effort, by the end of Zedillo's term it was obvious that his government's unfulfilled promises (such as "family welfare," which was nowhere to be seen) would benefit the opposition, enabling it to

acquire a weight it had never had. Both the PAN and the PRD entered the ring against the tired official party, with growing chances of success, as was apparent from the elections of 1997.

But the increasing competitiveness of the opposition came at an ideological and political price, especially for the left. In order to compete at the polls, it was forced to distance itself from ideological positions that had formerly defined it and cease to represent classes and class sectors that had once distinguished its base from that of the so-called bourgeois parties. The reason for these changes was simple: ideological definitions and the representation of certain social classes (workers and campesinos, say) excluded other classes, and this exclusion would be mirrored in votes or the lack of them, hampering the ability to compete with parties that *appeared* more broad-based. This is why the left sought to boost its electoral appeal by adopting a more plural composition and discourse, avoiding precise ideological definition, fielding often ambiguous proposals, and finally becoming very similar to its opponents.

The sole issue that set the left apart or, more precisely, distinguished the PRD from the PAN and the PRI was López Obrador's promise to "sand down the edges of the neoliberal program" (*La Jornada*, June 9, 1997)—that is, to implement a noticeable change of economic direction in order to improve the lives of all Mexicans, not just those of the billionaires and their second-tier associates. To put it another way, the PRD platform was anti-neoliberal to some degree, unlike the projects of the PRI and the PAN, and envisaged increased state intervention in the economy to regulate it and direct its investments as the state does in the main developed countries (most conspicuously in Japan and the United States), create jobs, strengthen the rural economy in the popular interest, raise wages, and maintain the free provision of social security and the subsidized services that have indirectly supplemented the incomes of millions of Mexicans and that they have now lost or are about to lose.

However, such departures from neoliberal policies could be implemented only under one or both of two conditions: either society would have to organize in such as way as to put pressure on the technocrats to rethink their policies or the anti-neoliberal opposition would have to win the presidency in 2000. The presidency is the sole position from which Mexican economic policy and hence the entire direction of the country can be dictated, at least *formally,* as long as presidentialism continues to be the outstanding feature of the system.

Unfortunately, it proved impossible to organize society, despite the many exhortations issued by the Zapatista Army after 1994.[22] Its heterogeneity and the many divergent interests of its members, sharpened by the long economic crisis, prevented society from coming together to halt or redirect neoliberal policies. This weakness of society, added to the ideological ambiguity of the political parties and the very fact of their co-participation in an alleged democratic transition that involved only the elites, militated against any challenges to the new regime that was being established.

The governments of this new regime have abandoned the traditional forms of social control and domination to such an extent that they are increasingly resorting to the use of armed force, yet they have proved unable (or unwilling) to resolve the extreme contradictions that their policies have provoked. The country's seeming socioeconomic health is a figment of macroeconomic

graphs, because at the level of ordinary people or that of businesses that do not compete in the world market (i.e., most of them), the instability of the model is obvious, and conditions are unlikely to improve for the next 20 years, as Zedillo implicitly admitted in his third state-of-the-nation speech in September 1997.

Neither a return to the past nor a continuation of the present would seem to be a fair summary of our thinking. And yet what other choice was there?

One candidate, the PAN's Vicente Fox, appeared to understand what the country was going through at the end of the Zedillo era. Following the canny advice of his team, he disguised himself as an anti-technocrat, a populist, and this helped him to project a very different image from that of Zedillo and his designated successor, Francisco Labastida. It was the candidate who triumphed rather than the PAN as a party. Fox's victory signified the utter and probably definitive rout of the old regime and left the old party reeling despite the updating it had undergone since Salinas's day. But it also signified the defeat of the anti-neoliberal option, represented for better or worse by the PRD. The PRI had lost, but not so the clique that had taken power in 1982. Neoliberal technocracy had guaranteed "its" model (one that it had never really monopolized, but no matter) by betting on two of the three numbers in play: the PRI and the PAN. From the technocracy's point of view and that of the capital it represented, the PRI card was not ideal because of the ill-feeling among the groups and interests represented by its foremost members, many of whom had belonged to or been shaped by the old regime and were indebted to it for the privileges they enjoyed. The PAN card, in contrast, meant not only putting an end to the old regime but also ensuring the continuity of the technocrats' priceless gem, economic policy. There was yet another advantage to this choice: if the president belonged to another party, the PRI would be orphaned and potentially reduced to its own resources rather than continuing as the beneficiary of federal funds. It is no accident that the first reaction of many leading PRIistas was to turn against President Zedillo, demoting him to the rank of distinguished party member rather than the natural leader of the party even while he was still in office. Party tradition would have required the chief executive not only to bitterly dispute Fox's victory (or at least wait until he was declared president-elect a month later) but also to put all possible ways and means, fraud included, at the disposal of the PRI's own candidate. When the party faithful saw the electoral results, they realized too late that Zedillo had played both cards in order to guarantee the survival at all costs of the neoliberal model—and how magnificently he had succeeded, with the defeat of his own discredited party and in-house opponents! The triumph of the opposition bestowed greater legitimacy and credibility on a continuist government than the accustomed PRI victory would have done. Zedillo had never been a committed PRIista, and his party membership was only formal.

To sum up: the contention of the two overlapping regimes, one populist and statist, the other technocratic and neoliberal, was resolved in 2000 when the latter came out of opposition to win an unimpeachable election, probably the cleanest and most transparent Mexico had ever known.

The government led by Vicente Fox, widely expected to be the vehicle of change, instead carried on with the policies of its immediate predecessors, as well as eagerly pursuing a rapprochement with George W. Bush and courting

his elder-brotherly approval. One of the most telling examples of the Mexican president's deference to his U.S. counterpart took place in March, during the United Nations Development Summit in Monterrey. In order to spare Bush from an encounter with Fidel Castro, Fox—hosting the meeting—told Castro to "Eat up and get out" (though not, according to the former Cuban president, in such polite language). The Puebla–Panama Plan (rechristened by President Calderón as the "Mesoamerica Project") was another Fox initiative, supported by Bush and the Inter-American Development Bank in order to facilitate foreign and domestic private investment in the south and southeast of the country, particularly in areas rich in energy resources and biodiversity, as well as for setting up maquiladoras.

Economic growth between 2000 and 2006 was poor (an average 0.63 percent per year during the first three years) and was based on the use of excess capacity to boost productivity (without job creation) and the exports of a handful of companies characterized by high technology and low manpower. The economy avoided flat-lining as it had done under De la Madrid only because of the remittances sent back by Mexicans working north of the border. Such remittances amounted to more than US$13 billion in 2003 (more than the earnings of tourism and exports together, excluding oil exports worth almost US$17 billion). By the end of Fox's term remittances had topped US$23 billion (Ornelas, 2004; *El Universal,* January 31, 2007). Remittances, oil exports, and the informal economy—involving over 60 percent of the economically active population—were all that kept the economy from collapsing. The informal economy, which has not been studied enough, plays a key role for a country's social stability if not for its economic health. One IMF study, complemented by another from the Instituto Nacional de Geografía y Estadística (INEGI), revealed the dire straits we were in with respect to the black economy and its implications for tax revenues. The value of the informal economy rose during the Fox administration to one-third of the gross domestic product (GDP), one of the highest proportions in the world, meaning that some US$284 billion a year were flowing through these untaxed channels. The INEGI study showed that the unofficial economy had overtaken the industrial sector (manufacturing, mining, construction, electricity, gas, and water) and the farming, forestry, and fishing sectors, which respectively bring in 26.6 and 3.9 percent of GDP (*La Jornada*, October 12, 2006). Another study revealed that the growth of the informal sector was more than twice that of the formal economy between 1992 and 2006: this period counted "5,145,045 salaried posts, but 10,169,898 informal jobs" (CONEVAL, 2008). The escape valve afforded by the underground economy assured relative stability but at great cost to the future of our national development.

Fox's campaign promise of 7 percent annual growth was more than broken: growth failed to match even that of earlier administrations. The privatization program established by the neoliberal PRI governments continued apace. Fox (after insisting without success on privatizing the national oil company, Pemex) managed to hand over to foreign (Spanish and North American) capital a fifth of the electric energy obtained by the Federal Electricity Commission. The fact that neither he nor his successor has succeeded to date (2008) in selling Pemex does not mean that foreign investment has not been welcomed into the oil sector. Worse befell the banks. Fox surrendered 90

percent of the banking system to foreign investors, a process that had begun under Zedillo once Salinas had reprivatized the banks (*La Jornada,* December 5, 2008).

Vicente Fox could not live up to the expectations he had generated in the course of his campaign. Politically he relied on the extreme right, perhaps because of the influence of his chief political operator, an El Yunque member named Ramón Muñoz.[23] Helped by the ambitious woman who would become his wife, Marta Sahagún, a member of Regnum Christi, of the Legionnaires of Christ (Torres, 2001), Fox altered the PAN's orientation by appointing Luis Felipe Bravo Mena, also of El Yunque, as party chairman, and he passed the baton to his associate Manuel Espino Barrientos, architect of the presidential succession of 2006 and current head of the Christian Democratic Organization of America.[24] Fox's government was the most right-wing, politically speaking, to have ruled this country since the defeat of Victoriano Huerta in 1914; at the same it was a faithful continuation, whatever its clumsiness and intellectual limits, of the neoliberal policies put in place by its technocratically inclined PRIista predecessors.

The process of choosing a presidential successor for the 2006 elections laid bare, if that were necessary, Fox's alliances with the forces of capital of (and in) the country and their joint determination to ensure the continuity of the new regime. The most powerful corporate-political group (the Business Coordinating Council),[25] the TV duopoly (Televisa and TV-Azteca), the Catholic hierarchy, and the advice of Miami's Inter-American Center for Political Management and that of Dick Morris (who backed Condoleezza Rica against Hillary Clinton as a possible candidate for president in 2008) were just some of the supports, all of them documented and public, that were marshaled to prevent anyone who might stand as the leader of the anti-neoliberal project from being elected.

Another partnership that became obvious during the succession process was with the PRI. While this party was ostensibly part of the opposition (the more so since it had lost the race in 2000), events in Oaxaca confirmed that the PAN's enemy was not so much the PRI as the Coalición por el Bien de Todos (Coalition for the Common Good—CBT), consisting of the PRD, the Partido del Trabajo (Labor Party—PT), and the Partido Convergencia (Convergence Party—PC).

In Oaxaca, on May 22, 2006, a social movement was launched around Section 22 (more or less independent) of the powerful Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (National Education Workers' Union—SNTE). As other working-class and campesino sectors joined, the movement grew and evolved into an organization called the Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca (Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca—APPO). Among its demands, especially following a violent crackdown, was the removal of the PRIista state governor, Ulises Ruiz. Fox refused to step in both before the elections, claiming that he did not want to "contaminate" them (more than he had done already?), and after the elections, this time because he needed the PRI to complete his term of office in an atmosphere of relative stability and to help smooth the transition, which appeared likely to be troublesome. The governor's party naturally stood by him. PRI senators balked at dismissing Ruiz or the Oaxaca authorities, since both the state and the federal constitution require

that such action be followed by new elections, which were likely to be won by the CBT coalition.[26] What is more, it would have established a precedent for the overthrow of a ruler by a social movement (as happened in Argentina in 2001). This was unacceptable to the PAN and its business associates once they had seen the scale of the mass social support summoned up by López Obrador in April 2005, when the government and the Congress attempted to remove him from office.

The Oaxaca case—on top of that of Puebla, whose governor, Mario Marín, was also ripe for dismissal because of his illicit dealings with pederasts and harassment of the journalist Lydia Cacho—sealed the alliance between Fox's administration and the PRI. Fox did nothing in either case, allowing the PRI to hold onto two key governorships. This favor must be kept in mind if we are to understand the role played by the PRI in the 2006 election, for it was a much weakened formation by then, compared with its "glory years."

The former governor of Tabasco, Roberto Madrazo, was the second PRI chairman to angle from that position for presidential candidate status (the first was Javier García Paniagua, competing against Miguel de la Madrid). It counted in his favor that the chief executive was a PANista and could not, therefore, designate the PRI candidate (as presidents had done until 2000). In order to prevail over his antagonist Beatriz Paredes he linked up with Elba Esther Gordillo, the powerful leader of the SNTE—the union that represented over 1,200,000 schoolteachers. Gordillo, it may be recalled, had got where she was with the support of Carlos Salinas (since 1989); during Fox's presidency she established close political relations with his wife and with several overtly right-wing faith groups. In 2003 the PRI began to question the fact that its general secretary and coordinator of deputies was an ally of the far right and was implicitly supporting the nomination of Marta Sahagún to succeed her husband. At the end of that year, the party's deputies repudiated her, and Madrazo was quick to support them. Two of the deputies close to Gordillo were rewarded by Fox with posts in his government: Tomás Ruiz became the director of the National Lottery, replacing Laura Valdés in the wake of the scandal of the diversion of funds into the foundation presided over by Marta Sahagún, and Miguel Ángel Yunes became the Subsecretary for Prevention and Citizen Participation, a department of the Ministry of Public Safety. (After Calderón was elected, Yunes went on to direct the Instituto de Seguridad y Servicios Sociales de los Trabajadores del Estado (State Workers' Social Security Institute—ISSSTE), where he was a prominent advocate of privatizing these workers' pensions).

It should not be assumed from the above that Roberto Madrazo was a genuine Fox opponent. As Carlos Sirvent has shown (*La Jornada,* December 8, 2003),[27] it is more accurate to say that he took advantage of Gordillo's closeness to the presidential couple to break with her noisily enough to dislodge her as general secretary of the party—all because the *maestra* (teacher), as she liked to call herself, did not support his bid to become the PRI's presidential nominee. Madrazo mismanaged his path to the nomination so badly that he was finally left almost isolated, an object of dislike in his own party. His bad reputation was not dispelled by his behavior as a candidate, and this, allied with insistent rumors that he enjoyed the support of Salinas, pushed him into third place in the preelectoral polls of 2006.

In an interview with the leftist daily *La Jornada* (March 15, 2006), Manuel Bartlett—still a senator for the PRI at the time—said,

> Salinas de Gortari led the PRI to the right and now has become an enemy of our party by imposing a right-wing candidate like Roberto Madrazo, who will be sure to take care of his interests. This is why Madrazo is such a fan of opening up strategic sectors. Yesterday he spoke of wholesale reforms to our energy policy to allow domestic and foreign private investment because, he says, we must transcend old-fashioned nationalistic prejudices and move on to a modern nationalism based on state supervision of Pemex and the Federal Electricity Commission.

It was obvious, Bartlett went on, that "Madrazo is doing nothing but repeat his instructions from Salinas de Gortari. They are both in the electricity business; that's what I mean by saying that the latter's presence in national politics is damaging." Arturo Romo Gutiérrez, the PRI governor of Zacatecas from 1992 to 1998, complained months later that his party had turned into "a voting agency for neoliberal policies" and called on the leaders of both the PRI and the PRD to construct "a great party of the left" together (*La Jornada*, June 13, 2006).

The outcome of all this, as many had foreseen, was the continued decline of the PRI. Madrazo's proportion of the vote came nowhere near that of his principal adversaries. Indeed, many in his party felt that a vote for him would be wasted, preferring to drum up support for Andrés Manuel López Obrador: the "useful" or tactical vote. Others—Salinas and Zedillo's "political heirs" and the governors of several northern states—were inclined to channel the party vote to Calderón and the PAN. Here again, the influence of Gordillo was apparent. She had formed her own party, made up of SNTE members, and its name, the Partido Nueva Alianza (New Alliance Party—PANAL), well befitted its role in the 2006 elections: its members, people from all the union's sections, voted en masse for Felipe Calderón, costing the party's own presidential candidate (Roberto Campa Cifrián) some 1,400,000 votes that did, however, go to PANAL's candidates for the Congress. Few could miss the significance of the "new alliance" and with whom it was formed. Calderón is deeply obliged to it.

During the Fox period, something unexpected happened. While the star of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas was sinking, another leader rose to prominence: Andrés Manuel López Obrador, head of the Federal District government. (Mexico City is still crucial in such a traditionally centralized country, and it is here that much of the country's economic, political, cultural, and scientific life is concentrated.) As long as society remained atomized—even if there were regular outbreaks of isolated protest—and as long as the PRD, as a center-left party, was alienating great swaths of the population by its own errors (some of which were unpardonable), Fox's government could rest easy, so to speak. But it was not long before the president and his aides (official and otherwise) began to realize that López Obrador could turn into a strong candidate for the next elections; not only this, he represented a platform that was in many senses anti-neoliberal, statist, populist, and nationalist without necessarily being regressive. Fox and his followers (probably including Salinas and Zedillo) came to regard López Obrador as a man who, were he to become president, would bring back the old regime—or at least interrupt the new one,

the one that had already made such tidy profits for the great capitalists, national and foreign, and the (formal and informal) subscribers to the Washington Consensus.

Ever since 2003 there has been a relentless campaign to discredit López Obrador. Attempts were made to remove him from office for noncompliance with a judicial order and have him jailed, but they only served to redouble his popularity. The balance between López Obrador as a figure and his party became comparable to that between Fox and the PAN: the important element was the candidate, to whom the party provided invaluable organic support but in a secondary capacity. It may well be that the general loss of prestige suffered by political parties everywhere (not just in Mexico) tempts many citizens to place more faith in charismatic leaders. It is certain, however, that no political party could ever have convened such huge numbers on short notice as did López Obrador, on April 24, 2005, in protest of the threat to remove him, and in the aftermath of the election of July 2006: on both these occasions, more than 1 million people responded to the call (and on July 30 the crowd was 2.5 million strong).

The champions of neoliberalism painted the PRD candidate and his confederates as "a danger for Mexico"[28] and acted accordingly, preventing him from becoming president. This was essential to the continuity of the neoliberal project and the entrenchment of the new regime. Felipe Calderón Hinojosa, who had been not Fox's choice but rather that of the PAN majority, was to be charged with carrying the project forward and getting the message across that the new political regime (without calling it by that name) was here to stay. The most worrying aspect of the debacle is that the PRD, previously the standard-bearer of the center-left and indisputably embodying the vanguard of anti-neoliberalism, has been seriously damaged by its internal squabbles: today it occupies third place in the opinion polls, having fallen behind even the PRI, which had held that ranking in 2006. There is no doubt whatsoever that the errors committed by the PRD, added to the unpopularity of the Fox and Calderón governments, have been a boon for the PRI, which has lately recaptured a number of state governorships from both of the other parties. It is not too far-fetched to suggest that if nothing substantial changes over the next few years the PRI may regain not only a majority in the Chamber of Deputies in 2009 but the presidency itself in 2012.

Calderón's government, the product of fraud and irregularities that were admitted even by analysts with no commitment to the left,[29] started off by declaring all-out war on organized crime, especially the drug trade. One may suppose that engagement in this war had more to do with the president's subjection to Washington's interests than to any internal problem of drug consumption. Jorge G. Castañeda, who was foreign minister under Fox, recently wrote (*Reforma*, December 3, 2008) about a survey of Mexican drug addiction conducted by the Ministry of Health that "between 2002 and 2008, the number of addicts…went up by 51 percent, from a very low starting figure (307,000) to a low one (465,000)." He added that, by comparison with the market for illegal drugs in the United States, the Mexican market (in a country of nearly 110 million inhabitants) was small and drug use a mere 1.5 percent of the issues regarded by the survey sample as of greatest concern to them. The new government's first initiative, with which it hoped to cloak itself in the

legitimacy it lacked (since Calderón would not permit the full recount of the votes demanded by the CBT coalition), was this irrational, makeshift war on drugs. For some idea of the madness of this battle it is sufficient to consider that in 2008 more than 5,000 people, most of them innocent bystanders, died as a result of it, while during the same year 5,672 civilians and members of the security forces lost their lives in Iraq—in the course of a military invasion led by the most powerful army in the world.

The senseless war on drugs proves that Calderón is flailing, improvising on his feet while increasingly losing his grip, not only because of the increasing number of civilian and other narco-casualties but because of insecurity across the board. Murders, robberies, kidnappings, and other crimes have risen to truly frightening levels, levels that were inconceivable a few years ago.

Further, Calderón has proved unable to maintain his party's alliance with the PRI, especially since the latter embarked on its electoral comeback two years ago. The president's energy reform bill, aimed at privatizing Pemex, suffered substantial amendments at the hands of the PRI and the PRD (as well as smaller parties) in Congress. The new ISSSTE law, which would privatize state workers' pensions, is still being debated, while the majority of the workers in question (some 2 million) have elected to stay with the old pension system. If in the early days of his administration Calderón had marginalized the El Yunque faction by giving the party chairmanship to one of his closest associates (Germán Martínez Cásares), two years later he has taken a more conciliatory stance and appointed a salient member of the group, Luis Felipe Bravo Mena, as his private secretary. This U-turn in relation to the far-right faction is motivated by Calderón's concern for party unity in the face of the threat represented by a resurgent PRI as the election for the Chamber of Deputies approaches. Calderón has also gone out of his way to please the business sector, once more courting the affiliates of the Business Coordinating Council. Recently, for example (November 27, 2008), he bestowed the directorships of the key financial institutions Nafin (Nacional Financiera) and Bancomext[30] on Héctor Rangel Domene, head of the Private-Sector Economic Studies Center (a branch of the Council): it was like delivering the Church to Luther.[31]

The above should not be interpreted as evidence of a substantial distinction between the PAN and the PRI; it reflects rather the determination of the first to keep hold of political power as an instrument to guarantee the continuity of the technocratic and neoliberal regime. Any differences between the PAN and the PRI should be seen, perhaps, as analogous to those between the Republican and Democratic parties in the United States: minimal when it comes to the economic project to which both are committed. In both Mexico and the United States (even with Obama in charge), neither of the two main parties has any quarrel with the prevailing economic model. In other words, neither of them has proposed the least deviation from the neoliberal globalization that currently dominates the world. For instance, Agustín Carstens, the Mexican finance minister, is a graduate of the Autonomous Technological Institute of Mexico (a kind of academic technocrat-factory) and has a doctorate in economics from the University of Chicago (a "Chicago Boy"?). He was also an IMF executive director representing various countries (including Mexico) and deputy director for Mexico at the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank. In the United States, to continue with the parallel, Timothy

Geithner—Obama's Treasury secretary—is also a former IMF executive and one of the team that put together the Federal Reserve's bailout package for U.S. banks. Thus the public treasuries of both countries are entrusted to officials whose professional backgrounds and personal convictions make them defend the interests of capital, not of the increasingly disadvantaged masses.

As far as can be seen from the vantage point of December 2008, there are not enough counterweights to the neoliberal-technocratic political regime for it to be neutralized, let alone reversed. The various lefts (social as well as party-political), in all their different hues, have failed to maintain any sense of themselves as a unitary force with concomitant historical responsibilities. They have been dominated by internecine strife in senseless wrangling over the hegemony of this or that tendency or group instead of standing up to defend an alternative project for the nation. The principal differences between the PAN and the PRI belong more to the axiological (the abortion issue, the role of religion in schools, etc.) than to the economic sphere. However, the older party, at least on the level of discourse, is marginally less eager to align Mexican economic policies with foreign corporate interests, especially those of the United States.

## EPILOGUE

The local and federal elections of July 5, 2009, exposed the deep crisis in the government of Felipe Calderón and his party, the PAN. When the United States was already talking about serious financial conflict and the bankruptcy of businesses of various kinds, in Mexico the finance minister was talking about a "cold" as opposed to the "pneumonia" that was afflicting the country to the north—seeking to minimize the effects on Mexico of the U.S. economic crisis, perhaps because of the proximity of an election that might well produce a PRI victory. The "cold" was not one: unemployment continued to rise, hundreds of companies had to close or reduce output, the GDP fell as never before in the past 75 years,[32] inflation affected the basic food basket and therefore the population below the poverty line (46 percent of the population), and there was a significant decline in remittances from Mexicans working in the United States. As if this were not enough, from January to August 31, 2009, 4,059 people, mostly civilians, had been killed as a result of Calderón's war on drugs.

Meanwhile, the public image of the PRD had suffered once again because of the internal elections of March 16, 2009. Its main subdivisions, known as tribes, had committed various unlawful acts, and the New Left faction (the Chuchos), led by Jesús Ortega, appealed to the Electoral Tribunal to resolve the conflict. The fact that the Chuchos would appeal to this court, the very one that had validated Calderón's suspect victory over López Obrador in 2006, was interpreted as an absolute lack of policy coherence and as a maneuver by the New Left in collusion with the federal government to prevent López Obrador's followers from controlling the party.

The result of the crisis of the PAN and the PRD was the triumph of the PRI in alliance with the discredited PVEM, whose campaign focused on the death penalty for drug traffickers, kidnappers, and rapists—one of the demands of the most conservative sectors of the urban middle classes—and in some districts the

also discredited PANAL. The PRI went from being the third-most-powerful party in 2006 to the first, with 233 deputies out of 500, plus 22 from the PVEM. The PAN took two governorships that had been considered safe, Querétaro and San Luis Potosí, besides winning Campeche, Colima, and Nuevo León, but it ceased to be the leading force in the Chamber of Deputies, winning only 134 seats in comparison with 206 seats three years before. The PRD went from being the second-most-powerful party, with 127 deputies, to the third, with 71 and a vote of 12.23 percent of the total, comparable only with its situation in 1991, in the midst of persecution it suffered under Salinas (Padierna, 2009).

The majority of the PRIistas who won seats are the product of the ideological changes introduced by Salinas. Some observers say that the "renovated" PRI has Salinas behind it by way of the current governor of the state of México (Enrique Peña Nieto) and the party coordinators in the Chamber of Deputies (Francisco Rojas Gutiérrez) and the Senate (Manlio Fabio Beltrones). Whether or not this is the case, the PRI is now neoliberal-oriented, and therefore its deputies and senators would not be wholly opposed to the fundamental economic and social policies of Calderón or represent a change in political regime if they were to win the presidency in 2012.

The PRD and its allies, perhaps the only force against neoliberalism in the country, can hardly improve its image with the electorate enough to win the presidency in three years. Therefore it seems likely that the neoliberal technocratic political regime will not change substantially for at least nine years.

## NOTES

1. According to Garrido (1982: 127), it was Cárdenas's view that "the two 'core agencies' that underpinned the regime since the channels of 'institutional life' had been opened up were 'the government and the party.' The government . . . was 'implementing, with great effort, the tenets of the regime,' but it could only act 'within the specific authorities' given it by the law . . . . 'The party is, however, within the same laws, the dynamic organization of the regime' and apart from the functions of government—although working at all times and always in perfect harmony with complete discipline toward it—to organize the community, channel it in terms of the principles of the regime, create administrative bodies to advise the working masses, and accomplish, in short, everything that it is impossible for the government to do while complementing its work."

2. This seems bold, but it is not. If De la Madrid, a weak president, could deliver the government to Salinas and Salinas to Zedillo after the assassination of Colosio, there is no reason to believe that Zedillo, who was stronger, could not have handed it down to Francisco Labastida, but he not only failed to do so but also interrupted the latter's speech to the nation on national TV to recognize Fox as president-elect.

3. I use the term "authoritarian democracy" in the sense given to it by Volpi (1979), as a form of succession that preserves many of the distinctive features of Bonapartism without being a democracy as understood in the current literature on the subject.

4. Even during the 11 years of "stabilizing development," according to the powerful and economically liberal finance minister Antonio Ortíz Mena, the economic link between Mexico and the United States "could have been an absorption." It was not, he added, because of the "positive nationalism in Mexico, stemming from its cultural tradition, its history, and the values emanating from the revolution" (Ortíz, n.d.).

5. In the Maximato the presidents (Emilio Portes Gil, Pascual Ortíz Rubio, and Abelardo L. Rodríguez) were subordinated to Calles, and government ministers consulted with Calles before they did with the sitting president (see Córdova, 1995).

6. Here I refer to the repression of the formation of a union central in 1947, of first teachers and then railroad workers and their allies in the movement of 1958 that culminated in a military

crackdown in early 1959, of the popular student movement in 1968, and of the electrical workers in 1976, which prevented them from democratizing the unions in Mexico.

7. The Centro de Estudios Económicos del Sector Privado warned on November 30, 2008, that if wage increases were not kept below inflation many businesses would fail and many workers would be laid off (*La Jornada*, December 1, 2008).

8. These recommendations included privatization of public enterprises, reduction of the deficit, reduction of government, drastic reduction of social expenditures, salary caps and downward homogenization of wages, the dismantling of unions and associations defending workers, state economic deregulation, trade liberalization, and foreign investment—in short, the removal of any obstacle to the flow of goods and money.

9. The World Bank in 2003 critized PRONASOL as clientelistic and unproductive in combating poverty (*La Jornada*, September 21, 2006; Dion, 2000).

10. The PRI, for the first time in history, failed to achieve a majority in the legislature to carry out constitutional reforms and therefore needed the PAN to assemble one.

11. This situation was one of the reasons for the uprising of communities in Chiapas whose lands, already insufficient for population growth, would have been further reduced by the constitutional reform.

12. In 1990 the Salinas administration created the Fondo Bancario de Protección al Ahorro (Banking Fund for Savings Protection—FOBAPROA), an instrument for rescuing state banks from lack of liquidity and insolvency due to the 1987 stock market crash and devaluation. It was used fraudulently to "clean up" banks and businesses close to the government (such as Carlos Cabal Peniche's Banpaís). The Grupo Financiero Banamex was later "helped" without the need for FOBAPROA in 2001 and later sold (when Vicente Fox was president) for US$12,447 million to Citigroup (Citibank). It is worth adding that the Fox government did not charge sales tax on this transaction and that the U.S. Federal Reserve approved the deal in record time despite opposition from economic groups in the United States. Roberto Hernandez, the owner of Banamex, was a friend of Carlos Salinas and a beneficiary of the privatization of the banks in Mexico.

13. Fox's minister of labor was Carlos Abascal, a leading member of the clandestine organization El Yunque (Delgado, 2003).

14. The top 200 companies in the world were located in Japan (62), the United States (53), Germany (23), France (19), the United Kingdom (11), Switzerland (8), South Korea (6), Italy (5), and the Netherlands (4) (Frederic F. Clairmont in *Le Monde Diplomatique,* Mexican edition, 1 [4], 1997).

15. This phenomenon was called *triadización,* and Petrella (1996: 77) reports that "of more than 4,200 strategic cooperation agreements between firms worldwide in the period 1980-89, 92 percent were made between companies in Japan, Western Europe and United States."

16. Labra (1997: 6–8) compares the Mexican economy between 1971 and 1981 with the economy of the period 1982 to 1996 and shows that not only the production of wealth but real wages, per capita consumption, and employment have declined alarmingly, even in comparison with countries that in 1980 were worse off than Mexico.

17. See *Época,* July 2, 1994. One of those supermillionaires is Carlos Slim, a friend and probably partner of Carlos Salinas de Gortari, who in December 1990 bought the state-owned monopoly Teléfonos de Mexico. It was not until 1997 that long-distance telephone communication was opened to competition. Needless to say, Slim is one of the richest men in the world—for a while, recently, richer than Bill Gates and Warren Buffett.

18. According to CONEVAL (2008), in 1992 the top 10 percent of the population held 41.6 percent of the wealth and the bottom 10 percent held 1.4 percent. The average wage has not changed in the past 16 years.

19. I emphasize the word "authentic" because both the presidential candidacy of Vicente Lombardo Toledano of the Partido Popular (Popular Party) in 1952 and that of Candido Díaz Cerecedo of the Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores (Socialist Workers' Party) in 1982 were in fact highly questionable oppositions.

20. Before 1988 there were other difficult times for the party of the regime: the presidential elections of 1940 and 1952 both involved splits in the ruling party. However, while there were doubts about the results of those elections, since there is insufficient evidence to suggest that the PRM and then the PRI lost to John Andrew Almazán and Miguel Henríquez Guzmán respectively, in 1988 logic pointed to the success of the FDN.

21. The so-called December errors, which first manifested themselves in a sharp devaluation of the peso, revealed the existence of a crisis during the Salinas administration that had been

"swept under the rug." This crisis was of such magnitude that the U.S. government was forced to lend Mexico more than US$50 billion to prevent not only the economic collapse of its southern neighbor but the failure of the model. Something very similar was attempted later with Brazil.

22. Subsequently, especially after 1999, the EZLN modified its views, aligning itself more with ultraleft currents and, in its 2006 Other Campaign, attacking López Obrador and the PRD more than the right-wing party (Rodríguez, 2008).

23. Muñoz (currently a senator) had been coordinator of Fox's campaign for governor of Guanajuato. With Fox's victory in 2000 he became the head of the Office for Government Innovation, a post of little importance that allowed him to advise the president directly and control Los Pinos.

24. Manuel Espino Barrientos has admitted (*La Jornada*, March 11, 2002) being a member of Desarrollo Humano Integral y Acción Ciudadana (Integral Human Development and Citizen Action), one of the several fronts of El Yunque.

25. The Council emerged at the end of the Echeverría administration to allow the most important businessmen and business organizations to get involved in politics, given that the Chambers of Commerce and other business and financial groups were expressly forbidden by law to do so. In the 2006 elections, under the presidency of José Luis Barraza González, it funded television ads against the opposition candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador. The Electoral Tribunal, despite its bias in favor of Felipe Calderón, concluded that the Council's television commercials had affected López Obrador's image. In 2007 Barraza, along with other businessmen, bought Aeroméxico after a long series of auctions. It has been suggested that this was his reward for supporting Calderón's campaign. For the Council's member associations, visit http://www.cce.org.mx/cce/home.htm.

26. And this assumption is not unfounded. In Oaxaca, in the 2006 presidential election, the PAN won 226,304 votes (16.77 percent), the PRI-PVEM (Partido Verde Ecologista de México) coalition 428,026 votes (31.72 percent), the PRD-PT-Convergencia coalition 620,062 votes (45.96 percent), the New Alliance (the party formed by leaders of the SNTE associated with Elba Esther Gordillo) 5,620 (0.42 percent), and the Partido Alternativo Social Democrático y Campesino (Social Democratic and Campesino Alternative Party—PASC) 19,482 (1.44 percent). Obviously, the majority of the teachers affiliated with Section 22 of the SNTE and the APPO voted for the CBT. See the IFE's web site for the district vote count results by state (http://www.ofe.org.mx/documentos/Estadísticas2006/presidente/20 dtto.html).

27. "Between Gordillo and Roberto Madrazo there are no substantial differences in terms of their identification with Fox's policies."

28. In its efforts to discredit him, the PAN compared Lopez Obrador to Hugo Chávez as the latter is described by the right-wing press in both Venezuela and other countries. In reality López Obrador should be located between Chávez and Lula (see López Obrador, 2004).

29. Among these analysts Crespo (2008), reviewing the results for half of the precincts, discovered more than 300,000 errors involving votes altered—more than the difference in votes between Calderón and López Obrador (see also Rodríguez, 2008).

30. Bancomext is a government financial institution whose mission is to foster the growth of Mexican companies, especially small and medium-sized ones, and increase their participation in global markets, helping to strengthen their competitiveness and encouraging investment through access to financing, services, and promotion.

31. Rangel Domene started as a banker at Citibank, was president of the Association of Banks of Mexico and the Business Coordinating Council, chaired the board of directors of Bancomer, and has held various positions at BBVA-Bancomer. Enrique Galvan (*La Jornada*, December 3, 2008) considers it ironic that the development bank created by the nationalist government of Lázaro Cárdenas is now in the hands of a conservative private bankers linked to foreign financial institutions.

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