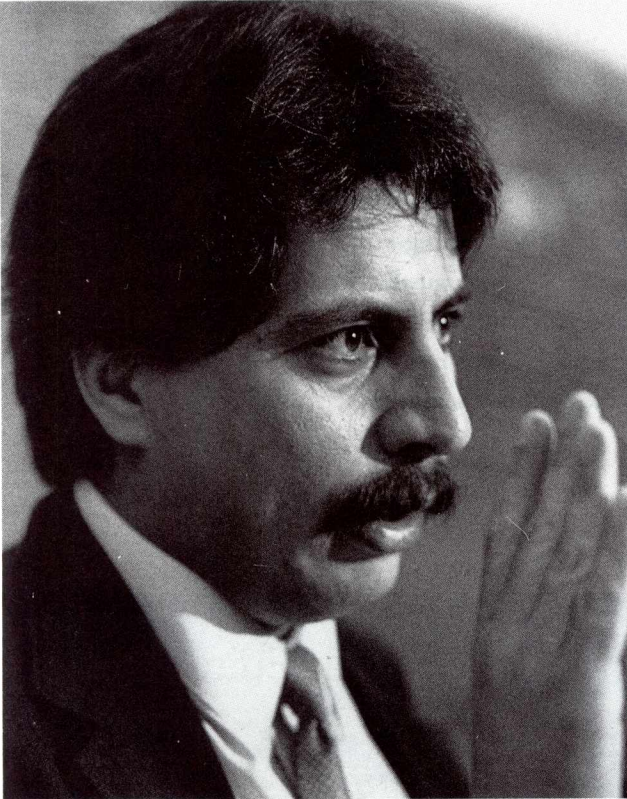


Waylaid on the Long Road to Democracy

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What do we mean by the political reform? The transformation of the authoritarian, antidemocratic state that has existed in Mexico since soon after the Revolution.

The clamor for political reform emerged in Mexico after the government of Gustavo Díaz Ordaz massacred students and workers on October 2, 1968. In mid-1968, high school and college students took to the streets to demand greater democratic freedom. The government silenced their demands with bullets. A still undetermined number of dead paved the way for Mexican politics to halfheartedly begin to liberalize.

But it was not until 1977 that this liberalization became law and some of the existing political groups opted for the electoral road to power. In 1979, the new legally registered parties were able to run for office, giving politics a completely new look. The make-up of the Chamber of Deputies, the only one of the two chambers of congress affected by the reform, changed radically. Until then, only four parties had congressional seats: the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the National Action Party (PAN), the People's Socialist Party (PPS) and the Authentic Party of the Mexican Revolution (PARM). The PRI, as the official party, had the absolute majority, and its almost exclusive task was to unanimously approve all bills sent by the president. For decades, the right-wing PAN, with a small number of deputies, merely bore witness to what went on. Although it was socialist, the PPS was incapable of opposing bills sent by the president because he was the one who had granted the party its congressional seats. The PARM was in exactly the same straits.

New parties in that Chamber of Deputies produced a new political situation: the voices of right-wing, communist, socialist and pro-Catholic deputies were heard. It was the beginning of an era of incipient political pluralism which can still be felt today. However, the pillars of the Mexican political system remained intact.

Since then there have been other reforms and counter-reforms, but they have all basically centered on electoral questions, without touching the pillars of the system. That is why the demand for political reform is still valid in Mexico.

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What do we mean by the political reform? The transformation of the authoritarian, antidemocratic state that has existed in Mexico since soon after the Revolution and still exists today.

This demand is now viable because in recent years the public has participated more and is more demanding, and the political parties are stronger, more experienced and more capable of exercising the functions of government. The demand is, then, the reform of the state. But this task requires, among other things, another electoral reform to make elections in Mexico credible; a reform of the three branches of government; a reform of the relations between federal and state governments, with autonomous municipalities; and a reform of the media.

Of all these requirements for an authentic political reform, the only steps forward so far are in the electoral reform. Recently, the new electoral reform was passed, and its advances are considerable. For the first time in Mexico since the Revolution of 1910, the elections will not be organized and carried out by the government, but by a Citizens Council elected by the Chamber of Deputies; the electoral justice system, forever absent from Mexican elections, has been strengthened; there will be more equality in electoral competition; and both chambers of congress will be made up in such a way as to favor a larger presence and better representation of political parties. In addition, Mexico City, whose citizens have not enjoyed full political rights since 1928, will have a government elected by direct, secret and universal ballot as of 1997.

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insufficient for leading the country down the road to democracy, let alone for deactivating violent situations like the ones which now threaten Mexico's political stability.

The emergence of two guerrilla organizations in Mexico is the negation of the peaceful road as the only road to power. The problem is that the steps forward in politics are not paralleled, even minimally, with similar improvements in the living conditions of many Mexicans who are living —surviving— in conditions of extreme poverty and atrocious marginalization and pressure, particularly in rural and indigenous areas. The political reform must urgently be taken into these areas, but it will be of little use if the profound social inequalities there prevail. ❧