

# TRANSPARENT DEMOCRACY

## The Masses and their Leaders

Pablo González Casanova

Although I believe that the way to new sociopolitical negotiations is both possible and necessary, I can foresee several obstacles to the realization of such negotiations. There is first of all, the obstacle of "legitimacy" in the electoral process. Second, there is the obstacle of the "hotheads" and the resentful, or those who would look for the breakdown of constitutional order. Third, there is the obstacle of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) members who are used to always winning and determined to "carry away victory when they lose." Fourth, there is the obstacle of Legorreta's 300 business leaders. Fifth, there is the structural obstacle of a tributary, multinationalized, dependent capitalism. Sixth, there is the obstacle of an impoverished people and a "nobody" working class that was formerly attended to by the government—at least in the better organized, corporative part—both restless and irritated and with an emerging awareness of its mass strength which it can feel, see and would like to use. Seventh, there is the obstacle of a neoliberal president that doesn't agree with Carlos Salinas de Gortari's speech at Chalco nor with the political and economic changes that the population demands, and the obstacle of a Salinas who leaves his political discourse in the realm of electoral rhetoric by not understanding that, in order for it to become reality, a transparent democracy is indispensable. Finally, there is the obstacle of those who perceive any negotiation as

---

**An immense proportion of public opinion, both national and international, does not believe that the constitutional right of suffrage has been respected**

---

a trick, as a sellout, without understanding that negotiations exist that are not necessarily betrayals and that are necessary in order to meet the demands of the people.

I am going to analyze these obstacles, beginning with a consideration of the first one. With all of them, I will make observations which I feel are true.

The lack of legitimacy of the Mexican elections of 1988 is a universally accepted fact, not just in Mexico, but also in the world at large. The lack of legitimacy is a political fact. Today, the Mexican government is faced to an unprecedented degree with the problem of "winning without convincing," that is to say, it is faced with the problem of force. The problem is not the result of a suspension of the Constitution, as in South America. At the present, the problem has arisen because of a lack of legitimacy within the constitutional framework that the government claims it respects.

The problem lies in the fact that an immense proportion of public opinion,

both national and international, does not believe that the constitutional right of suffrage has been respected. The idea of "macrofraud" is very widely held, and because international and transnational opinion is valued in national politics, it is no small matter that the entire world says that the government was disposed to commit fraud against the will of the people.

It is even more important that all of the opposition parties for the first time in modern electoral history affirm that the elections were not legitimate. While some—such as the National Democratic Front (FDN)—claim to have won, others, in particular the National Action Party (PAN) maintain that the turbulence is of such magnitude that it is impossible to say whether they have won or lost and that no one can possibly claim to know what the results were with any honesty or seriousness.

There are several proposals designed to recover legitimacy. First of all, there are proposals that come from the government itself. Some within the government ponder a traditional transaction with negotiations and agreements with the leaders of the opposition in order to calm the spirits of those involved. Others within the government, imagine a new type of political negotiation with the left that could affect economic and social policies by conceding positions to leftist candidates. Of course, there are also hard-liners inside the government who are adamantly opposed to any negotiations with or concessions to the opposition. Fidel Velasquez absurdly demands no negotiation with the op-

position, while proposing to play opposition politics from inside the government in the old, limited way.

### An Act of Faith

What no one in the government doubts, and which is dispensed as dogma, is that Salinas de Gortari won the elections. In front of this dogma or act of faith, the PAN candidate declares, "He who would like to think of himself as an even slightly ethical or moral man cannot claim to have won." Clouthier discredits Salinas de Gortari and he discredits Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas. He discredits the elections "chaos." He has warned, "If they rob this election, I can assure you that they won't finish the term." He even attributes greater economic deterioration to the "lack of credibility" resulting from the elections of July 6. In these circumstances he makes an extreme demand, the elections should be annulled and new elections should be called. Clouthier's proposal appears to be the furthest from a viable, political negotiation. From the very first, he calls for the annulment of the elections.

Cárdenas' position is different. Cárdenas' proposal lends itself much more to a social and political negotiation of the new type, if legitimacy is seen as a key problem to the nation's future. Cárdenas does not say he won; he doesn't state it as an absolute truth. "We believe," he affirmed on July 28 en route to Tula, Hidalgo, "that we won, but, if they can show us that the result is otherwise, then we can find no reason not to accept that fact."

Cárdenas asks that the government not demand that its word be taken on faith. But he does not stop there. He demands that the government continue to divulge the electoral information that it has stopped doing. More concretely, he demonstrates that the Federal Electoral Commission, which had originally made public the figures from the polls, suddenly stopped doing so. Cárdenas asks that Mexico be permitted to see the results of the official polling affidavits, all of them.

The problem and the solution lie in the following:

Cárdenas' argues that for Salinas to have obtained 50.36 percent of the final total, he would have needed to have obtained 67 percent of the vote in the totals of the polling places of which there is no public information, that is to say, almost double what he

# WHEN THE ELITES DIVIDE

Lorenzo Meyer

**Each time that there has been a significant change in the Mexican political regime, it has been preceded by a rupture in the elite**

A little more than a year ago we were all witness to a spectacle that developed in an entirely predictable way. At the 12th assembly of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) a handful of dissidents proposed the internal democratization of the ruling party that has the longest tradition in the western world. Without great ceremony, the heterodox members were put in their place. First they were ridiculed, then ostracized, finally to wind up abandoning the Great Party to be condemned to live in error, that is to say, outside the party's budget. In normal times this would have been the end of the story, a mere footnote in the Great Party's long history. But it turns out that 1987 was not a normal time in Mexican politics: it was the fifth year of the Great Mexican Depression.



PAN supporters at a PRI meeting.  
(Photo from uno más uno archive)

Today that small group of reformers, headed by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, has incredibly turned the tables. Now, in pursuit of the July 6 elections with several aces in hand, the Cardenist movement has demonstrated to Mexico—and incidentally to the

Academics Director of the Colegio de México  
This article first appeared in *Excelsior*, July 27, 1988.

rest of the world—that the ones who were in error were not those who ended up leaving the state party, but rather those who remained inside. Wielding a hollow authority, now without content, the PRI denied the possibility of channeling the political discontent brought on by the economic crisis into a more or less free play for the party's nomination of its presidential candidate.

---

**Today, for the first time,  
the possibility exists that  
the rupture will not lead to  
violence**

---

Now then, how is it that this minority that called itself the Democratic Current and that failed in its attempt to win a niche within the PRI, today has enormous popular support that allows it to very successfully confront the invincible Mexican presidency of yore to the point of prohibiting in from being able to govern? Part of the answer can be found by examining past experiences when the governing elite weakened by the exercise of power, lost its cohesion and divided.

Casting a glance at our political history, one fact stands out: each time that there has been a significant change in the Mexican political regime it has been preceded by a rupture in the elite. That is to say, a conflict within the dominant group has ended in the branching off of another group. That does not mean that the division has been the only cause for change. These historical changes have been the result of very complex processes, the origins of which predate the fragmentation of the governing group. Nevertheless the rupture within the elite has been a powerful catalyst putting other players into action, namely the subordinate, mass groups who, after all, are crucial in the process of change.

**Historical Memory**

A fundamental rupture in the core of the dominant group served as a precedent to the great political movements of Mexico's Independence, the

Reform and the Mexican Revolution, to mention just three of the most important examples from our history. In each of the three cases, the causes of the clash between a minority of the small privileged group—the standard bearers of change—and the bulk of their equals—the defenders of the *statu quo*—arose from a fundamental disagreement over how to confront a major crisis within the dominant system. These crises were the Spanish invasion and the capture of its monarch by the French, the United States defeat of Mexico and the disastrous leadership of Santa Anna, and finally, the presidential succession during the dictatorship of General Porfirio Díaz. Along with a disagreement over *how* to confront the challenges of each one of these three crises another equally critical point of disconformity arose, namely *who* should do the confronting. That is to say, a personal struggle arose within the elite over who had the right to exercise supreme power in the moments of change.

In each one of the three crises that have marked the end of one historical era and the beginning of another in Mexico, the group that put the extant arrangement into doubt in the name of another, new, more legitimate one, was a marginalized minority within the elite group in power. To successfully challenge their powerful enemies, the dissidents always had to call on the non-powerful classes for their support, that is to say, the middle classes or the common people or both. In reality, in these three cases the banners raised by the discontented ones were general principles that were aimed at rescuing the dignity and interests of the Mexicana people as a whole, interests and dignity forgotten by those who had exercised power.

From this perspective, what is happening today is not in its essence anything entirely new. The dispute between the ones in power has given origin in various occasions to an explosion that has broken the iron circle that has always surrounded power in Mexico. Due to that rupture, new forces, new actors burst in, actors who challenged the ruling system until it was transformed.

But if there is nothing entirely new under the sun, neither is history repeated in exactly the same way. Today, for

example, the rupture has not come from only one point: it comes from the left as well as from the right. In effect, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and Manuel J. Clouthier and part of the group that surrounds both of them were in their times central parts of the system of domination that is today put into doubt. Both leaders despite their antagonistic positions agreed on one point: on an invitation to the masses of citizens, still passive up to a little while ago, to cease being mere objects in the political arena and to convert themselves into conscious political actors. This invitation in the face of the deterioration of the quality of life turns out to be very attractive and even necessary.

However, the most important difference between the rupture in the elite of the past and of the present is not its double character, but rather the fact that today, for the first time, the possibility exists that the rupture will not lead to violence. If all of those involved in the process conduct themselves with a minimum of good sense—and the citizens who have responded to the call of the new leaders have behaved in an optimal way at the balloting boxes as well as in the streets—perhaps it will be possible to pass with difficulty, but without falling hopelessly into chaos, from an authoritarian system to a pluralistic one.

---

**Today it is not utopian to  
suppose that it is possible  
to peacefully overcome the  
authoritarianism and  
corporatism of the  
present**

---

The historical memory—the recollection of the immeasurable suffering and tremendous losses provoked by the civil struggles of the past—should serve to curb the passions of those who have launched the assault on the citadel of authority as well as to limit the inflexibility of the defenders of the citadel. Today it is not utopian to suppose that it is possible to peacefully overcome the authoritarianism and corporatism of the present and to arrive at a situation in

which a true pluralism reigns, permitting, with the passage of time, the existence of true political parties and competitive, reasonably clean elections, in which basic agreements are made in broad daylight between the legitimate representatives of social groups and not as today, in the solitude of the palace between the president and the upper corporate echelons.

### Peaceful Transition

Undoubtedly it is the principal responsibility of the government and its supporters to regulate the transition from one system to another. In effect, the government must accept that what has happened now is not a mere electoral setback, but rather the beginning of a process that must arrive at a change in the fundamental rules of the political game. Today, the president, his collaborators and his supporters must think about what, until yesterday, was impossible: that it is necessary to be prepared for the peaceful transfer of power in some not very distant future to someone who obtains it by way of voting that can no longer be stained as today's ballots, by the shadow of fraud. Any attempt to step backward, to resist change by the path of violence, would be suicide and an unforgivable historical error.

As far as the opposition is concerned and Cárdenas supporters in particular, they must not demobilize themselves nor disappoint their followers by relinquishing their demands for clean elections and, above all, for more just rules in the political game. Nevertheless, the opposition must not arrive at limiting situations. In any event, it is essential that the new leadership search for ways of channeling the action of the people as actors via a new party—today, the action of the Cardenist masses seems to have gone beyond that of the existing parties. Otherwise the risk is run of not efficiently channeling that genuine creation of power that the appearance of a massive leftist electorate signifies. Only with the formation of a party of leftist masses of the PRI can the present-day rupture of the elite lead to a peaceful, long-term struggle that puts a definitive end to the drawn out, authoritarian history of Mexico. □

### Cárdenas asks that the government not demand that its word be taken on faith

won in the polling places of which we have figures. Of course, at the same time, Clouthier would have had to have obtained in the unreported polling places 12 percent instead of 22 percent and Cárdenas 20 percent instead of 39 percent, that is to say, almost half of what they obtained in the public, official polling affidavits, according to the vote totals.

Cárdenas' argument is very precise and conclusive. He asks that all the parties be allowed to examine the affidavits that have not been made public yet and that are still being retained. This is a perfectly serious petition. And if the government wishes to recover its legitimacy, it needs to make this information available and ask that it be analyzed in a clear fashion. This petition is not a provocation. It is a demand that may be attended to if the political will exists, if the government is willing to preserve constitutional order. If this will does not exist, then they will not deliver the affidavits.

It is true that asking the government to exhibit some documents that is has been more than reluctant to do is based on a simple conjecture—that they contain evidence of electoral manipulation. But if this hypothesis is incorrect, if in fact these documents of 25,000 polling places provide more support for the government and the official candidate, then there is no reason to hide them. The documents would legitimate the ruling party's triumph.

Without a doubt, there are still other sources which have called the election's legitimacy into question, for example, the irregularities in the voters' lists, the denial of election identification cards to those who were entitled to them, the ballots that were cast by election officials, the ballots that were stolen, the polling documents that "disappeared", the precincts from which opposition representatives were expelled and the "voting brigades" that went from one polling place to another to vote. Absenteeism was the highest in Mexican electoral history in both absolute and relative numbers. Given the absenteeism, only 25.32 percent of registered voters ac-

tually voted for Salinas. This is a political fact that may be added to the apparently statistical, facts, like the magic 50.36 percent which Salinas supposedly obtained.

But there is still one more source of incredulity and of illegitimacy. It is found in the distrust of the present electoral process in which the PRI holds the vast majority of the positions on the different commissions such as in the Federal Electoral Commission and the Electoral Disputes Court. The political parties and the public have shown themselves to be very sceptical of a court in which the judge and the accused are from the government. Only one step remains, the establishment of the Electoral College made up of the Chamber of Deputies. Its responsibility will be enormous.

There is no doubt about it. In order to legitimize not only this government but also the next one it is absolutely necessary to deliver and analyze the polling affidavits from *all* the polling places and to make a decision based on these figures and other evidence that suggests a need for corrections in particular cases of electoral fraud. Added to the decision to deliver and not hide the remaining 24,642 documents from the same number of polls, is the obligation to emit an objective judgement on the real results of the national, state and district totals. And added to this is another decision that can only be conceived as scandalously provocative and irresponsible to those who postulate consciously or unconsciously a policy of repression. This is no exaggeration: or voting is respected as a governmental practice or we are headed towards a policy of repression in which the army would be called out against the population without knowing why or wanting to. Sooner or later, and sooner than later, this will be the alternative.

### Preserving the Constitution

On the supposition that Salinas' triumph is not supported by proof, the Electoral College's responsibility will be enormous with its 260 PRI deputies and 240 from the opposition. In particular, it will be an enormous responsibility for the PRI deputies who seriously believe it necessary to preserve the nation's constitution and with it a democracy that satisfies the demands of the people for the truth. Several PRI deputies will be faced with a civic and moral dilemma which they

will surely resolve with a politically realistic and moral decision to vote for the truth.

On the other hand, the basis of the opposition must be the law, and if the law cannot prove "macrofraud," then it is necessary to support with all firmness the electoral result, whatever it may be, without claiming irregularities that cannot be proven. But for this to occur, the first step must be taken by the government, and the final decision—a constitutional one—lies with the Congress. The political decision to not hide the voting results from 24,642 polling places lies with the president who continues to be Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado. He is the one—perhaps the last president of an institutional presidentialist regime—who must make the necessary decisions to provide his successor government with a legitimacy. If he fails to do so, he will leave the country in a position of extreme weakness and instability. The last act of a president who has done everything in his power to end the former political system and initiate a system of political parties should consist of facilitating in every way possible a process by which the truth about who won can be known. It is true that the president to a certain degree reflects national and transnational forces and that he chooses within this context. But he does *choose*.

The obstacles to a policy of consensus begin with the obstacles which do not permit public accounting of the electoral process. If the electoral process can be cleared up and the necessary decisions are made about *effective* suffrage, a new political process can be initiated, though not without some difficulty, especially in a country like ours on the capitalist periphery. Here, Legorreta's 300 business leaders and other national, political and foreign businessmen are use to the idea that doing business in Mexico consists of looting Montezuma's treasure, dominate the people through force and exploit them with myths and inflation without a thought about hunger, disease, crime and the lack of schools and housing. All so that they can keep their well-earned income and send the indispensable "quinto" to the king or the "half" to the International Monetary Fund. Many of them are pressuring publicly for the continuation and the accentuation of the speculative, monetarist policies that have permitted them to prosper so well in the past years. And they are

prepared to throw the blame of the "possible fall of Salinas" on the "corruption of the PRI-government." Their idea, of course, is to accept a South American-style policy of repressive looting in which they already know how to give greater strength to the rightist currents in the army. They imagine that a forceful government will have to rule for a brief period with a civilian head of state, then with a military head for a longer period.

---

**In order to legitimize this government it is absolutely necessary to deliver and analyze all polling affidavits**

---

Among the indoctrinated, neoliberal, "political" businessmen, there are those who are well acquainted with the politics of destabilization. They are both psychologically and ideologically prepared to back up any destabilizing measure that would frustrate a popular, democratic triumph, including the use of ultraleftist provocateurs who call for a takeover of the National Palace—a similar call could be heard among such provocateurs when Cárdenas held a rally in the Zócalo in July. The extreme right wing is ready

for anything and could play the role of provocateur to a frustrated people whose standards of living have fallen dramatically in this six year period.

A national, social and democratic policy will only come about if the people who drew up Salinas de Gortari's famous Chalco speech do what the candidate offered there. They will have to respect the will of the people as expressed in the ballot boxes without engaging in tricks or deals and they will have to work, with the FDN, in or outside the government to draw up appropriate policies for food, clothing, schools, health care, and housing for the great majority of Mexicans. This is of the utmost importance and can only come from an official sphere capable of recognizing that it is living in a new nation in which the opposition can enter government through the electoral process.

It is true that only an organized populace can make democracy triumph. But the response of the government is also essential.

For the time being, just as in Brazil, the people shouted "Direct elections now!", now in Mexico we must shout "The election affidavits now!" We are talking about a minimum demand whose benefits for the whole country could well be optimum. To comply with this demand would be to comply with the Federal Electoral Code and with the rule of law. □