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IN DEFENSE OF HOPE

Concerning the reactions of the apostles of the PRI religion

They had played the role many times, but never before such a packed house (despite the invisibilizing efforts of national television). At precisely the moment when they should have portrayed the part of "republican dignity offended by the interruptions of the president's final State of the Nation address," the members of the political system (there were exceptions, please forgive me) took refuge in the "crushing power" of Naughty Words and played the part with all the maturity of a boxer. (Why did the PRI members say that they were so afraid of awakening the "dark side" of Mexico, if they're the ones who have always been Henchman Jeckyll to Minister Hyde, Lawyer Hyde to Businessman Jeckyll?) The legislative chamber became a thick, roaring, acritical mass that, with the serial emission of insults and condemnations like a cheering section in a sports stadium admired the denigratory allusions to their opponents' mothers with all the fervor of adolescents and compensated for the lack of critical analysis with ire.

Days before, while denying the political nature of the murders of the four adolescents, PRI Senator Ernesto Luque Feregrino verbalized so marvellously this state of mind: "I think we've had enough of prudence and enough of sensibility." On September 1 the psychic vulnerability was quite genuine—the agitator who spoke without permission in front of the president offended the PRI legislators in their very reason for being, in their very soul, in their deep-seated need to maintain power.

In the peaceful transition to democracy, presidentialism is the principal danger. Presidentialism is not only the concentration in one person of decision-making that rightly belongs to a government, a party and a society, it is also its direct and necessary complement: the atmosphere of false and true religiosity where criticism and the demand

for dialogue are such heresies that they may be benevolently considered to be "breakdowns in constitutional order." On September 1, in the Chamber of Deputies, no one showed a lack of respect for Mexico's president, nor was he insulted, nor—as the Chamber of Deputies president Miguel Montes pointed out—was the presidential persona desanctified. The rules were barely broken. The only thing that happened was that the nation was made aware of the systematic cornering that the opposition had been suffering at the hands of the PRI's mechanical majority in the Electoral College. While the opposition demonstrated numerous cases of fraud, the PRI legislators amused themselves at impromptu cocktails and voted against arguments and proof.

This is the true context of the interruptions and not that described in the complaints of the presidential court. Not very convincing, for example, are the tantrums of Agustín Legorreta, president of the Business Coordinating Council, when he says, "the opposition showed a total lack of political maturity and a lack of respect for the office of President and the institutions." As if he were so respectful when he assures us that 300 individuals direct governmental conduct. Nor is the argument of Governor José Francisco Ruiz Massieu very persuasive. Who, or so I have been told, is called the apostle of the vote because of his electoral scrupulousness in Guerrero. According to Ruiz Massieu, among other things, in a presidentialist regime one doesn't interrupt or ask questions of the chief executive; parliamentary customs and traditions do not grant a congressman the right to formulate questions (for the PRI, unwritten law is the law of God); and finally any demand for explanations or any questions of the President could lead to a "mini-coup d'état or a mini-auto-coup d'état." The governor, after bludgeoning himself with maxi-auto-coups of elementary logic, gives the rationale to those who have no wish to turn "the inclination to negotiate into cowardliness,"—that is to say, to those who judge surrender to be an act of courtesy, be it solely verbal, towards the other's vote.

The most minimal democratization of the presidential office is nor permitted—something rather different from a

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Poor people at the polls. (Photo by Lucio Blanco)

lack of respect—because the PRI believes it to be literally sacred. If it were not so, the delegates of presidential power here on earth would turn out to be mere mortals. Ergo, the exasperation and the cheerleading fervor in the Congress. With a shudder, politicians, bureaucrats and businessmen, who would later deny any loss of cool, presenting good manners, flung themselves into the breach in the order to protect the mythic fount of their privileges, not so much because it was in any actual danger, but rather because their outrage was the only possible reaction to the situation.

The next day, the leader of the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), Fidel Velázquez, played two parts before the PRI candidate, Carlos Salinas de Gortari—the believer-offended-by-blasphemy, and something even more crucial, the militant-indignant-because-of-the-wimpiness-of-the-party-leadership. He accused the PRI and the government of having step by step ceded power to the opposition, all that is lacking now is to negotiate the presidency. The CTM declared its independence and announced it will attack the enemy in accordance with its own interests. The PRI meanwhile, is acting on the fringes of its party bases, while a pseudo-ideologue is trying to switch the party's sectorial bases for individuals—I'm told that this is not a flattering reference to the party's president Jorge de La Vega).

The tribal chants—traitor—the amorous missives to power, the revival of Díaz Ordaz' special brand of anticommunism, the threats that longed to imitate Darth Vader's

fulminating destructiveness, all are mutually coherent in this testicular ideology. It is the Versailles discourse of fetishist machismo. The whole affair can be synthesized in one phrase: "We will not cede power." Every PRI militant has said it in one way or another, and the president most incisively: "The system will not be changed, we have enough strength..." And how is this judged by those who condemn the intransigence of the Cardenas forces because they demands that the elections be cleaned up? To say, "we will not cede power" is to disqualify beforehand the results of any possible electoral process. It is to make power non-transferable. It is to make power private property. And in the PRI, the "dark side" of Mexico and the Mexico that has read Milan Kundera and Marguerite Yourcenar (mixed in with Irving Wallace and Cartland) share an axiom: the transition to democracy, in order to be carried out at all, should be scheduled a couple of centuries from the present regime. Beyond the warm confidence in their parliamentary majority—psychological life insurance for the PRI candidates, is the demand: power shall not be shared. Manuel Camacho Solis, PRI's secretary general, spoke of a principle: "Under the present conditions, there is no distinction between the majority party and the opposition parties." I do not know if the exasperation at this political modesty is what led Camacho to the gang plank of the "pseudo-ideologues." I do know that a great majority of PRI members find the idea of legal equality unthinkable. Note for example the series of doors leading nowhere, the void and the locks with no keys that constitute the present

electoral legislation. They find the idea of political equality as simply inconceivable.

Labor chieftain Fidel Velázquez once affirmed, "We got in with bullets, and only with bullets will they drive us out." This is no mere boasting. Here is a disqualification of the electoral process, and a certainty: the motives of the opposition will always be obscure because they are not illuminated by the possession of what is fundamental. A few days ago, a journalist from Excelsior was scandalized by the illicitness of aspiring to govern. "Does anyone still doubt that the struggle of the Cardenas forces is for power?" And all this time we had thought that Cardenas' supporters were participating in the elections in order to see news about themselves suppressed on television. To struggle for power. Why that is a sacrilege even more atrocious than interrupting the president's state of the Nation address every second.

What has never been conceded, *ab eternum*, is not so much power as something rather trivial, something within reach of the president's publicly ridiculed stereotypes, the "cubicle academics and the cafe pessimists." This is why the PRI members never felt called upon to try to hide their fraud, nor even to feel ashamed of it in private. Because according to this particular political culture, the population's civic "underageness" made fraud a paternal obligation. To fix the elections is to remove the temptation of power from eternally inept hands.

Concerning the intolerance that dares not utter its name

How is intolerance affirmed and ever more widely spread in the recomposition of the different strengths and weaknesses that today constitute what we recognize as political life? The business, political, union, journalistic right wing proclaims itself as the prime beneficiary of what happened on September 1. We, they say with expansive monotony, by venerating the institutions, end up becoming the inevitable alternative for the country. We are "the real forces of power," the only ones capable of holding back the copper-colored masses, the Zapatismo *sans* rifles but with transistor radios and vengeful looks. For this reason we refuse any conciliation or dialogue. It was a grave error to have ever conceded anything. We gave the opposition 240 congressional seats and four senator seats, and now they seem to think that they are our equals. For these people, the solution lies in the use of force.

Next to right wingers, in a division so real yet so fictitious of the governing apparatus, the public friends of tolerance may be seen. As magnificent as this is and though this attitude may never be repeated or be as widespread as we might wish, tolerance is founded on the recognition of the rights of others. Ergo, the calls to tolerance have been up to now pleas for clemency for those who are supposed to resignedly return to political marginality. Tolerance is not invoked when faced with the dissident point of view, but rather in front of the adversary who has already confessed his defeat. We are dealing here, in fact, with an "anticipated amnesty."

From a tactical point of view, once the battle for credibility is lost, the PRI hopes to recuperate by demonstrating to be the lesser of two evils "Alright, you say I'm fraudulent. I won't admit it even though I do practice it, but would you prefer the horders, the unwashed, the un-

lettered Cardenists?" In essence, the duel continues over the July 6 vote, and a publicity-wise struggle seeks to amend to the vote for Cardenas and for the PAN. One gets the impression that the PRI still trusts that the votes have yet to fall into the pregnable urns and that, as this instant becomes eternal, the citizens may still be persuaded of their error: "Don't do it! Avoid chaos!" In order to prevent the elections and postpone July 6 forever, everything is turned to. Judicial decisions are not permitted. Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas' proposal of examining 1000 selected polling places is left unattended. Complaints accompanied by hundreds of items of proof are ignored. The electoral packets are left unopened out of principle. The national certainty of electoral fraud is treated with sarcasm.

This is where the most intolerance resides. The other—the verbal posturings, the threats of union "housecleaning," the CTM tough talk—are the *grand-guignol* version of the fundamental negative. If it is inconceivable for a 100,000 reasons that a country whose boundaries are the United States and the PRI permit power to be shared in even the most minimal way, the wisest thing to do is to adapt yourself to the "legal results." If not, you will fall into intransigence before intolerance, a perfectly noxious attitude, as everyone on television says.

The message leaves no room for doubt. He who will not accept the essential intolerance of the system is intolerant. His conduct merits, in the most philanthropic of possibilities, the declarative lash. And in function of this seige of "intolerance," the attempts grow at character assassination and the moral and political lynching of Cardenism, especially of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and Porfirio Muñoz Ledo. In this hate campaign even meta-PAN sectors have acted, their visionary antimarxism nourished from the Middle Ages. They would like to revive the atmosphere of 1959 or 1968 when it was enough to throw out somber accusations—"agitator, treasonous"—in order to stir up fear and loathing. But, though it might have produced excellent results for former Mexican presidents López Mateos and Díaz Ordaz, this kind of climate of homicidal intolerance just does not work any more.

There is in Mexico, far more extended than is readily admitted, a public opinion representing judgements and actions of a civil society that is not only adverse to moral lynching, but destined to laugh at whoever uses the masks of the blue demon of Atlantis to dramatize the dangers to the fatherland. The anti-student rage and the crimes of manipulated, popular anger, as happened in San Miguel Canoa, are impossible to repeat today. Urban society and a large part of rural society are better informed today and more integrated into national society. The spectacle of socialism a la Agustín Legorreta or Fidel Velázquez (the successor of Fidel Velázquez who in turn inherited his power from Fidel Velázquez, who in turn...) does not and cannot convince them. In September 1988, the struggle is evidently for a democratic cause, an indispensable milestone along the road to social justice—the elimination of electoral fraud, which is to say, respect for the people's will.

Of course, there are valid criticisms to be made of the Cardenist forces, though far from any defamation. As with any heterogeneous movement and one of such rapid growth, Cardenism has some obvious limitations. Among these limitations are:

— Very distinct levels of ideological articulation and

political culture, corresponding in their most regressive manifestations to authoritarian practices that do not take into account the constant education and the different points of view of the participants;

— Areas ruled by a sectarian discourse that reveals incomprehension of present-day reality and by affirmations that are not followed by proof or political reasoning;

— Minimal areas where traditional picaresqueness is in charge, the most recent exponent being Salvador Miranda Blanco, the king-for-a-few-hours, plurinomial deputy for the PARM who, when he felt that his services were required, transferred to the PRI his prestige and his incorruptible ideals;

— Attitudes in which dogmatism imposes itself on any democratic consideration. (I recall Ortiz Mendoza of the PPS in the electoral college ridiculing the clergy, when the PAN argued in my opinion, fraud in an irrefutable way in Durango first electoral district.)

— Slogans and oratorical posturing that express militant attitudes, emotionally comprehensible but alien to the Cardenist line, based on the defense of constitutional legality facing the sum total of illegal acts of the regime.

— Aftertastes of leftist authoritarianism with its "caudillo" enthusiasm.

But these criticisms, as important as they are to discuss in the national arena, do not affect what is fundamental to Cardenism, nor are they taken into account in the practice of intolerance which proposes the reconstruction of prejudices, rancor, the utilization of any method at all to prove that what is done to the adversary is all right, given that, according to the dominant group, they are frankly inhuman. When dealing with the PAN, the classical nullification is of an ideological order—"they're reactionaries, so they don't enjoy the right to have their votes respected"—dealing with the Cardenism of the 1980s, intolerance proceeds by extreme disqualification with "dehumanization of the enemy." Later, if still needed, and now justified by the people who matter—the governing class, the business and political circles of the United States, the Church—repression will not provoke greater political costs.

For this reason, in the anti-Cardenist attacks, reasons do not count as much as calumny, insults, never proven charges of "actions outside the law," grotesque imputations of an alleged "zeal for violence," the pop-psychologizing—charges of "messianism" from the experts who every six years salute the new messiahs or of "insanity" from those who cling dementedly to their little power fiefs and, last but not least, the demands for a firm hand and a hard line. In their frenzy, the anti-Cardenists forget that these "detestable" beings were accompanied by millions of votes—recognized or still to be so—corresponding to millions of people who, in one way or another, thought their decision through and continue to do so. And intolerance continues to affect the electoral process, which these moral and political lynching parties wished had never, ever happened.

The principle of Hope

In February 1988, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas visited the Lagunera area of northern Mexico, and his campaign took

a qualitative leap. A commiserative interpretation began to be divulged: the most backward sector recognized itself in the shadows of the past. The nostalgic campesinos, during the hours of retrospective yearning, believed that they were in the presence of Tata Lazaro. It is useless to argue about the different age of those in attendance and the fervent response whenever present-day reality was referred to. If they are campesinos, then they are backward. Their clock stopped with the Agrarian Reform of 1936.

Also explicable, using techno-modern logic, is Cardenas' triumphal campaign in Michoacán. That would be the end if his campaign did not function there. And those who certified the disastrousness of his government and his unpopularity in the state—"The one who really moves things there is Martínez Villicaña, as modern as a tractor and as popular as speculation"—save face by ridiculing the chauvinism of the Michoacán residents who cannot distinguish between Juan Colorado and Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas. And what about the large meetings and marches of the National Democratic Front (FDN) across the country? They are products of "messianic exaltation," a confusion of historic moments, fear of modernity, and the effect of the religious spirit (lay Guadalupanism!) deposited in a clearly otherworldly cause (democracy). The faith which before was only reserved for virgins and saints. In relation to this last accusation, and with no desire to annul the arguments of those scornful of the ecstatic faces in the Cardenist meetings, I would like to counterpose Max Horkheimer's defi-



Carlos Salinas de Gortari, presidential candidate for the Institutional Revolutionary Party. (Photo by Marco Antonio Cruz)

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nition: "What is religion in the best sense of the word? The sustained impulse against all reality, still unsuffocated, that things will change, that the enchantment will be broken and justice will be done."

The meeting, at the Autonomous National University's (UNAM) campus left no room for doubt about the multiple qualities of "neo-cardenism" or just plain Cardenism. Tens of thousands of students, professors, workers and researchers listened with redoubled watchfulness. The admiration—a phenomenon often repeated in Mexico City—come from Cardenas' historical heritage, his energetic but reflective departure from the PRI, his capacity to encourage the answers so long forgotten in the rural areas, and his most contemporary characteristic—a viable offer of political participation, circumscribed or not to voting, but related to the individual and collective reconquest of citizen sensibility.

Stated in the foregoing words, the main proposal of Cardenas and the FDN would appear to be merely declamatory. It is not at all so, and if it has turned out to be enormously convincing and vital, then it is because even before July 6 it was seen as a real alternative. Nothing succeeds quite so well as success, and the meeting, the exhausting tours, the sensation of a shared cause with neighbors, friends and family all began to solidify the Cardenism of the 1980s, something that is reinforced in demonstration after demonstration, in march after march. And after overcoming the crucial tests of campaign fatigue, to continue on once the electoral frenzy is over, the FDN proved that, despite its constitutive deficiencies, it is a movement destined to remain, especially if at the same time it can give birth to an indispensable political party and not lose the libertarian characteristics of a social movement.

Ever since the beginning of the year it has been self-evident: the vitality of the Cardenas Front—"the hope", as so well described by Adolfo Gilly—owes little to the three parties that it started with. Another Rainbow Coalition is in the making, the heterogeneous combination of ages, social classes, regions, attitudes, cultural backgrounds, degrees of tolerance and of sectarianism, intellectual and anti-intellectual visions. In four or five months, the most visible processes have begun to surface—actions, mobilizations, ideological rejections, vital certainties, that took decades of subterranean germination. Much of the maturing of the different societies in Mexico, identified not uniquely but principally with the modernization of mentalities, is manifested by the enthusiasm with the Cardenist alternative, which, in the terms of Mexican reality, joyfully and critically forms the political boundaries of the center left.

The crowning figure, the notorious bond with a great tradition, the point of reference for the movement is Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas. But in spite of his decisive place in the FDN, I find it difficult to characterize it, last name and

all, as a "caudillo" movement. Cardenas has not risked the lives of his followers. He has not desisted from his serene tone nor the explicative and didactic mode of the beginning of the campaign. (He has modified it, freeing it from a large part of the rhetoric of the Mexican Revolution and keeping it within the political analysis of each moment.) He does not stray from the emphasis on legality. And the silent attention that surrounds his words, his anti-charismatic charisma, does not lead to the constitution of a caudillo. For this, we can count on the efforts of presidentialism and the factory of unmovable caudillos in all shapes and sizes: the CTM.

Cardenas is, I believe, the most qualified leader in the opening of the new political space, under the very adverse conditions of this transition to democracy. In this respect I need to enumerate some of the disadvantages of Cardenas' leadership:

- A small team as compared to the gigantic structure of the PRI and its government functionaries, remunerated accordingly so that their political activity will be most sincere.
- A lack of financial resources as compared to the budget abuse of the PRI.
- A high concentration of decision-making.
- Areas of party fallibility (for example, the four deputies who finding the road to Damascus, were converted to the PRI on their knees, only after finding that, horror of horrors, the FDN ignores the norms of good conduct in the court!).
- Enormous difficulties in the integration of the actions of such diverse groups.
- Schematic development of a national program.
- Informational blackouts that include a large part of the press and the television networks.
- "Atmospheric tension" cultivated with the western torturous theology by the PRI, something which combines funereal threats—"I can't guarantee the life of anyone from the FDN who tries to intervene in the unions of the CTM", Mr. Fidel Velázquez—with pontifical dictums—"The opposition is immoral and perverse," Jorge de la Vega Domínguez).
- Precarious or non-existent organizational forms in numerous places around the country.

In spite of all of this and given the great distance covered in such a brief time span, I consider the social and political movement of the FDN to be the most important one that has arisen in the last fifty years. That is still far from eulogizing it within the historical framework so dominated by the authoritarianism that imposes and dissipates depoliticization. It is, in essence, and so should remain, non-violent. It is today the fruit of the first democratic practice of millions of people and demands a complement: the intensification of internal democracy. It is a generalized, critical attitude implying the fundamental revision of the dominant political culture which existed as of July 5. And it is also, one of the most vital forerunners of the new nation that we are still far from inhabiting, but which in some way perceive in fragments, in episodes, through extraordinary experiences.

To defend the democratic hope is today to hold back the promises of violence and provocation and to promote in the best way we know how, the exercise of rationality. □