

Ruiz Massieu's political thought

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Throughout his administrative and political career, José Francisco Ruiz Massieu was concerned with leaving a record of the duties he discharged, this being an inherent part of every public servant's responsibilities. Yet in addition to fully exercising his public duties, he continually reflected on the great issues and challenges facing the nation.

His record of public service made him a key protagonist, as well as observer, of several aspects of Mexico's political life, roles which he complemented through the study of constitutional law, politics, history and comparative analysis.

Within the federal government, he held high-level positions in central administration and management of state

enterprises, as well as in such social-policy fields as health, housing and social security. At the local level he reached the highest office as governor of his home state of Guerrero.

In his party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), he coordinated presidential campaign activities as well as those aimed at ideological enrichment and debate, and found his place in the national leadership: he was assistant director of the Institute of Political, Economic and Social Studies, president of the Cambio XXI Foundation and the National Ideology Commission, as well as secretary general of the National Executive Committee, representative to the Federal Elections Institute and coordinator of the PRI caucus of representatives elected to the 56th Federal Legislature.

Thus, his rich biography took shape through intense study, writing, the formulation of ideology, political

practice, government experience and service in public administration at both the federal and state levels.

A key element in José Francisco Ruiz Massieu's published work was the unraveling and explication, through critical analysis, of the phenomenon of power. In a multiplicity of forums — from books, prologues, newspaper and magazine articles, lectures and interviews to government reports — he put forward his vision of government, democracy, politics, public administration, presidentialism, the workings of parliament, justice, federalism, party relations, the electoral system and the PRI.

For Ruiz Massieu, the new politics meant both an ideological formulation for the understanding of new times and a proposal for action to face them successfully. He founded his vision of democracy in Mexico on a systematic analysis of the democratic process, with an overall, historical view,

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Angela Torrejón / Imagenlatina.

Ruiz Massieu in one of his appearances at the Federal Electoral Institute.

supported by the study of comparative politics and stressing the challenges involved in advancing and accelerating the democratic process.

The new politics

The new, modern politics—which is not necessarily that of the new politicians—consists of changing the old abuses which are no longer accepted, instituting the new uses demanded by our times, and reaffirming those practices which the people have always considered good and valid.

Why do our times demand a new politics? Because this is a time of transition bringing together the old problems we have still to overcome and the many new problems we find ourselves facing. The new politics involves a new attitude towards power and the exercise thereof, the renewal of political language as well as the customs and habits of power and the reaffirmation of ever-relevant political values.

This new politics is that which rejects politics as the art of fakery, dissimulation and myth-making. Thus it demands the use of truth, without fear or frailty: “The truth reveals reality in order to be able to transform it; its absence—the absence of truth—makes reality rebel, sooner or later.”

To illustrate the new politics, José Francisco would contrast it to the old politics as well as to “anti-politics,” while stressing the attributes that men of state and modern politicians ought to possess: “The practitioner of the old politics cannot withstand light; his natural habitat is darkness or at least shadows; he lacks ideas, or if he has them does not express them; his language is cryptic; he reflexively falls into sloganeering, and since he yearns for the old days when there was no opposition, no national debate or crisis, he confuses criticism with treason, questioning with defiance. He is proud of his ability to avoid providing answers, and believes that dialogue is a monologue for two voices.

“The new politician, on the other hand, never lets an opportunity pass to rendezvous with public opinion and his adversaries, to show himself to society, drawing close to it, communicating with it and seeking its support. He must have ideas and know how to debate them, possess a ‘thick hide,’ since he has to resist aggression, pressure, demands and even trivialities without losing his spirits or his serenity, without allowing his pulse to race or good faith to give way to anger. He must be possessed of serenity as well as a keen eye in order to interpret facts faithfully; a sense of proportion, in order to calibrate events in a measured way,

without overlooking their real weight, but without attributing more weight to them than they have; the gift of anticipation, so as to act in time and react opportunely; the ability to act with imagination but not according to whim; to handle power with responsibility, balance, forethought and calculation, always looking out for the long-term interests of the nation.”

Prone to illustrating and summing up his views in phrases and adjectives, which then became mottos, he stressed: “Politics is passion and patience. It is also tolerance and detachment.” “What we are witnessing is not the decay of ideologies: we are beginning to witness the decay of myths, so man and society may free themselves; the decay of the myths that exempt those in public office from being effective, that exempt public officials from giving an accounting of their output to the people.” “Either we change or we’ll be exchanged. When everyone changes, he who doesn’t change changes too: he turns inward, he changes in a backward direction when

“*The new politics is in the process of appearing, while the old politics in a phase prior to its death agony. These are times of transition, and whoever fails to understand this will be left behind*”

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everyone else is going forward.” “The government must work in the spirit of political ethics. Ethics weighs the intention and validity of ideas, while politics puts the accent on efficiency in order to bring ideas into the temperamental world of facts.” “The solution to conflicts must be political, but above all legal. Political solutions must be found, but within the parameters of the law. Solutions which advance democracy rather than perverting it. Anti-politics, on the other hand, means exterminating one’s adversary, the use of violence as well as the authoritarian wielding of power as if it were one’s personal property.”

The book of new politics is made up of various chapters, as Ruiz Massieu summed it up in one of his works:

- *Scarcity.* The practitioner of the new politics—in contrast to that of the old, who had access to ample resources—must perspicaciously manage planning (“anti-chance”) and politics (“anti-dilemma”), in order to administer scarce resources and harmonize competing demands.
- *Opposition.* The new political man must contend with an active, growing opposition, which is already participating in areas of government; he must look after the interests of the PRI while simultaneously serving the national interest and building essential points of consensus with members of the opposition.
- *Plurality.* Democracy can be viewed as a continual process of differentiation, which makes it a system of plurality. In the new politics there is no substitute for harmonizing

conflicting, legitimate interests, and this calls for men who do not confuse principles with dogmas, convictions with stubbornness, affiliation with sectarianism.

- *"Concertación."*¹ The scarcity of resources and the need to reorient and accelerate growth demand *concertación*, so the social contract may be continually renewed, as well as the establishment of projects that will benefit the nation, in a common effort with all the sectors that make up the country. In political life, discord results from any and all neglect, while active concord requires patient, tempered and thick-skinned negotiators.
- *The outside world.* In a period of greater international interdependency, Mexicans must become more proficient interlocutors with the outside world, recognizing that it will never again be possible to leave dialogue to professional negotiators. As a nation, Mexico cannot continue acting autistically; the leading groups [particularly the business and intellectual communities] must be characterized by an activism which leads to modern, practical understanding.
- *Change.* Society is never static, but there are those who believe that things can remain as they are, or refuse to recognize that things have already changed. The new politics demands men capable of facing up to the acceleration of change, who realize that what society demands is not an end to abuses—that is but a lower stage—but the establishment of new uses. That is the tenor of our times.
- *Politics in public.* The activity of the mass media, together with the expansion of the middle classes, takes the lid off politics, which becomes less secret every day. Neither concrete decisions, overall policy nor the people in power can go unnoticed, since today's democracies are better informed and therefore more critical. Those who fail to grasp that politics is no longer played out simply in official offices can only make mistakes, showing that they lack the instinct of contemporaneity.
- *Ideas.* Politics is not only for the engineers of power or the professionals of ideas. Politics is, above all, ideas and acts; it is thought in action. No political system can do without ideological work, which prevents it from drying out. In the new politics government officials must have ideas and be able to debate them.

Engineering democracy

As a student of democratic transitions and processes, he wrote about these topics. In his book *El proceso democrático de México* (Mexico's Democratic Process) he

¹ This word, increasingly popular in Mexican political vocabulary, has no exact English equivalent; it involves the concepts of negotiation, consensus politics and the harmonizing of antagonistic positions. (Editor's note.)

coined the concept of "democratic engineering" or "political engineering," meaning the systematic definition of the ways and means for implanting and developing democracy, as well as the stages and time-frames for its use. This is a technological, methodological question. Both the democratic transition and the acceleration of the democratic process itself not only require a collective commitment to the liberal democratic doctrine, as well as what has been called the democratic education of the citizenry and of the "real factors of power"; they also call for democratic engineering.

This is an exercise in political planning, a design which corresponds to the government and political forces pushing for a qualitative transformation, which, in turn, means coming to an understanding. And this understanding is achieved only when the protagonists of the democratic process formulate and implement a common democratic culture. The axis of democratic culture is a shared conception of democracy which includes the role of parties, the function of elections, the nature and operation of basic political institutions, as well as the organic and territorial arrangement of power.

What are the fundamental issues with regard to which agreement must be reached? Sixteen key points, upon which the exercise of democratic engineering must be based, sum up José Francisco Ruiz Massieu's thinking on the democratic process:

1. That the idea of democracy's inevitability be rejected; instead, what should be accepted is its desirability and accessibility. It should be desirable and viable, so that it may be planned.
2. That there be a shared conviction that the democratic process is a dialectical, not a Manichean, process. According to the dialectical conception, dialogue for *concertación* is the irreplaceable method, while the Manichean method is violence, the effects of which—annulment and extermination—may be called "anti-politics."
3. Democratic culture is an exercise in collective political intelligence, whose fundamental resource is reason

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—political reason, which can be achieved only through the constant use of dialogue among players. This means laying to rest the “thesis of the hero” and its corollary, “the thesis of the antihero,” as well as voluntarism.

4. The transition must be understood as an agreed-upon project in terms of its modalities, ends, stages and time-frames.

5. The transition must be inclusive. Every protagonist has a place and plays a role which strengthens the logic and workability of the whole. This inclusiveness means recognizing that pluralism invigorates political processes and increases their efficiency.

6. The transition rejects dogmas, instead embracing programs and relying on the efficacy of agreed-upon gradualism.

7. The end product of the culture of transition consists of agreements, whether they be informal or of the highest normative level.

8. The democratic process is an endogenous task which is the business, essentially and without excuses, of the society which proposes to carry out a transition. The history of transitions does not record cases of successful democratic projects being imposed from abroad.

9. Democracy must be seen as an integral process, which certainly has a political content, but also an economic, social and cultural one. The pact [for democracy] must therefore be simultaneously viewed as furthering the advance of democracy, development, social justice, governability and national sovereignty.

10. As part of the definition of democratic engineering, it is indispensable that the convergent political forces become genuine interlocutors, and as far as the government is concerned the interlocutors are political parties. Thus, if there is no reasonably efficient and responsible party system it is impossible to achieve this pact, without which there can be no democratic shift and acceleration. In some cases parties institute themselves, in others they restore themselves, while in others still they reconstruct themselves in order to co-author the work of democracy. In a period of democratization, the parties’ natural allies are the intellectuals, the university community and the mass media, and the participating forces therefore usually seek to incorporate these sectors into the process.

11. In a genuine transition the principle of the centrality of the parliamentary institution may be observed: it is in parliament that consensus is achieved, pacts are sealed, agendas are drawn up and the tasks of democratic engineering defined, the latter finding expression in declarations, political debates and laws. There is no record of any durable, authentic democratic transition occurring in the absence of the demand for a reevaluation of the role of parliament and of the parties participating and giving life to this institution.

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12. Intelligent, applicable and equitable electoral legislation, which guarantees the effectiveness of suffrage and parliamentary efficacy while strengthening political parties, is one of the most essential aspects of democratic engineering.

13. The exercise of political planning which the rise of democracy demands is aimed at preventing ideological and programmatic “bipolarization” by fostering centrism. Centrist tendencies can culminate in a genuine national convergence around a basic social pact, making possible the alternation of government power which can aid in consolidating democratic advances without unleashing collective discord or reviving historic quarrels. Centrism is expressed in a constant: in a democracy one doesn’t win everything, nor does one win forever.

14. Centrism and party pluralism make it necessary that the agenda of the democratic process take up the great issue of the organic and territorial arrangement of power, the division of powers and political decentralization.

15. A moderating and temporary solution is the formula of incorporating members of the old regime into representative or simply governmental organs during the first phases of transition, in order to block radicalisms and remove obstacles.

16. Transitions have an international dimension which the engineers of democracy must especially keep an eye on if the process is to be successful and to avoid foreign interference.

This is a brief summary of José Francisco Ruiz Massieu’s ideas regarding two concepts he put forward for explaining and carrying out the changes demanded by Mexican political life, changes to which he devoted many hours of reflection. This was the result of a firm conviction, which he always upheld: “Those who carry out functions of government and leadership must link ideas, words and action. Ideas illuminate collective problems, words carry the message of ideas and action transfers them to the field of political reality, in brief.” This conviction and his gift for anticipation led him to formulate and expound his ideas opportunely and submit them to public debate. ❧