

The Perfect Dictatorship

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The Mexican peaceful transition to democracy cannot be understood without first recognizing the importance of PAN (Partido Acción Nacional /National Action Party) at the head of the fight for installing democracy in all government bodies. The PAN, which this year celebrates its 65th anniversary, was established with a doctrinarian inspiration based on political humanism. It gathered the soldiers of ideas and democracy who without hate and violence strove for the transformation of Mexico. These were young university students that with ideals and courage founded the first modern Mexican party. They respected humanist values, human dignity, solidarity, subsidiarity and the strive for commonwealth. Their goal, in compliance with their principles and their program of political action, was to avoid pain, both to themselves and others. This group established an institution designed as a school for citizens in order to install participative democracy and the corresponding government power. Their objective was to wake up the citizens of Mexico and as they were the only real opposition party they did not succumb to fear and threats. Rather, they worked intensely to regain the dignity of politics.

The long fight of PAN took place in the context of what Mario Vargas Llosa has referred to as ‘the perfect dictatorship’. One authoritarian party, the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party), had established itself in the government for more than seventy years. The absence of freedom, in particular the freedom of expression, in the presidential regime led to corruption, a lack of accountability and the violation of human rights. It also resulted in weak institutions and the absence of the separation of powers. Executive power stood over and above legislative power, therefore avoiding any kind of dialogue and discussion at a national level and manipulating judicial power resulting in severe damage to the rule of law.

This led to the manipulation of elections, which the group liked to refer to as ‘patriotic fraud’. The opposition were labelled reactionaries, yet at that moment the opposition was gaining more and more support from the citizens of Mexico, citizens that understood that a democratic future was the best possibility for Mexico. More and more citizens joined the fight for democracy and for the respect of decisions made by the people. All of them fought electoral fraud with peaceful civil resistance, fighting in order to make the regime understand that power should serve the interests of the nation. They did not give in to fear or power. Consequently, the citizens democratic movement, led by PAN, proved to be a responsible opposition. After an evident electoral fraud in 1988, which was legitimated by Castro who turned against his traditional alliance with the Mexican Left, major transparency was installed in the electoral mechanism. The fight for creating a trustworthy electoral register began; an electoral register in which people voted with the verification of a document containing their photograph. At that time Mexico underwent a process of opening its trade that helped to raise Mexicans awareness of the impact of competition, opportunities and choice.

The conditions for accession to power were developed and the notion of plurality entered the realm of legislative power, which resulted in the fact that in 1997 the PRI lost, for the first time, an absolute majority in the House of

Deputies. Subsequently, political reform began and, most importantly, electoral reform took place that strengthened the autonomy of the institution which began to accept citizens without particular party interests.

Every process of change and transition requires great leaders to combine and coordinate their efforts and unanimously support the democratic ideal. Mexico had many leaders with different ideologies that all supported the same objective: the democratization of the nation. One great leader that was able to govern and communicate with the people succeeded in winning the support of the citizens, especially young people, with regards to the transformation in government. We, the younger generation, decided to be the generation of democratic change and with our involvement we put our present at stake in order to achieve a better future. Finally, in 2000, Vicente Fox won the presidential elections and was the first person from the opposition party to hold the post of the head of executive power. He created a minority government in a country with an unequal distribution of property, a high index of poverty and with bankrupt state-owned companies in urgent need of investment. This was a country in which groups of power presided which favoured individual interests over national interests, a nation without the political culture and atmosphere necessary for building a competitive, prosperous, fair and impartial country.

The Mexican experience of the transition process can aid the development of democracy in Cuba in numerous ways. Firstly, one must create a political culture to consolidate democracy and make it efficient. That is to say, you must create positive and tangible results in the public and private lives of citizens so that they fully appreciate the freedom of a democratic regime and refuse the option of returning to an authoritarian regime. Secondly, one must strengthen the institutions and the rule of law in order to avoid the arrival of a populist and irresponsible leader. Third, one must anticipate the arrival of public power by initiating the training and education of people to execute public functions. As our teacher Havel said, "one must opt for temporary inexperience instead of permanent sabotage". Fourth, as in Mexico, one must choose the permanent rather than plunging into electoral conjuncture and temporary compensation. An important element here is a high degree of willingness for conciliation and pardon that is necessary for the transition to democracy in Cuba.

The lessons learnt from the Mexican transition cannot be summarized in such a short time and since we are still building our democracy this process needs, due to its nature, constant observation. The achievement of real democracy, which hopefully will follow the sinuous process of transition, is like a sea without coasts. It is like an unfinished symphony in which all political players, all social and cultural elites and all citizens participating in the shared power have the obligation to strive for a perfect tone and for the fair and homogenous sound of every instrument without stopping to listen to the individual playing next to us.