

## What's Next?

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We should "try to be the parents of our future rather than the offspring of our past", sentenced Miguel de Unamuno, the enlightened Spanish philosopher who confronted the hordes of fascism at the time of the Civil War. The beginning of the year is auspicious for reflecting on how it would be possible to relaunch the national political and economic life –build the future- in the light of the paralysis in which Mexico lives and the irrationality –on occasion not distinct from a civil war- that seems to dominate the current collective unease.

The only thing not in dispute is that the malaise is generalized and cuts across the country's social classes and regions. The cause of the phenomenon is more complex, but I have no doubt that at its heart lies enormous disenchantment with the government, politics and politicians. Although corruption has become the explanation that many offer for their own dispiritedness, my impression is that there's much more at stake in the common anima than the corruption factor because the latter is not novel or exceptional in the nation.

Some time prior to rumors running rampant about mansions, contracts, bribes and infrastructure ventures associated with certain construction companies, the country was pressing headlong toward a clash of expectations. The government had initiated its six-year term with flying colors, giving no quarter. Time prior to its inauguration it had already convinced key international publications of its enormous transformative project, pledging things that were never realistic but that, nonetheless, served as self-promotion. The onslaught was multifaceted and generated an immediate assortment of expectation, fear and repudiation. For some the promise of a reformative project indulged the hope that, at last, the country would take a leap forward. For others, media control, forced dismissal of journalists and implicit censure would entail a return to the least sterling times in the life of the country. The changes instituted in the constitutional as well as the fiscal plane led to wide-ranging disavowal in parts of the society. But the government did not slacken its pace.

For me it was evident that there was an overarching problem in the governmental project because there seemed to be no connection between the ambition inherent in its reforms and the political activity necessary for implementing these and guiding them to a successful conclusion. It was clear that in the government it was surmised that, once approved, the reforms would establish themselves. In this manner, the diagnosis appeared to be that the true stumbling block to the reforms was not the reality of each activity or sector but instead the Congress: consequently, by suppressing the Congress the obstacle was eliminated. No sooner said than done, the Congress was obviated and the reforms were passed. The problem is that the reality did not change nor would it ever change if the reforms were not implemented, which would inexorably affect interests, many of these essential to the political coalition that sustains the President.

Thus, the clash was inevitable and crystal-clear. What was surprising to me was the incapacity of the President to respond. In the last analysis, the President had exhibited a prodigious capacity for negotiation in his political life and great astuteness in his strategy of making the presidential candidacy his own. How, within this context, can the paralysis be made intelligible? Time has led me to understand this better.

For many politics is something sullied and unscrupulous, but there is no society in the world and in history that survived without politicians because there are always irreconcilable differences, contrasting objectives and numerous sources of conflict. Politics is an activity that strives to resolve conflicts, channel disputes and reconcile dissonant stances. In a democracy, politics retains the additional function of

enticing followers, convincing the populace and currying favor with popular support. That is, democracy exacts not only negotiation among interests but also persuasion of the society and each of its components. In the eighties Mexico experienced the initiation of the process of the political transition from politics centered on the palace intrigues of the PRIist world to the political hustle and bustle oriented toward winning over popular backing as well as that of the productive sectors, public opinion and diverse social interests. This became necessary because otherwise everything was paralyzed. The process was not smooth but nonetheless uncontainable and all of the politicians had to learn to manage both worlds, some with impressive success.

The current government, as if descended from Mars, sought to return the country to the PRIist primitivism era of the fifties, assuming that participation of the population and its diverse elements were a governmental concession and not a political reality. It is within this context that I have come to understand the paralysis and the government's incapacity to adapt itself to the XXI century. Therefore, that sinking feeling is not the product of chance but a combination very much sui generis, our own: a government that does not understand and an excessive governmental onus due to its immense capacity to impose itself upon all types of issues thanks to the arbitrary attributions it enjoys. A fatal admixture because it impedes the development of a competent government for the XXI century and because it expedites and endorses corruption.

The big question now is whether, on the one hand, the society is already welded to its anima and, on the other, whether the government will be disposed to change. In an open economy, the government is obliged to explain, convince and join in because that represents the sole possibility of advancing its projects and objectives. So great are the opportunities that it would be regrettable were these to be thrown overboard in the face of the government's own obstinacy.

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