

Off-Track Politicians

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It is rare day that our politicians realize the effects of their decisions. Assured of the infallibility and bonhomie of their ideas, they rarely consider the possibility that their choices and actions might give rise to opposite outcomes from those sought or radically different from those imagined. Politicians think in terms of their own frames of reference (usually access to power and to their next means of livelihood) and not with respect to the consequences of their actions; like a thief who thinks everyone is out to steal from him.

Protected from the mundane complexity of the life of the Mexican everyman, their perspective does not in any way resemble what the citizen needs. The citizenry wants the basics: safety, certainty, services that work, the means to develop their daily life, that is, nothing out of the ordinary: they only want to live and prosper the best way possible. Politicians, however, know better: progress does not consist of having a good life, basic services and everyday safety but rather radical transformations.

The case of “A Day Without the Car” in Mexico City is paradigmatic because everyone, except for its promoters, knew that limiting the use of the automobile for millions of inhabitants without having an effective and reliable means of public transportation in place would engender the inexorable result of causing an increase in the number of vehicles: the population began to buy an additional car to be able to move to work every day. But that case, of a quarter of a century ago and, inexplicably repeated a few months back, is only a sample. The country has changed drastically in the last decades in great measure due to governmental decisions, some on target, many terrifying, which have altered not only the physical aspects and the statistics, but also the populace’s perceptions and expectations. The result is not pleasant.

Although there have been truly transcendental and transformative strategies (for example, the economic liberalization of the eighties and the North American Free Trade Agreement [NAFTA]), the majority have had null effects and, on occasion, have been counterproductive.

But beyond the great reforms, what is noteworthy is the absence of the “little” things, those most important ones in day-to-day life. Many are contemptuous of the liberalization of the economy and propose canceling it, but it is obvious that they ignore a very simple fact: the SOLE engine of growth of the Mexican economy at present is NAFTA; the notion of placing it in question is, first, absurd, but after that makes one’s hair stand on end. Thus the concern about Trump.

Perhaps there is no better test of the last four governments’ lack of success than the fact that, however much growth they promised, they did not achieve adding anything to NAFTA and, in contrast, at present, have placed financial stability once again in doubt, the very financial stability that, as we learned in 1994, lies at the heart of economic viability.

Despite the lack of success of the last three administrations as well as the present one, some states and regions have procured something that is not currently recognized: the growth rates of states such as Aguascalientes, Guanajuato and Queretaro are more similar to those of Asia than Latin America. That is, today there are many Mexicans undergoing a radical transformation which distances them from those who, thanks to the worst governments devoted to corruption as their *raison d’être*, have left their populations in poverty and ruin. Parts of Mexico have come to prosper, others have become poverty-ridden. What is the difference? Quality of government. There is no other answer.

Some local governments have been able to do something out of the usual: they govern. Something as patently obvious is inexistent in the majority of the nation. More common are governors dedicated to power and profit than those committed to development. How unfortunate it is that the majority quest after power and personal gain.

The result is pathetic. For the ordinary citizen what is important is that there is food in the stores, gas at the respective gas stations, safety in public conveyances and certainty in the economy. The reality is another: as if it were a natural and not a political disaster (created by the radical teachers union CNTE), the federal government organized an airlift to transport basic goods to Oaxaca; rather than being the guarantor of safety, it grants privilege to delinquents.

What is the result? Instead of winning over a prosperous, content and satisfied public, the country is characterized by growing uncertainty. The workaday Mexican lives in fear of assaults,

robberies at their homes, their children's safety, uncertainty regarding job permanence and, as if this were not sufficient, the absence of hope. Our politicians do not understand even the most elementary: without stability and trust the future is impossible.

“Broken Windows” was a concept coined by Wilson and Kelling to describe the way a society deteriorates. When no one repairs a building's broken windows or a city's potholes, deterioration accelerates because no one cares about the state of things. Little by little, people become accustomed to everything perennially getting worse.

Mexico possesses enormous assets and virtues, but the quotidian reality discloses precisely the opposite. The key question is: who benefits from this?

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