

Absence of Strategic Vision

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Few things distinguish Mexico as crisply as a nation as the total absence of strategic vision: the nation lives day to day. Matters are not resolved, they are simply postponed; the problems are not seen to, they are bought; the challenges are not recognized as such, they are ignored. In one of the most descriptive anecdotes of the old political system, it was said that President Adolfo Ruíz-Cortines (1952-1958) had two trays on his desk: one said “problems that solve themselves” and the other, “problems that time takes care of”.

That way of governing (or pretending to) had viability in an era during which the government enjoyed full control. The PRIist system was a hegemonic mechanism of control which had tentacles throughout the country, even the most modest hamlet; its operators had a presence in the greater part of the national territory and served not only as a means for obtaining information on local affairs and potential risks or threats to the system, but also to dissuade potential troublemakers or, were the situation to require it, appease any dissidence. The problems were many, but the system possessed mechanisms to deal with them and, in a world without the ubiquity of information and telephones with cameras of today, no one found out how these were actually dealt with: what counted was not the care with which government operatives or forces acted, but rather the efficacy of their actions. Stability was all that mattered and the system of that era provided it generously. It was a simple world when compared with the complexity of the current one.

The presidents of recent decades surely dreamed of a world without the press, with citizens without options or information and with the capacity of making the powers of any governor not submitting to the central power disappear. But that was then: today we live in mounting chaos because the façade sought, today’s pretense, is that nothing has changed.

To function in these times, in addition to developing itself, a country needs to pave the way on multiple fronts and that implies a strategic vision. Its absence at present –and in our history - is astounding and even suicidal. The problems are not solved but instead, in the vernacular, “the

can is kicked". Recently, some members of the Cabinet sacrificed others in order to eliminate a contender from the presidential race without the consequences mattering, even for the government itself, not to speak of country; the case of the recent state elections is revealing: some influential Presidential Cabinet members preferred to lose some governorships in the interest of excluding a potential rival in the form of the president of the PRI. The only thing that matters is today, the here and now and me, myself and I. With this rationality, the problems do not vanish, they are only prolonged, postponed and magnified. The case of the CNTE (the National Confederation of Education Workers) is paradigmatic.

Were the problem about the playing of parlor games in a glass house, the issue would be irrelevant. But these are merely anecdotal examples. Mexico is facing basic decisions in countless areas for which we have not prepared and for which we have not exhibited a disposition to advance.

Here is an illustrative series of obstacles that Mexico is up against and that, without strategic vision, will be incapable of confronting:

- To consolidate democracy: currently we have a dysfunctional system of government in which it is not known where the executive powers end and the legislative ones begin. There are no checks and balances, no clear rules. Everything constitutes an incentive to conflict, rather than to effective government. How to construct a model of government? Who heads up the effort? How to convince the distinct political forces? How to build a future?
- The Police: in 1968 a mistaken lesson was learned (police = repression) and that has impeded the development of a modern police corps, respectful of the citizens' rights and respected by the citizenry.
- Justice System: innumerable laws are approved but the paradigm has not changed: laws are meant to appease diverse constituencies, but not to fix the problem. Conflicts of interest in the judicial power are flagrant; politicized justice continues to be the norm.

- Corruption and impunity: everyone gives lip service to denouncing this, but no one wants to do away with the binome. What would have to happen to change the dominant paradigm, beyond laws with which no one pretends to comply with or to enforce?
- Relationship with the U.S.: we are at a crucial moment due to the upcoming elections in the U.S. but we have no idea, or less so a plan, to redefine the relationship. What happens under each potential scenario? What do we want from the relationship? What do we have to do for the desirable to be possible?
- Education: we have been for decades in a vicious circle in which what is important has not been the development of human capital. How can the vision of education be changed? What has to be done to achieve this? How to join forces with, instead of combating, the teachers? How can we unhinge the leaderships devoted to holding back the development of education?
- Public finances: the spending model financed by few taxes from captive citizens and growing debt is creating a crisis. How to develop novel sources to raise revenue? How to develop accountability mechanism to make this possible?

The challenges that we face are huge and, clearly, cannot be solved overnight. Each of these – these and others- will demand understanding, vision, leadership and arduous negotiations. But if the sole objective is “don’t move anything”, “don’t even try to change the status quo”, the country will persist in its decline and conflict will be on the rise.

The only way to break through the inertia is to speak clearly: we have problems that require one or two generations of continuous efforts to transform the country. Kicking the can is not a solution, even if comfortable for some functionaries.

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