

Desperation

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In the eighties, the title of a book on Indonesia summed up the moment in that society, not very distinct from that of today's Mexico: "A Nation in Waiting". In waiting for "a change".

Governments come and governments go, all avowing deliverance. But deliverance did not come and everything turned out being excuses: the fault was always someone else's.

When things turn out well, Mexican society leans over backward towards the government; when things come out poorly, the reaction is one of spite, of betrayal. That is why Mexican society's reaction has been so brutal, making life easy for the promoters of chagrin as a politico-electoral strategy. And the government could not have acted worse: it entrenched itself, convinced of its virtue, thus incapable of reaching out, ended up an easy prey of its own prejudices, and of an opposition that it does not understand, nor tries to. This has led society towards absolute uncertainty with respect to the future.

During the last lustra, Mexicans have lived through two similar and, at the same time, totally distinct moments, a contrast that illustrates some of the causes of the disgust, desperation and anger ad hominem that currently characterize the country. Vicente Fox and Enrique Peña-Nieto have nothing in common in their biographies, proposals or abilities, but both share one thing: the two promised a transformation, which they forgot nearly immediately on taking office. Fox swore to "get the PRI out of los Pinos" in order to change the country; Peña-Nieto pledged an "effective government". Both betrayed the population. Their failings explain the growing popularity of the miracle peddlers: "Bronco", AMLO, and all those that are certain to show up later.

Joaquín Villalobos, an expert on social movements, says that there is no worse government strategy than that deriving from a simple reading of a complex reality. Fox did not understand the dimensions of his victory nor much less the nature or the depth of the demand for change in Mexican society; also he did not recognize the weakness of the PRI at that juncture in time. The problem for him were the persons and not the structures and institutions, the reason he wound up doing the dead man's float for six long years, creating antibodies for the politico-economic transition that the country continues to await.

Peña-Nieto did not understand that the Mexico of today has nothing to do with that of the fifties of the last century, that the globalized economy forever altered the domestic politics, and that resorting to a high fiscal deficit is tremendously dangerous politically. The present government not only incorrectly read the circumstances that it came into power but also the crucial moments that changed under its own watch, especially Ayotzinapa. Its decision to attempt to recentralize power bespoke enormous naiveté, as if decentralization of the previous decades had been the product of the will of a president and not the result of a complicated and shifting political reality. But by centralizing an array of instruments and imposing controls on the media, governors and other social actors, in addition to tax increases to captive taxpayers, and the disdain with which it managed (and continues to mishandle) cases of corruption, the government ended in the worst of worlds: responsibility for all issues and events about which it did not have (nor could it have) control fell in the lap of the president. Worse, all Mexicans are aggrieved.

The case of Ayotzinapa is emblematic. In objective terms, it is evident that the matter was a local one and that the federal government did not become aware of it until much after it occurred. In contrast with other crises, in that one there was no participation of federal forces. Under those conditions, it is unbelievable that the federal government ended up taking the blame, but that was the product of its own way of acting, of its folly in protecting the governor and, above all, of its turning a blind eye to the complexity of

the context. Even now, the government does not appear to understand the amount of grievances that it engendered in all of society and that Ayotzinapa permitted bringing out into the open and making them explicit anonymously.

When Nikita Khrushchev, Stalin's successor, denounced the crimes of the Soviet regime, one of the delegates called out, "Comrade Khrushchev, where were you when Stalin was doing all these terrible things?" Khrushchev shouted, "Who is that? Stand up!" No one rose. Khrushchev said, "That comrade, in the shadows, is where I was".

President's Peña's government did not understand the society that it attempted to govern nor much less understood that its initiatives and policies were disrupting values, traditions, interests and, most of all, realities and rights won the hard way. At the moment that Iguala took place, the society manifested itself with brute force.

While uncertainty has become the dominant factor in citizens' minds, the government remains trapped in its own simple reading of a complex reality, believing it controls the presidential succession process. The contradiction is flagrant: society demands definitions about the future while the government delivers nothing more than scorn. Mexicans clearly understand the complexity of the moment, and nobody seems disposed to violent action. However, no country can function in absence of certainty and clarity of the future and, at the very least, a sense of hope.

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