

Intentions and Realities

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The intention can be praiseworthy but the reality is stubborn and implacable. The objective of the reforms was, in the governmental rhetoric, “to move Mexico.” At least in the case of education the one moved –in fact hoodwinked- has been the government. Contrary to many predictions at the beginning of the 6-year presidential term, the educative reform, doubtlessly the most popular of the reforms, has been, by far, the most conflictive. While the energy reform –the reform against which great opposition was anticipated- advances, the educative one evaporates in mortifying negotiations, mortifying and counterproductive.

Despite that the discourse and discussions regarding the educative reform have been well ordered, there is no consensus on what motivates the CNTE, which would permit solving (in contrast with postponing and prolonging) the conflict and, chiefly, advancing toward the core objective: a first-world education that puts equality of opportunity into effect. The government has see-sawed –from hard handedness to negotiation to capitulation- without having afforded any specimen of understanding the logic and motivation of the CNTE and its contingents.

The reform was conceived for a reality that had nothing to do with the Mexican of today and it has been that very reality that has ended up imposing itself on the governmental capitulation. The government aspires to a change à la italienne: that everything changes so that everything remains the same and that, CNTE dixit, is not going to happen. The educative reform, as with several of the reforms that the country has undergone in the last decades, supposes a paradigmatic change about what the country is, of what is desired to achieve and of what the manner of government action should be. In the absence of that conceptual change, no reform will be successful.

The old political system worked under the premise of a closed economy, a vertically controlled political system and a structure designed to generate benefits for the heirs of the Revolution and their cronies. In that schema, the educative system had two functions: on the one hand, to build and nurture an ideological hegemony that would serve to mollify the population and control it; and, on the other hand, particularly in the countryside, the teaching profession was a form of employment and generation of welfare in impoverished zones. The quality of the education did not comprise a relevant issue and no one thought of it in those terms: there was an employer and a clientele, an effective mechanism for keeping the peace that favored, and made possible, the depredation, corruption and prosperity of the privileged.

While reforms have been approved in matters of competition, imports, investment and so on, the paradigm of control and privilege has not changed. Politicians behave as if there were no democratic competition among political parties, entrepreneurs exert pressure to eliminate competition, the government does not comprehend that its responsibility is to create conditions for the success of the population, and, in general, they all repudiate the international review mechanisms (as in human rights), which are the daily bread of the XXI century. In a word, everyone clings to a past that, in many respects, no longer exists. And the price of preserving the old privileges mushrooms daily.

Of course there are spaces of competition, first-world companies and niches, such as those engendered by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), that exhibit a singular modernity. But the overwhelming majority of Mexicans and, virtually, the entire political apparatus, live on another planet. Some because that is the way they exploit the system, others because they endure it. My hypothesis is that, as long as the status quo does not change, the educative reform is impossible. And that was as true with the two PAN administrations as with today's "new" PRIists.

The educative reform attempts against the two pillars of the education system: it undermines hegemony on allowing the competition of ideas and views; and, most of all,

threatens the guarantee of an employment system with benefits deriving from the historical marriage between the government and the field of teaching. The politicians want the teachers to accept a change in the rules of the game without the former altering their own behavior. More to the point, the reform takes for granted that teachers will submit to evaluations and other mechanisms of control, itself a new type of control, without offering teachers the possibility, the certainty, of becoming an integral and thriving part of the new system. Under these conditions, it is not difficult to fathom the clash of terminologies, postures and views.

Perhaps even more important, the government pretends to raise the quality of education within the old system, an inextricable contradiction. At least one segment of the government supposed that it could eliminate the patronage system overnight, at no cost and without opposition. What it found was that the governmental rear guard (those who later capitulated, mostly in *Gobernacion*), as well as the CNTE, continue playing under the old rules that are understood to perfection. Violence winds up as an instrument in the hands of the dissenters, mainly because the government lives in fear due to the memory of 1968 and, more recently, Nochistlán.

The educative reform will work when the Mexican political establishment is willing to enter into the XXI century. Inasmuch as this does not occur, CNTE and the Nochistlanes will be the norm, not the exception.

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