

## Waiting for AMLO

by  
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Because of bad weather, a famous German writer once remarked, the German revolution took place in music. Mexico was not as lucky. It had lots of sun—and even has a *sol azteca*—but still had a revolution, albeit one of which little remains but documents, films, corridas, museum pieces, names, monuments, and what is generally referred to as myth. Even the famous ejido system is on the brink of going out. Privatization of electricity and oil are to follow if everything goes according to the magicians of Foxipanismo. That the government at times still makes concessions against its will is due to fear that the local and foreign press will attack a nondemocracy that is trying desperately to sell its image of a transition to democracy. This has been well demonstrated by the debacle surrounding a potential new airport near Atenco (see the account in these pages by John Stolle-McAllister). Giving in to ejido pressures and not building the new airport was obviously meant to be understood by the population at large as a sign from the so-called transition government that the country really had arrived at democracy. The new government continually tries to sell democracy, transition, and transparency, but with its 80,000 multimillionaires (obviously in U.S. dollars and not in pesos!) and 50 million impoverished the country is embarking on a dangerous neoliberal course that at times even smells of a rebirth of the Porfiriato. Mexico remains a country that exports its poor to the North to receive payment from them via the infamous remittances (together with oil and tourism certainly its largest revenue source). At the same time it sells more and more of its once nationalized raw materials to multinational companies. This process even started long before the neoliberal orientations of the present government. Despite the Cardenista nationalization of oil in 1938, other resources were not nationalized until quite late in the past century, as Raúl Delgado Wise and Rubén del Pozo Mendoza argue in their article on mining. But, given Chinese pressure, one may well wonder when this is going to change. Competing with China for lower and lower wages, the maquiladora system has been moved to the South (see the article by Marie France Labrecque). In short, as Stolle-McAllister writes, “the fundamental structures of inequality and vertical control remain untouched, making a viable democracy unlikely.”

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Despite the failure of the 70-year-long “institutionalized revolution,” there have been attempts at change worthy if not of hope at least of continuous memorialization and interpretation: Mexico in 1968 and Mexico since the Zapatista “uprising” in 1994 are absolutely necessary for an understanding of contemporary Mexico. In the following pages they are reflected upon with a new angle of vision by Michael Soldatenko and Kara Ann Zugman respectively.

There was faint hope after the elections that brought the former Coca-Cola entrepreneur to power that the new government might indeed change the course of Mexico’s painful history. But all too soon this hope waned as many citizens realized that the Partido Revolucionario Institucional, the Partido de Acción Nacional, and the Partido de Acción Democrática are not very distinct from each other and have merged into something held together only by the glue of rhetoric. Such an ominous statement would probably not have been possible two years ago, but the recent scandals involving Rosario Robles, the former mayor of Mexico City, PRD party leader, and, at least in the capital city, hope of most feminists, and her questionable relations with the now jailed “fixer” Carlos Ahumada have certainly buried the last remnants of hope for the third-strongest party of the Republic. We can now safely speak of the setting of the *sol Azteca* (the PRD). The announcement in January 2005 that Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas Solórzano will run again (for the fourth time!) eliminates the last chance of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the current PRD mayor of Mexico City and the famous instigator of the second level of the Periférico, who is already embroiled in the fight between the city and the federal government. Since only Lopezobradorismo has done anything positive, everyone is trying to oust him, even his closest friends in his own party. Things do not look very good south of the Rio Bravo.

On Sunday mornings in Chaos City, El Mónstruo, Chilangolandia, the De-Effe, Mexico City (how many cities have that many nicknames?), many of those left from the left eagerly await the next installment of a serial novel published in the daily *La Jornada*. It is a kind of detective story written by four hands and two very bright minds: the writer Paco Ignacio Taibo II and one who is widely considered the last hope for a change that could be considered something of a revolution, the self-styled “Sub” who frequently signs his pieces “desde las montañas del sureste mexicano: Marcos.” The theme of the novel is the tracing of missing persons by detectives from the city and from Chiapas. This undoubtedly very serious topic is presented in a comic and carnivalesque mode of narration that well shows that Michael Soldatenko is not far off when, in his article in this issue, he appropriates Bakhtin’s thoughts on the carnivalesque as an indicator of the momentous spaces for real democracy. Both Soldatenko and Kara Ann Zugman recognize that

while change on the country's larger and governmental level will be long in coming if ever, communal spaces have sometimes opened up that may eventually have their impact. A slow pace and dialogue are, after all, as Zugman observes below, hallmarks of Zapatismo. While the government pushes for its phony vertical democracy, real democratic and utopian moments can be found in smaller movements, even in such stories as the novel-to-be by Taibo and *el Sub*. The novel in progress is an allegory of what is to remain unfinished. After all, the country is full of unfinished stories: the many unsolved political murders and disappearances of the late 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s; those responsible for the 1968 student killings, such as former President Luis Echeverría, still not brought to justice; the almost daily slaughter of women in Ciudad Juárez, largely ignored by the present government; the violent death of the human rights lawyer Digna Ochoa, ruled a suicide by the Procurador de la República, Rafael Macedo de la Concha, when everybody knows it was no suicide; the recent murder of a brother of former president Carlos Salinas de Gortari, Enrique Salinas, in Huixquilucan, just outside of Mexico City, ruled a suicide by the same procurador when everybody knows it was no suicide; the continuous scandals of the PRI, the PAN, and the PRD. At the same time there is an alarming increase in lynchings, executed or attempted. Between 1984 and 2001 there were 230 attempted lynchings. The most horrifying took place on November 23, 2004, in Tláhuac, one of the capital's 16 political delegations. These lynchings demonstrate the total distrust of people in villages of their legal system; people are taking the law into their own hands. What will come out of such a development must remain guesswork, but it does not augur well. And the press does not follow up on any case but quickly jumps to the next. Tláhuac had barely been forgotten when the press reminded the citizenry of an alarming increase in narco-violence. There has been an uprising in the security prison of La Palma, and a few days later four guards were assassinated in a high-security prison in Matamoros. The country simply is getting out of control, and its government apparently does not even notice what is going on. Instead it erects signs along the highways saying "El gobierno del cambio cumple." Rhetoric, nothing but rhetoric! Where are the promised changes? The problems in Chiapas solved in 15 minutes if you vote for whom? And more recently (January 2005) the president has announced that the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional is no longer a problem for Mexico. The magician has solved the problem of Chiapas in even less than 15 minutes by simply ignoring it: there are no more problems in Chiapas. And Mexico, according to the president and his wife, who dreams of becoming his successor, is moving ahead: there is less unemployment, more democracy, more transparency, etc. In reality, there are only

more lies. One can almost imagine a competition by the two countries south of Canada as to which government lies better.

Most recently, the so-called AMLO Affair has overshadowed both Mexico City and national politics and represented a dark threat to the nascent democracies of both. In a country where leaders have historically used their six-year terms to guarantee their successors, Fox has so far managed only to set in motion a legal proceeding (*desafuero*) that could eventually lead to the disqualification of the leading candidate to defeat his own party in the 2006 presidential election, Andres Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), Mexico City's mayor. Accusing López Obrador of having built an access road to a hospital despite a court order barring the city government from expropriating the necessary land, Fox's PAN has joined with the PRI to use this technical offense to try to force the mayor to stand trial. Should he lose, he would be expelled from the mayoralty and possibly face jail. Most of all, though, he would be ineligible to run for president. This attempt, in turn, has made López Obrador into a kind of martyr, and if the *desafuero* succeeds all hell could break loose in the streets of the capital. As this is written, marches and demonstrations have already begun.

On a first reading of the two memorializing essays that follow, I felt like saying, "But this is old hat! Why this in a new issue on Mexico?" Rereading the essays, however, convinced me that there is indeed a "there" there. On a larger national level, the 1968 student strike and the Zapatista uprising have not (yet) brought the changes one had hoped for. The Salinas-Zedillo-Fox continuity is indeed alarming. The longest university strike in history is as forgotten as the long Marcha Ciudadana against insecurity. It certainly must be irritating that the only showpiece of success is an 18-km-long second level of a highway that allows the better-off to get where they want to go faster and look down on the pedestrians not so lucky as to ride on it. Democracy has become a word often tossed around, but people are less and less interested in the rhetoric of their government. Stolle-McAllister appropriately quotes Julio Hernández López in *La Jornada* shortly after the July 2003 elections: "Mexico is quickly becoming a democracy without people." At the same time, there is some truth in Soldatenko's optimistic conclusion: "Perhaps as Mexicans forget their fear we will see the return of the utopian world as a necessary challenge to the new global order brought about by Vicente Fox and his cadres." Perhaps. Very little has changed. More likely, as in Yeats's famous dictum (appropriated by the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe), "Things fall apart. The centre cannot hold." (Nigeria and Mexico have some things in common: oil, blood, and corruption.) This dictum can also stand as a signpost for Mexico. Under the title "Bienvenido Mr. Hobbes," Rolando

Cordero Campos has summarized the present situation in Mexico as follows: “From Tláhuac to La Palma, from Nayarit to the table dances, from the Supreme Court to the annual national budget, all crumbles in a formidable institutional erosion that could easily be the envy of the most daring and delirious anarchist” (*La Jornada*, January 23, 2005). Only five years separate us from 2010, the hundredth anniversary of the Mexican Revolution, and only a couple of months separate us from the next elections. Events move at incredible speed. A March of Silence of over one million people forced not the desafuero of AMLO but led to the resignation of macedo de la Concha. More heads will fall. Fox has become the laughing stock who now endorses the mayor he tried to unseat. AMLO very well may very well become the next president of Mexico.