

For Fox, Now Is the Hard Part

By LORENZO MEYER

MEXICO CITY—In 1513, Niccolò Machiavelli wrote about how difficult and dangerous it was for a leader to introduce a new canon. That is precisely the challenge that President Vicente Fox is facing now in trying to introduce new rules into the political game.

He must inject the canons of democracy into a society that never has had substantive experience in the politics of democracy. Such a task not only will be difficult but also may be dangerous. For the first time since independence 179 years ago, Mexico held an election that was decided in the ballot boxes rather than in the back-room dealings of the ruling party, and the governing party must peacefully hand over the reins to its adversary.

But since Fox got only 46% of the vote, he will not have majority control in Congress or with the governors of the states of Mexico. And Fox will not have the budget to achieve the goals he set during his campaign: substantial economic growth, creation of jobs, aid to small businesses, a better standard of living for the poor, transformation of the police forces, fighting organized crime, improving public safety, reassessing the judicial system and combating the ever-present stink of corruption.

The new government also will have to tackle the enormous web of interest groups that the Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI, has legally and illegally assembled in the past 71 years. Rest assured, those who have comfortably lived with the privileges of the PRI and the other opposition party, the left-wing Democratic Revolutionary Party, or PRD, will not give up their privileges without confrontation.

The first challenge Fox will face will come from the displaced elite. History, according to Machiavelli, proves that the art of politics is simpler when it is just a continuation, a transference of a routine. In the era of PRI authoritarianism, the change of presidents every six years permitted a change of faces among the elite without a change

in the fundamental politics of the government and the politicians. The union leaders, labor organizations, bureaucrats, the church, the armed forces, the media groups and even organized crime were handed certain powerful positions within the government. They now will find themselves displaced.

After decades of attempted change, Fox and his National Action Party, or PAN, left President Ernesto Zedillo and his PRI party with no other option but out. It was either accepting Fox's victory or anarchy. The fall of the PRI, however, uprooted the routine of

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authority, the unwritten law. It broke the malaise and forced Mexico to experiment with a radical change. But politics is always two-faced: cooperation on one side, conflict on the other. So it is quite possible that Fox's victory on July 2 will bring about inevitable conflict.

In principle, the passing of the torch signifies a collective effort to end the countless corrupt arrangements that symbolized the past. In truth, however, it probably will unleash countless forms of resistance. So the art of leadership will be focused on the difficult task of controlling conflict—or Mexico will face chaos.

It is likely that the 25 industry leaders who contributed \$625 million to the PRI presidential campaign in 1993 will be smart enough to cooperate with Fox as well. But this does not mean that the old PRI cronies will be able to continue doing business as usual.

The same applies for the drug traffickers who found the PRI government accommodating and are not likely to get the same reaction from Fox's camp. The recent day-

time execution on the campus of Hidalgo University of Juan Pablo de Tavira, the former director of the Almoloya high security prison, might be an omen.

The majority of the voters—just short of 62%—favored opponents of the PRI. So almost two-thirds of the Mexican citizenry should sympathize with the new administration. Yet some of the people that opposed the PRI could also be opposed to Fox, especially the left, which made up 18% of the popular vote. Polls indicate that 70% of the public approves of the president-elect, but do not indicate whether people would support a cabinet made up of PAN-istas, PAN-sympathizers, right-wing corporate types, PRI-istas (some from the presidency of Zedillo's predecessor, Carlos Salinas de Gortari) and a minimal representation of left-wing politicians.

In any event, the approval of the new government is likely to come under attack and supporters may lose their intensity. Also, those who don't get expected handouts could join forces with resentful PRI-istas. Yet this is not the worst of Fox's worries.

Fox has to be able to make good on all the demands and interests of the disenfranchised who have been waiting for almost two centuries for justice. The promises that the new government has made to the poor are vague. According to 1999 statistics by domestic and international agencies, impoverished people account for half of Mexico's population. Yet their needs have never been met because of a lack of public funds—80% of the budget is already allocated to internal costs and debt—and the fact that the free market economy has almost nothing to do with their interests.

To overcome these challenges, Fox will need intelligence, willingness and honesty. Let us hope that he is not just a charismatic idealist but rather a rare person of ethics, courage and intelligence. Time will tell whether Fox will be a simple politician or a man of state, a success or a failure.

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