

a warning “for those who still nourish the shaky conviction that democracy can be established simply through an outburst of people power . . . , a constitution, and an election or two, without the vital dedication of a political class willing to put aside differences.”

OTHER NATIONS

Goodbye and Good Riddance

THE SOURCE: “Mexico’s Wasted Chance” by Fredo Arias-King, in *The National Interest*, Winter 2005–6.

REFORM WAS IN THE AIR WHEN Vicente Fox was elected president of Mexico six years ago, ending more than 70 years of one-party rule. Yet as the July 2 election of a new president nears, reforms have been few, “corruption has actually increased, and the quality of government has deteriorated,” writes Fredo Arias-King, the founding editor of *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, who worked as a speechwriter for Fox’s campaign.

Fox’s two immediate predecessors, Carlos Salinas (1988–94) and Ernesto Zedillo (1994–2000), from the long-ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), had instituted some economic reforms, but essentially they “only replaced the existing crony socialism with crony capitalism.” To do better, the popular Fox and his center-right National Action Party (PAN) needed to tackle “bureaucratic red tape, monopolies, obstacles to foreign investment, the byzantine tax code, criminal networks in government, a bloated public sector, [and] the lack of property rights.”

Instead of breaking completely with the old regime, however, Fox chose to work with elements of the PRI, while slighting his own supporters and his party’s coalition partner, the Green Party. Members of the old guard were installed as the national security adviser and the ambassador to Washington, while others ran the Finance Secretariat and Fox’s own presidential office. Fox “resurrected some of the most notorious figures of the pre-Zedillo PRI,” including two men who had served with the secret police during Mexico’s “dirty war”

cooperation, he was disappointed, notes Arias-King. “The PRI has blocked Fox’s most important proposals in Congress, including labor, energy, and tax reform, and has used its networks inside the federal government to continue funneling resources to its campaigns.” The PRI regained its congressional plurality in 2003, and the Green Party left Fox’s coalition for an alliance with the PRI.

It’s not Fox’s fault that Mexico’s economic growth has been feeble in recent years (America’s lagging economy is mostly to blame for that), says



Many hoped that Vicente Fox would bring much-needed reform to Mexico when he was elected president in 2000, but his administration has been disappointing, with corruption worse than before he took office.

against the country’s leftist guerrillas in the early 1970s. He also rejected an offer from some 50 newly elected PRI congressmen to break with their party and vote with PAN and the Greens, in return for minor favors. The legislators, said Fox, should “stay in the PRI, since we need a strong and united PRI to negotiate better with it.”

If Fox hoped that his unilateral concessions to the PRI would win its

Arias-King, but “the worsening quality of government largely is.” Surveys by Transparency International and other organizations show increased corruption and inefficiency. Mexicans’ faith in political institutions has eroded. “If this trend continues,” Arias-King warns, “the party system itself could be discredited, opening the door to a Hugo Chávez-like figure” in Mexico and an increase in guerrilla activity and terrorism.