



Review: After the Fall: The Legacy of Carlos Salinas

Reviewed Work(s):

Dismantling the Mexican State? by Rob Aitken; Nikki Craske; Gareth A. Jones; David Stansfield

The Mexican Shock: Its Meaning for the U. S. by Jorge Castañeda

Mexican Politics in Transition: The Breakdown of a One-Party-Dominant Regime by Wayne Cornelius

Democratizing Mexico: Public Opinion and Electoral Choices by Jorge Domínguez; James A. McCann

A New Time for Mexico by Carlos Fuentes

Liberalismo Autocrático: Las contradicciones del sistema político mexicano by Lorenzo Meyer

Bordering on Chaos: Guerillas, Stockbrokers, Politicians, and Mexico's Road to Prosperity by Andrés Oppenheimer

Neo-Liberalism Revisited: Economic Restructuring and Mexico's Political Future by Gerardo Otero

Crónica del gobierno de Carlos Salinas de Gortari, 1988 - 1994 by Presidencia de la Republica

Rebuilding the State: Mexico after Salinas by Mónica Serrano; Victor Bulmer-Thomas
Miguel Angel Centeno

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REVIEW ESSAY

After the Fall: The Legacy of Carlos Salinas

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- Dismantling the Mexican State?* Edited by Rob Aitken, Nikki Craske, Gareth A. Jones, and David Stansfield. (London: Macmillan, 1996. \$75.00).
- The Mexican Shock: Its Meaning for the U.S.* By Jorge Castañeda. (New York: New Press, 1995. \$13.00).
- Mexican Politics in Transition: The Breakdown of a One-Party-Dominant Regime.* By Wayne Cornelius. (La Jolla: Center for US-Mexican Studies, UCSD, 1996. \$11.95).
- Democratizing Mexico: Public Opinion and Electoral Choices.* By Jorge Domínguez and James A. McCann. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996. \$45.00).
- A New Time for Mexico.* By Carlos Fuentes (New York: FSG, 1996).
- Liberalismo Autocrático: Las contradicciones del sistema político mexicano.* By Lorenzo Meyer (Mexico: Oceano, 1995).
- Bordering on Chaos: Guerillas, Stockbrokers, Politicians, and Mexico's Road to Prosperity.* By Andrés Oppenheimer (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1996. \$25.45).
- Neo-liberalism Revisited: Economic Restructuring and Mexico's Political Future.* Edited by Gerardo Otero (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996. \$19.95).
- Crónica del gobierno de Carlos Salinas de Gortari, 1988-1994.* Presidencia de la Republica (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica).
- Rebuilding the State: Mexico After Salinas.* Edited by Mónica Serrano and Victor Bulmer-Thomas, eds (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 1996. \$20.00).

Something about the fall of Carlos Salinas makes observers seek references in classical texts. The best may be Jorge Castañeda's characterization of presidential *sexentos* as a perpetual Sisyphus scaling the volcano Popocatepetl, popularly known as *El Popo* (p. 66). Certainly, in 1993 it seemed that Salinas had avoided the presidential curse and was about to reach the peak. The last two years have seen a prolonged fall, not only of Salinas's stature, but also of Mexican aspirations and expectations. Above and beyond the specifics of the Salinas *sexento* (e.g., the unsolvable mysteries of who won in 1988 and who killed Luis Donaldo Colosio), one critical question dominates the debate: Did Salinas stumble and fall down the mountain or did the volcano blow up? Did personal frailties destroy the Mexican political and economic project or was the technocratic revolution never really viable? Is it finished?

The books selected for this review offer a variety of answers. They have been chosen as a semirepresentative sample of authors and methods. Since the focus is on current events, I have excluded books written prior to 1994 or recent works that have been recently reviewed.¹

I will emphasize what these books offer toward our understanding of the *salinato*, but the following judgments may serve as a quick critique. Andrés Oppenheimer and Castañeda are probably the most fun to read given the wealth of anecdotes and details, as well as their generally nonacademic style. Carlos Fuentes is largely disappointing, but gives a good insight into the views of the intellectual opposition (see also Castañeda). For those looking for a single reading for courses or their own information, Wayne Cornelius offers a concise summary of the past eight years. Jorge Domínguez

1. This might include Maria Lorena Cook, Kevin J. Middlebrook and Juan Molinar Horcasitas, eds., *The Politics of Economic Restructuring* (La Jolla: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, 1994); Stephen D. Morris, *Political Reformism in Mexico* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers); Donald E. Schulz and Edward J. Williams, eds., *Mexico Faces the 21st Century* (Westport: Praeger, 1995); Roderic Camp, *Politics in Mexico* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Phillip Russell, *Mexico under Salinas* (Austin: Mexico Resource Center, 1994); Miguel Angel Centeno, *Democracy within Reason* (University Park: Penn State Press, 1994). The treatment of Salinas by Tomás Borge (*Salinas: los dilemas de la modernidad*, Mexico: Siglo XXI) might also merit attention, but it says more about Borge than about the ex-president. Given the large number of books available, with one exception I have concentrated on the more widely available in English. Mexican offerings include Enrique Márquez, *Por qué perdió Camacho* (Mexico: Océano 1995); Julio Scherer García, *Estos años* (Mexico: Océano, 1995); Carlos Ramírez, *Cuándo pudimos no quitarnos* (Mexico: Océano 1995); and Gabriel Zaid, *Adiós al PRI*, (Mexico: Océano, 1995). We are still waiting for the novel that this era deserves and one hopes that García Márquez has been taking notes.

and James A. McCann, Gerardo Otero, and Rob Aitken et al. provide a wealth of detail on economic, social, and economic changes, but do not offer a coherent explanation for Salinas's rise and fall. The eight volumes published by the Presidencia de la República are wonderful both for skimming through the *sexenio* and as a reference source. The Mónica Serrano and Victor Bulmer-Thomas and Lorenzo Meyer volumes provide the most satisfactory explanation of what happened and contain the best analysis of the situation in Mexico today.

Wayne Cornelius's *Mexican Politics in Transition* is disappointing. There are few people who had as privileged a position from which to understand the Salinas *sexenio* as Cornelius. Moreover, as a student of migration and urban Mexico, he has a profound knowledge, rare among American academics, of the underside of Mexican society. His book does not make use of this deep understanding. An excellent guide to the political and economic surface, it would make a superb text for undergraduate courses. It will frustrate, however, those more familiar with Mexico who are searching for original answers to the question, *que pasó?*

Cornelius does a good job of covering all the bases. His analysis includes the internal dynamics both of the government and of the opposition. He also provides a cogent summary of the economic and social repercussions of the Salinas policies. But in the end, he explains too much of what happened on the basis of Salinas's and Ernesto Zedillo's actions. Cornelius is perfectly aware of the limitations of the *salinato*, but he seems reluctant to link these to its ultimate fall. He joins those who call for Zedillo to continue the process of transition through a strong presidency. But if the strongest president since Lázaro Cárdenas ended exiled to some Irish castle with a brother in jail and the economy in tatters, why should we believe that a more politically macho Zedillo will lead Mexico to democracy?

Bordering on Chaos also focuses on the major characters of this the latest Mexican political *telenovela*. Andrés Oppenheimer is at his best when describing the intimacies of the Mexican system and providing an elite's perspective of the various personalities. Oppenheimer is a bit too fixated with whether Marcos is or has ever been a communist. Why this would make the slightest difference in 1996 is never explained. His editors also seemed to have missed comments bordering on racist (e.g., "Mexicans were by nature contradiction-prone people" [p. 103]; "double-talk and deceit had been a part of Mexico's national character" [p. 269]). Despite these problems, this valuable book will be enjoyed by all of us addicted to *chismes políticos*. Details on the infamous banquet in

which Salinas asked for \$25 million from each of the assembled millionaires, the construction of an opera house in San Cristóbal, electoral dirty tricks against the Partido Revolucionario Democrático (PRD), Mario Ruiz Massieu's compact disk collection, and "El Meme" Garza's hospitality, make this perfect 'airplane reading' for Mexicanists.

The details can be enlightening as well as entertaining. The race between members of the presidential guard sent to protect Raul and those sent to arrest him hints at the potential for violence should intra-elite solidarity shatter. Oppenheimer's most significant contribution is his emphasis on the mutual delusion suffered by both the Mexican technocrats and American investors and government. The mirage of growth was important both to attract investors and to maintain political stability. In the end, however, Oppenheimer does not really seem to accept the implications of this analysis. His general message is that the Salinas project was thwarted by the continuing influence of the dinosaurs and a streak of bad judgment and even worse luck beginning in 1994. Why Salinas had to rely on mirages, why the dinosaurs remained influential, why an entire economy could be decimated in a week, are questions that Oppenheimer never asks. The details of the leaves are interesting, but we barely see the trees, much less the forest.

On the other extreme, Carlos Fuentes seeks to link the events of the last few years to an almost metaphysical Mexico where time behaves in different ways and where various historical levels co-exist. When describing the Mexican political system, such a historical memory is welcome as it allows Fuentes to demystify the unique characteristics of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). Surprisingly, Fuentes is better on the Salinas economy than on the politics. His concise description of the contradictions within the technocratic model would do a social scientist proud. Some, however, may grow impatient with Fuentes' rhetorical ro-coco and demand more analysis from a person who knows the mayor players and Mexico so well.

For someone who has been so close to the belly of the beast, Fuentes displays a surprising naiveté. This is particularly obvious in his remarks concerning the San Angel group. It is almost surrealistic to read about the injustice and historical misery afflicting large parts of the Mexican population only to be told that a group of upper class intellectuals somehow offered a solution. Notwithstanding their intellectual power and political honesty, do these men and women really appreciate the gulf that separates them from their compatriots? Fuentes's (and Castañeda's) casual asides about din-

ners or lunches with Salinas, Cárdenas, and Zedillo, betray the fact that, an extremely small and in-bred elite, whether on the left or the right, continues to dominate Mexico. This is not just a problem of social justice. Fuentes seems to think that Mexico is Spain, only poorer, and his solution to a Mexican transition is an elite deal similar to the Moncloa pact of the early post-Franco era. This is probably not too dissimilar from what Salinas was attempting to do with the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN). It may be, though, that the Mexican crisis can no longer be resolved *entre familia*.

Jorge Castañeda certainly belongs to that family and is one of the most important political observers and intellectuals in Mexico today. In part, his status is a reflection of the quality of his work and the many years that he has been a student of the *grilla política*. He is also important because he has succeeded (in ways that others such as Carlos Monsivais, Lorenzo Meyer, or Carlos Ramírez have not) in establishing himself as one of the 'usual suspects' called upon by American institutions wanting to understand Mexico. (Carlos Fuentes used to fulfill this role. Juan Molinar Horcasitas might be approaching *Nightline* status). Thus, what Castañeda has to say is important not only in and of itself, but also because it will increasingly be what people at Georgetown and Manhattan dinner parties say to one another. His book needs to be read both ways.

Of all the books being reviewed, his is the most explicitly concerned with explaining what happened after 1993. It is extremely well done and informative. Interestingly, Castañeda has made little attempt to cover his trail and change much of the text of the previously published articles on which the book is based. There are several reminders of how surprising 1994 really was (e.g., "there has not yet been, and probably will not be, a major devaluation of the currency", [p. 53]). But, Castañeda was not fooled often. He has been a consistent critic of Salinas. He recognized early on the costs of Salinas's authoritarianism, both in terms of human rights and in the effectiveness of the regime. He was also one of the first to point out the contradiction between an export-led model and an overvalued currency. His account of the December Debacle is particularly good.

Not surprisingly, Castañeda's analysis of the political transition is also quite strong. He appropriately emphasizes how traumatic 1988 was for Salinas and how much it shaped the manner in which he perceived the challenge of democratization. The night of July 6, 1988, scared Salinas and he vowed not let things get out of control again. The nominations of Colosio and Zedillo have to be understood in this light. Castañeda also notes that while Salinas did begin

to dismantle parts of the old system, he did little to build a new one. Unfortunately, he is unable to explain why this occurred. (This is pervasive problem with literature on this topic. I have yet to see a good account of why and/or how the Salinas political project stopped cold in 1992).

One problem with being such an inside player in the political game is seeing everything as part of a labyrinthine elite competition. Castañeda, for example, is fixated on the political influence of the *narcotraficantes*, and his analysis sometimes suffers from searches for the conscious agent responsible for all twists and turns. As in many works on Mexico, the state and the capital are all; Mexican society recedes into the background and plays a passive role.

Unfortunately, Castañeda's diagnosis and prescription (precisely that which will be read in the United States) fails to communicate Mexican social reality to the important American audience. Castañeda is a bit like American democrats of his generation, a liberal who identifies the problem but is unwilling to accept the possible costs of fixing it. As in his well-known *Utopia Unarmed*,² Castañeda accurately identifies inequality as the root of Latin America's social, economic, and political dilemmas. But his solutions seem to ignore the fact that the respective economic elites have successfully defeated practically every attempt to challenge their power, that the United States has actively participated in the defeat of social reform, and that democratic states have often sacrificed the promise of social justice in order to assure their own survival. Castañeda is more than aware of the danger of violence in Mexico and he can be quite apocalyptic in his predictions. But he fails to communicate this urgency. He is too reasonable at a time when American public policy should be shaken out of the torpor generated by the apparent triumph of democratic capitalism.

The books discussed so far have largely focused on the personalities of those in power—how Sisyphus came to fall. Others have analyzed the long dormancy of Popocatepetl and the likelihood of explosion. Otero's volume represents the most classically left critique. It consistently places Mexico and the Salinas project within a theoretical and empirical framework of a transnational economy with an increasingly hegemonic model. Gustavo del Castillo's essay correctly identifies the major constraint facing Latin American countries—a continued dependence on external financing in a world in which capital mobility can humble even the most power-

2. (New York: Knopf Books, 1993).

ful economy. Gary Gereffi makes a similar point in explaining why *maquilas* do not promote the same kind of export oriented growth seen in Korea. Enrique Dussel Peters takes us through a very good accounting of the changes in Mexico's manufacturing sector. He points out that trade liberalization was never a part of a coherent development strategy, but rather was pursued as "an instrument and as a goal in itself" (p. 81) with disastrous consequences. Both he and Marilyn Gates (writing on agriculture) make similar points: Economic sectors are becoming increasingly *internally* differentiated depending on their position within and links to a global market. Other chapters give incisive analysis of the relations between the private sector and the government (Francisco Valdés Ugalde), corporatism (Judith Teichman³), Chiapas (Lynn Stephen and Neil Harvey with very different views on the conflict), democratic transition (Ilán Selmo), and cross-national labor relations (Barry Carr).

Given the findings discussed in the previous chapters, it is surprising to read Otero's concluding essay that suggests that there may be economic as well as political alternatives available to Mexico. A reborn PRI could abandon some of the most savage aspects of its form of capitalism or a left coalition could even move towards a more social-democratic regime. Yet, the evidence presented in the first two hundred pages of the book gives a very different impression. The book might even promote some unintentional sympathy for Salinas. Analyzing Mexico's position within the global economy and the constraints under which the state must function, it is not easy to visualize alternative strategies to the Salinas project. If we take seriously widely shared assumptions about Mexican dependence on external financing, loss of state autonomy, and the weakness of the manufacturing sector, then a 'kinder and gentler' Mexico would require either an unexpected bonanza (e.g., tripling oil prices) or a deep reform (revolution?) of social relations. It would be foolish to count on the first, and insane to predict the outcome of the second. If the slope is as slippery as these authors would indicate, Salinas's options might have been the best available and his follies immaterial.

Dismantling the Mexican State?, edited by Rob Aitken et al., pays much more attention to what we may call the political culture of the *sexento* and its aftermath. Alan Knight's chapter on the meaning and contradictions of social liberalism is quite good. Knight takes the Salinas discourse seriously and shows how it pro-

3. See also her *Privatization and Political Change in Mexico* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995).

vided an excellent indication of where the regime sought to go (a combination of neoliberal economics with a paternal state) and what it meant for Mexican democracy (not good). Other chapters continue this analysis of the ideological components of the *saltnato*. Aitken focuses on the explicit individualism at the heart of neoliberal ideology and the extent to which this contradicts historical communitarianism and Revolutionary ideology. More importantly, Aitken suggests that, much like its nineteenth century counterpart, neoliberalism will falter since the constraints facing most Mexicans contrast so starkly with the promise of individual freedom. Political discourse needs to be embedded in some social reality or it merely leads to frustration. Kathy Powell makes similar points remarking how the policies of neoliberalism and the accompanying ideology served to undermine precisely those sectors and institutions on whom the government relied for support. Victoria Rodríguez and Peter Ward offer a very original (and empirically grounded) skepticism about the future of a democratic PRI. No matter what its success may be, they state, there is such an ingrained cynicism about the party that even successes do not readily produce support and the coattails of even the best candidates are quite limited.

This volume also challenges the PRI-centric and Distrito Federal-centric bias which characterizes most writing on Mexico. Chapters by Gustavo Vicencio, David Stansfield, and Jorge Regalado give a much needed in-depth look at how the PAN governs and competes for power.⁴ David Stansfield provides a good summary of internal PAN debates. Wil Pansters goes beyond simple labels of regime and opposition in San Luis Potosí and analyzes deeper historical roots of *caciquismo*, including the often cited but little discussed case of Salvador Nava. Although recent work has largely shied away from the theme, it is interesting to note how strong a role *caudillismo* still plays in Latin American politics on all sides of the institutional and ideological battles. John Gledhill, Gareth Jones, Ann Varley, and Jane Hindley continue the focus on ideology through an analysis of rural policy, Solidarity, and *indigenismo*. All these once again confirm that Salinas had a rare mastery of symbolic manipulation which allowed policies promoting greater centralized authoritarianism to appear as encouraging grassroots independence.

The major fault with the Aitken et al. volume is the absence of an introductory or concluding chapter linking the findings to a co-

4. See also Victoria Rodríguez and Peter Ward, eds., *Opposition Government in Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995).

herent view of the *salinato*. This would be especially useful since so many of the articles focus on the largely neglected cultural side of the Salinas project. No one has yet properly analyzed the great success Salinas had in creating a form of technocratic *caudillismo* combining patronage and the glorification of an autocratic style. It is important to remember that Salinas took over a country that many predicted was ready to explode. He then proceeded to publicly and institutionally undermine some of the most sacred cows of Mexican political rhetoric while offering little economic relief to large parts of the population. Considering the wager, Chiapas—especially after the scares of the first week—was a relatively mild response.⁵ How Salinas was able to maintain even the very frayed political stability of contemporary Mexico cannot be totally explained by Solidarity patronage or innate conservatism, but requires a deeper analysis of symbolic politics. This volume is a good start in this direction.

The *Crónica del gobierno* is a potentially rich source of material on this issue. The Unidad de la Crónica Presidencial has been doing a spectacular job for social scientists and historians since its creation under President Miguel de la Madrid (DLM). Its *Diccionario Biográfico* is the best source on Mexican political personnel (excepting Rod Camp's files) and have no known equivalent anywhere in Latin America. Its archives will also provide future historians with an unparalleled view of the inner workings of the Mexican government. The *Crónica* (much like its predecessor *Las razones y las obras* for DLM) is anything but an objective document and its bias is open and consistent. It does possess, however, a wealth of statistical information. Certainly, it is one of the first places to look for data on the *salinato*. More importantly, it offers a wonderful opportunity to analyze the self-presentation of a regime.⁶ Its collection of Salinas's speeches and quotes, choice of photographs and accomplishments, and general discursive tone deserve much more attention than it has received. As students of

5. If we compare Chiapas to something like Chechnya, it is clear that the government has been either very lucky or very smart.

6. The chapter by Agustín Carstens and Moisés J. Schwartz in Serrano and Bulmer-Thomas's edited volume offers an inadvertent glimpse into the technocratic perspective still dominant in leading Mexican institutions. First, there is the continued triumphalist tone which seems to regard December 1994 as a mere adjustment necessary to balance equations. More interestingly is the disregard for the social context in which economic policy was implemented. A perfect example is the satisfied manner in which the authors detail the fiscal reforms made after 1994, which include a higher value added tax and more expensive public services and goods, yet completely neglect any discussion of income or wealth taxation.

Mexico we have become so accustomed to looking for the hint behind the lie, the fraud behind the vote, and the betrayal behind the *abrazo*, that we have largely neglected formal analysis of how the regime speaks and what it says about itself.⁷ This collection should be one of the first destinations of any student of the past *sexento*.

Looking at this political culture from the opposite direction, Domínguez and McCann analyze the basic contours of Mexican political public opinion. They first find that there are few vestiges of what we may call authoritarian culture. The Mexican population is "interested in politics, attentive to political campaigns, and [discusses] politics freely" and does not prefer strong leaders to reliance on the rule of law (pp. 7-8). The most interesting contribution of this book is that it reaffirms what many have long suspected: The ideological fissure dividing the Mexican population is not defined by issues or stances but by attitudes toward the PRI. Feelings about the government's performance and its chances of survival explain a large part of any electoral variance. This may go far in explaining the relative ease with which the regime survived both 1988 and 1994, as well as Salinas's appeal. The technocrats' political-electoral base consisted of party diehards—the corrupt votes of the still existing cacique fiefdoms, *and* that large part of the population that was unwilling as yet to consider a PRI-less Mexico and that believed that Salinas could actually pull off his miracle. In 1991, for example, Mexicans asked themselves, first and foremost, whether they wished to preserve the 'party of the state'. The answer was yes (p. 148).

What is interesting here is that, despite all his technocratic qualities, Salinas in the end depended on a very old political trick. As Domínguez and McCann ably demonstrate, a large part of the Mexican population thought that the economy and the country were doing very well in the early 1990s. This opinion prevailed despite the fact that jobs, wages, and economic growth were not very spectacular even in the glory years of the *salinato*. It was Salinas, not Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, who was the true candidate of hope. This myth, combined with the lack of ideological coherence analyzed by Domínguez and McCann, allowed Salinas to fool enough people enough of the time.

It is possible that such mirages are critical for success. As Albert Hirschman maintained in another context, delusion may be an important part of attaining goals. But, it did make the Salinas project extremely fragile to exogenous shocks. Chiapas, Colosio, Mario

7. The exception here is the ongoing work of Larisa Adler Lomnitz and Claudio Lomnitz.

Ruiz Massieu, and even the devaluation might have had less of an impact on a population (or a global market) truly committed to the leader's ideological program. But the Mexican technocracy had always sold itself on the pragmatic grounds that it could deliver success. When it could not even guarantee the behavior of its supposed allies in global finance, its legitimacy was perhaps permanently weakened.

Recent events in Mexico require explanations that lie in the middle range between 'great men' theories and over-deterministic models in which little is left to an individual. Serrano and Bulmer-Thomas's *Rebuilding the State* offers a coherent and satisfactory synthesis. Serrano's introductory chapter is excellent. She points out that the increased centralization of Salinas's power was partly purchased by the decline of intraparty discipline and that this produced increasing levels of disorder within the party apparatus. Thus, for example, Salinas' willingness to give Baja California to the PAN in 1989 gave him a great deal of leeway in national politics but may have produced the tensions that led to Colosio's assassination.

Juan Molinar's contribution is also quite good,⁸ as are those of Carlos Elizondo, and Manuel González Oropeza. All proceed from the assumption that formal rules and institutions do matter and, no matter how apparently moot and obscure, can help shape the transition. Paralleling the Serrano analysis, Elizondo claims that the institutional agreements reached during the *salinato* did increase the autonomy of the central government, but reduced its capacity to rule. In this way, the chaos of 1994 may have been the price for the apparent absolutism of 1989-1991. Certainly, the crime figures cited by González would indicate that the state is beginning to lose control over basic public safety. Foweraker's chapter continues the exploration of the relationship between formal laws and the discretionary power of authorities. The continued importance of the latter makes Foweraker pessimistic about the chances of a democratic transition.

Lorenzo Meyer's *Liberalismo autoritario* may be the best book on the *salinato*. Meyer successfully combines a sensitivity to the structural constraints facing Mexico with a profound understanding of how the various agents played the game and helped determine what happened in 1994. Meyer notes two critical contradictions in

8. See also his *El tiempo de la legitimidad: elecciones, autoritarismo y democracia en México* (Mexico: Cal y Arena, 1991) and "Changing the Balance of Power in a Hegemonic Party System: The Case of Mexico," in *Institutional Design in New Democracies*, ed. Arend Lijphart and Carlos Waisman. (Boulder: Westview Press 1996)

the Salinas project. The first had to do with economic goals and the instruments used to reach them. The technocrats had both a deep faith in the ability of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to open the floodgates of investment and an almost mystical devotion to controlling inflation. Both led to an overvalued peso that made it impossible to generate an export boom or to attract fixed investments. The second contradiction was that the regime's autocratic measures resolving problems actually prevented it from recognizing crises before it was too late. Rather than helping *salinastroiika*, the absence of a Mexican *glasnost* weakened the regime.

These paradoxical attributes produced some of the *sexenio*'s most surprising aspects. An administration associated with a smaller state made government deals more important than ever in creating private fortunes. A regime promising order saw increases in crime. Personnel legitimated by their economic expertise made errors costing billions. A policy to make Mexico more like an East Asian dragon made it look increasingly like a case from a *dependentista* textbook. Elections won by the opposition often required the imposition of fraud from the capital. A president who emphasized being realistic, ended up depending on a mutual delusion of affluence.

How do all these books help us understand what happened to the *salinato*? While not ignoring the obvious, deeper, historical roots of much of what happened in 1994 and 1995, we need to go back to 1982 and 1988. The first year marks the beginning of the economic crisis which Salinas sought to resolve and the second, the creation of the political environment in which he had to operate. From these twin crises, Salinas inherited a series of challenges. He had to either increase domestic investment or attract foreign capital in order to regenerate growth after the recession of the mid 1980s. This required a stable currency and the creation of adequate incentives. Politically, Salinas had to rely on a machine increasingly challenged on the right, having fewer resources to appease the corporatist mechanism in charge of the left, and facing a decline in its general legitimacy. Salinas' solution, for all its technocratic pretensions, had a long history in Mexico. Much like Benito Juárez before him, Salinas felt he had to "impose progress from above on a dirt-poor population . . . democracy had to be postponed yet again so that an ancient, traditionalist, miserable invisible nation could finally prosper, guided by its liberal elite" (Fuentes, p. 65).

The key to the Salinas economic policy was a form of trickle-down theory—not simply in terms of wealth, but also as effects percolated down from the macroeconomic environment. As Enrique

Dussel Peters explains, a "reduction in inflation rates and the financial deficit would induce sectoral and microeconomic structural change" (Otero, p. 65). Good macroeconomists that they were, the technocrats believed in the adjustment qualities of the system. Given the right signals, the Mexican economy and the global markets would behave in textbook fashion. They did, but the incentives created rewarded soft investments.⁹ Moreover, the very mechanisms used to attract capital also retarded its productive implementation. Tying the peso to the dollar created an exchange barrier to increased exports.

Politically, Salinas wanted to rule in what O'Donnell has called a "delegative democracy." He was willing to allow opposition and even criticism, but only as long as these did not get in the way of his fundamental goals. Obviously, Salinas was much less the monk many of us imagined. Castañeda and Oppenheimer provide more than a cursory view of the Salinas family's dirty laundry. Perhaps the corruption which permeated the upper reaches of the elite played a significant role in the collapse of 1994. All agree, however, that the certitude with which Salinas and company handled both economics and politics did have costs. The failure to respond to the many signals given by the economic market and the political arena led to what Fuentes calls the "year of living dangerously."

Much as in his economic policy, Salinas's politics suffered from not accepting the consequences of actions. He wanted the support of the PAN, but seemed unaware that it would alienate those in the PRI. He wanted to dismantle corporatism, but was unwilling to allow the development of a truly independent party. He wanted the stability of the PRI without the dinosaurs, but became increasingly dependent on them. He wanted global prestige and NAFTA but without all those reporters in the Lacandon jungle. His failure or unwillingness to face the costs of his choices made the technocratic project a hostage to luck and exogenous forces.

Is the technocratic revolution over? Few of the authors deal explicitly with the question, but the general agreement is that most of the institutions of *salinastroika* will remain. Despite his personal failure, Salinas is leaving a mark on the Mexican state perhaps comparable to that of Lázaro Cárdenas. Mexico is bound to the United States and the global market (and both are ever more committed to Mexico). The electoral system is increasingly democratically legitimated but largely offers choices between conservative economic

9. John Weiss, in the Aitken et al. collection calculates that nearly 75 percent of the foreign investment in 1992, for example, was in either the stock or money markets (p. 71).

ideologies. The corporatist apparatus has been weakened and is unlikely to challenge central power. A generation of Salinas's political heirs dominates much of the federal and provincial organizations. Like Plutarco Elías Calles before him, Salinas may not get any statues (at least not in the near future), but the state will be his monument.

So, did he fall, or was he pushed? Despite recent revelations, most believe Salinas was after more than money or an important job in the international civil service. Moreover, given his not unreasonable view of likely scenarios and their prospects, his policies made sense *in the absence of radical social change*. It is here that Salinas miscalculated and tripped: He misread the consequences of his policies. He assumed that he could manage a reform from above that would leave the hierarchy of Mexican society untouched. He expected to court the favor of the United States and global markets with impunity. Interestingly, he was not brought down by the popular revolt many of us have been expecting but by precisely the 'cellular phone class' he had helped to create. They might come to regret their profits. *El Popo* has been rumbling lately and no one looks capable of climbing it.