

Democratic Left: the Mexican Statement

(translated by Paula Ramírez Hohne)

1. Contemporary world, societies and economies of the second decade of the 21st century, face a dilemma of great dimensions: renounce and remain within the model and ideology that have made of the market and of supposedly anonymous decisions an utopia, an ideal of human existence; or alternatively, abandon that archetype in order to build a society based on political agreements, on rights and on democracy.

2. This is certainly a dilemma because the neoliberal domination that has expanded for almost forty years around the world has been shaken and questioned as never before, after the massive and destructive financial crisis that began in 2008. The financial sector as the axis of all growth, deregulation without caution, and the idea that public intervention is always a problem, created a crisis causing the product's and real wealth's major setback since the Great Depression.

According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), great deregulation and its crisis has cost the world 27% of the developed nations' GDP, and 2% of the larger emerging economies' GDP. 35 million jobs lost is the result of this economic and social devastation, whose significance hasn't been sufficiently evaluated yet. A number of agencies, financial institutions, national and global, intellectuals, schools and the media have made great effort to ignore this evidence and save themselves the trouble to lecture about this crisis, which has been as bad or even worse than that of 1929: the breeding ground of the Second World War.

3. Indeed, because of the great number of jobs and wealth destroyed, because of its worldwide extension and depth, in the roots of the financial system, the 2008 crisis is larger than the 1929 one, although its effects have not been so devastating. Why? Because of the existence of two structures of civilization built after 1945: the Welfare State and democratic politics.

The State as a guarantor of last recourse, public guarantees of bank deposits, social benefits, unemployment insurance, pensions funds, and representative institutions, with their diverse public counterweights, have provided nations with the capacity to manage a social and economic reaction that didn't exist in 1929. This is why the current crisis has not had the same catastrophic effects than its historical ancestor.

Nonetheless – in what constitutes one of the major modern absurdities- democratic institutions and the Welfare State have been questioned and attacked by precisely the same powers that created the crisis.

This is why there is nothing more important for our present civilization and the global Left, than the simultaneous recognition and vindication of the Welfare State and democratic politics.

4. In North America and Europe the issue is about the defense of both these conquests; in Latin America, it is rather about to build and consolidate them: essential liberties and structures of cohesion and social equality are and will be, the central tasks of the Left; even more so now that the world is in the throes of deciding between neoliberal utopia or to re-build, on a political, national and global basis, an explicit compromise for human coexistence.

Latin America –the Latin American Left- most attend this debate, learn from the European and the developed world lessons, to develop, in this region, such civilizing arrangement as emerged from the war's ashes.

5. We affirm that Latin America is ready to attend this debate because, besides its inequality and shortcomings, it is already a democratic continent. After the Cold War and the dull era of dictatorships and old authoritarianisms, Latin America can claim having reached its first generation of democratic life.

Almost all Latin American democracies were born like this: among discrete pacts, with the advent of parties that were previously banned, a faint expansion of liberties –especially of the press and assembly- and inaugural free elections. Starting

in the early 80's, Latin America entered the third democratic wave, and from then on it configured a political "age", a period so particular in its configuration and so long-lasting, that we can legitimately call it a historical period.

We celebrate Latin American democracy as an acknowledgment of a major conquest in which the Left played an absolutely decisive role. Another big task is still pending –equity and social cohesion- but without the democratic achievement, the scenario that we face today would be totally unthinkable: we witness great leftist national formations, whole country governments and of the most important cities of the region in hands of the Left, acting and deliberating plural congresses, powerful programs for social equality and a public debate with no strings attached; we live a scene like never before in our independent history.

For the first time, Latin American Left lives politics without fear, publicly, with its own resources and real possibilities of expanding, reproducing and access to power.

6. However, living in democracy implies responsibilities and commitments. It is the possibility of gaining access to government, but also of losing it, in open, inclusive and equitable disputes, always in a framework of unconditional respect towards the citizens' choice.

Everywhere, democracy is a commitment: with the vote expressed in the ballots, with the law, with the institutions and with a real political and social plurality.

The commitment of the Left with democracy is simply this: the recognition that it will live in a plural world. Our societies are so complex, heterogeneous and unequal that no actor or movement can claim to represent its entirety in its different formulations: the people, the citizens, or simply the society. Plurality is not a way station, it is the real world that we will live in henceforth.

This is why, if the expression "modern left" has to make some sense, it is precisely this: a Left that has assimilated and accepted to live, compete and coexist with others, with a plurality that is as real and legitimate as the Left itself.

7. For the Left this implies –from now on- thinking democracy as the sole framework of procedures, behavior and values that allow a plural society to organize, govern and transform itself.

This commitment with democracy and pluralism is not circumstantial, nor instrumental. It is neither a declaration to appease the powers that be, or to soothe apprehensive voters, but a political and cultural education which cannot be given up.

Therefore, the creation of solutions and a program for the democratic Left cannot be conceived but as a difficult and continuous practice in the general interest, in contact with adversaries, with diverse and even opposing interests and thoughts, a practice of persuasion, debate, dialogue, agreements and reforms.

This is the great difference with the primitive Left, for which negotiations and agreements with the “others” is not an option or at the most an occasional option. Rather, for the democratic Left, the deliberate search for agreements is THE strategy, the only way to influence and transform plural society.

8. Real pluralism, inescapable and permanent in Latin American societies, should place the issue of the presidential political system, so painstakingly deployed in its modern democracies, as one of the main concerns of its agenda.

The 18 imperfect democracies in Latin America escaped authoritarianism and its dictatorships, within the scope of historical presidential regimes and in the image and likeness of the American Constitution. However, from the political and constitutional point of view, no political problem seems to be as important as the tense and complex relations between the President and Congresses of this region.

This is because this new era not only begat legitimate powers through free elections, but also created a dispersal of power itself, given that Parliaments –now inhabited by political pluralism- took on a prominence never before seen in our independent history. Here and there the emergence of “divided governments” has configured the scene, complicated government and fenced in, in different ways, the behavior of Presidents.

The paradox is at the heart of the presidential system: on one hand the need for a strong but limited President, able to make decisions but full of controls, expeditious but attentive to majorities in Parliaments. On the other hands, we have Congresses that channel demands and needs of the people at the same time safeguarding the interests of its constituency or clientele; Congresses that debate, evaluate, supervise but do not obstruct the Government. This is the unsolved political equation of our democratization.

To transcend the inevitable electoral inventory, to open the political imagination in terms of the constitutional political regime, to explore the parliament alternative, these too are part of the mandatory agenda of the democratic Left of our times.

9. Finally, modern and free societies cannot build unless they have a solid foundation of rights and responsibilities. Basic rights that contribute to peace and equality, that guarantee democracy and above all, protect the weakest.

The democratic Left is the Left of basic rights, because these rights express the treatment that society owes its weakest members.

Rights cost, our liberties do not come for free. The constitutional democratic system is nothing but a set of rules, backed by the State and paid for with public monies, including the rights required by the markets: property rights, contract, lending and transaction rights. Including also civil, political, economic and environmental rights. Wherever there is a right recognized by law, there has to be a mechanism that watches over it and defends it, and that has a cost, always.

Taxes are inseparable from rights, thus they are a tool of the public sphere and they express what society is willing to pay to give itself guarantees of coexistence, progress and solidarity.

10. We have presented the features, reasons and purposes of the democratic Left. This is not the place to draw up a program with concrete measures. Rather, this is the

space to position the essential and unavoidable coordinates that define this Left in modern societies.

70 years ago, thanks to the democratic Left, of social democracy, Western societies escaped war and chronic depression, with a new vision and a new economic theory which, in practice, achieved sustained growth for three decades, through the fairest income redistribution in history.

The democratic Left is thus called to learn the lessons of the past and to repeat the great social reformist effort that developed the Welfare State and representative democracy.

We believe that the main proposals presented here, are the stuff of discussions both urgent and strategic, because they issue from afar and because, the relevance and benefits of the market society that materializes the uncaring ideal of utopian capitalism, is still occupying center stage in economic and social debates.

Mexico is a universal counter example of this debate: during the last decades the total number of Mexicans below the poverty line has not only not been contained but has continued to grow: from 47 million in 1994 to 61.3 million in 2012. After three decades of changes, globalization and “structural reforms”, the poor continue to represent more than half the population: 52.3% in 2012.

The bottom line, 61 million poor, of which 20 million are extremely poor, after a major economic change and also after two violent financial crisis, in 1995 of an internal nature and the world crisis of 2009.

In a fast forward of the last thirty years, the above is even clearer: in the 80s the first “liberal” reforms appeared, with the stated goal of projecting Mexico –almost at any price- into globalization. The 90s are the years of reformist excitement, when the major structural changes –such as the TLCAN- crystallized. And then, the first decade of the 21st century can be defined as the phase in which liberalization became bureaucracy and inertia, the decade consecrated to macroeconomic stability and its “culture”. With its variations, sometimes formidable, sometimes dark, with different hues and contrasts, the last three decades are the most disappointing, from the point of view of Mexico’s economic development, since the Revolution. And this is the main

source of the malaise of these times, the fuel that feeds the discontent with democracy and plurality.

The results of the last 30 years of neo-liberalization in Mexico and the word, demand explanations: What happened with the liberal reforms? What has been the real effect of structural changes inflicted by this last modernization, the one that covered from the 80s up to now? Why, in this period, only in one year have the jobs required by our demographics been created? Why do we depend on low salaries? Do we really need more of the same?

We sustain that it is necessary to place the debate at its proper place: in the real consequences of 30 years of structural reforms, in the urgent progress towards equality that a minimum sense of social cohesion requires, and in these first years of democratic life that has taken us to a confusing and disappointing condition.

This statement, drawn up in Mexico, is not, nor pretends to be a reflection of the whole of contemporary reality, nor does it offer a wide catalogue of proposed changes. Rather it is a rallying cry to the left to concentrate on the two central problems of these times: on one hand inequality, poverty and social divide and on the other hand the type of democracy that will be able to provide their solution.