Foreword to the First Edition

In general, the accounts of Mexican reality written by outside observers — the perspective of the "other" — have been neither better nor worse than those written by Mexicans themselves. They are simply different, and their importance lies precisely in that difference. When the view from the outside has been the combined result of good writing, intelligence, and scholarship, the result has been outstanding, as shown in *The Discovery and Conquest of Mexico* (1632) by the Spanish soldier Bernal Díaz del Castillo, the *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain* (1807–1811) by the Berlin scientist Alexander von Humboldt, *Insurgent Mexico* (1914) by the North American revolutionary John Reed, or *The Politics of Mexican Development* (1971) by the Harvard political scientist Roger D. Hansen, to cite only a handful of classics. We now welcome a fresh systematic overview of Mexican reality coming from Daniel C. Levy and Kathleen Bruhn, with the participation of Emilio Zebadúa (who helps highlight Mexican perspectives). Together these three capture a picture of the political process in Mexico at a time when both the country and the regime have been changing dramatically. As a result of the elections of July 2, 2000, Mexican society has peacefully brought an end to the regime born in 1916 out of the Mexican Revolution, and which led to seventy-one uninterrupted years of guaranteed stability through the monopoly of a single party.

This latest change in Mexico is without historical precedent. Ever since the dramatic encounter between the Europeans and the native

Mexicans at the beginning of the sixteenth century, all changes of regime have occurred through violence: the establishment of Spanish control, independence, the restoration of the republic during the second half of the nineteenth century, and the Mexican Revolution of 1910.

This book by Levy, Bruhn, and Zebadúa concentrates on the transformation of contemporary Mexico. Starting from an analysis of the present, the book attempts to look into the immediate future — the only goal within reach of the social sciences. The authors begin with the proposition elaborated thirty-five years ago by Pablo González Casanova in *Democracy in Mexico* (1965) and which continues to be as valid today as it was then: in order for Mexico to achieve true modernization, it is necessary to establish a political democracy.

For the authors of *Mexico: The Struggle for Democratic Development*, the appropriate definition of the Mexican political system that existed up to July 2, 2000, is not the one employed by a majority of analysts — that of authoritarian — but a more generous variation — that of "semidemocracy." This term takes into account the encouraging results of the federal election of mid-1997 when, for the first time since 1929, the opposition managed to wrest control of the Congress from the state party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). The country was then on the threshold of democracy; with a little luck, it could leave behind the old authoritarianism and begin to build a real democracy. And when fortune did, in fact, smile upon Mexico on July 2, 2000, it brought to an end, without bloodshed, eighty-three years of uninterrupted control by the revolutionary elite and their successors of the powerful presidency, Mexico's fundamental political institution, the one on which all the others depend.

With the presidential election of 2000 — a competitive election that took place under more favorable conditions than ever before — Mexico won its democratic spurs, though not the "democracy without adjectives" that Enrique Krauze demanded in 1986 after the electoral fraud in Chihuahua. The authors of this work have turned to Mario Vargas Llosa, the famous Peruvian writer — another foreigner who has observed and judged our country with precision — to baptize the newly born Mexican political democracy with his term: "difficult democracy." This difficulty is due to the many obstacles it will have to overcome before it can be consolidated.

No one can refute the authors' affirmation that even though the first constitution of independent Mexico, that of 1824, was a democratic constitution, as were also those of 1857 and 1917, the reality of democracy is

fundamentally new in Mexico. The country does not have any political history of the effective exercise of democracy. As opposed to the United States, the Mexican experience of the prehispanic and colonial eras, the nineteenth century, and the century that has just ended and that ran its course in the shadow of the Revolution of 1910 offered few opportunities to prepare for democracy. In practice, that broad span of several hundred years served more as a constant reaffirmation of Mexico's anti-democratic characteristics. As a result, Mexico opens today a new and decisive chapter in its political life, without having developed the institutions and practices necessary for the exercise of democracy. Nonetheless, in order to become a successful society in the twenty-first century, Mexico has no alternative but to throw itself into the ocean of democracy and learn to swim. There is no question that Mexican democracy promises to be difficult!

Levy, Bruhn, and Zebadúa argue, and argue well, that the political competition that gave rise to the results of July 2 — the death certificate of the old regime — is causally linked to the opening of the country to market competition over the last fifteen years. In effect, the 1970s showed that Mexico's semi-statist and protectionist models were no longer viable; in 1982, these models fell apart altogether. Because of the importance that the management of the economy then acquired for the survival of the political system based on the state party — in particular, the management of an enormous and growing external debt — the technocrats and neoliberal politicians displaced the traditional and neopopulist politicians though they continued — also to no avail — to try to save authoritarianism until the very end.

Over the past three presidential terms, and without much ceremony, a small technocratic elite took over the leadership of the PRI. Using the PRI as a lever it moved Mexico out from behind its old nationalistic and protectionist walls and placed it fully in the field of tough competition within the global market through a subordinated and dependent association with the United States as framed by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). This shift meant undermining in necessary and irreversible ways the corporatist and nationalist underpinnings of the authoritarianism inherited by the technocrats. It was the beginning of the end for the old regime. From this perspective, the regime born in the Mexican Revolution became an unviable arrangement at the end of the twentieth century — the free market was incompatible with a statist and presidential economy whose goal was to preserve the corporatist social

bases of the state party — though the exact moment of its demise was not pre-determined.

For the authors, the three fundamental dimensions of modern democracy are liberty, accountability by public officials, and political equality. Clearly Mexico has problems, and serious problems at that, in all three areas and will continue to have them in the foreseeable future.

It is in the arena of formal liberty where this book shows the greatest and the most well-founded optimism. In effect Mexican mass media have made great strides, and civil society is very much alive and already a systematic producer of independent organizations. Nevertheless accountability of government officials to the public is an arena where, without denying progress, there is much less optimism. If on the one hand, Mexican citizens who make demands on and ask questions of authorities are replacing the old vassals, the technocracy's style of governing that dominated Mexico in the last two decades of the twentieth century — isolated from the social bases of the system — was a step backward in terms of accountability. The defeat of the PRI and the arrival of a new political group, on the Right though committed to democracy, give room for some hope by citizens for progress in the art of making demands and insisting on accountability. Unfortunately, the terrible legacy of corruption that the new regime inherits will make the implementation of an effective and law-abiding state very problematic; the battle for legality is yet to be fought in Mexico.

It is in the field of political equality where the authors quite aptly find the biggest obstacle, the Achilles' heel of the new Mexican democracy. In every capitalist system, true political equality is detoured and deformed by existing economic inequality; in Mexico, the lack of social equity is especially brutal. The most worrisome aspect is that the economic policy implemented within the framework of neoliberalism leads us to believe that rather than basic inequality diminishing, it will increase. Official figures in 1998 confirm that social inequality continues to deepen; today the richest 10 percent of homes receive 40 percent of available income, while the poorest 10 percent must be content with barely 1 percent. In this context, the recently won Mexican democracy will have to operate in a very difficult environment: social contradictions will grow sharper without the new system being able to offer any equivalent to the traditional authoritarian controls that could moderate the contradictory demands of social groups. The old dikes of authoritarianism are broken, and demands for improved standards of life made by the vast majority of the population may flood a political system that enjoys very limited

means to either manipulate internationalized economic variables or come to the assistance of the many losers of this economic competition.

The space this book dedicates to the bilateral relationship between Mexico and the United States is so realistic as to be brutal. More than half a century ago, in 1947, just as the recently deceased authoritarian system was entering the years of its greatest glory, one of its first and most notable critics, Daniel Cosío Villegas, wrote an essay entitled "The Crisis in Mexico" published in *Cuadernos Americanos*. In it, Cosío claimed that the heirs of the Mexican Revolution, having abandoned their commitments to democracy and legal and social justice, would sooner or later bring the regime down a dead-end street. At that juncture, the ruling elite would be tempted to ask for North American help; the country to the north could give it, but the cost would be that Mexico should stop being Mexico. The prediction came true; as a result of the great crisis of 1982, the Mexican technocracy, with no other way out, ended up asking the United States for the North American Free Trade Agreement (signed in 1993) thereby internationalizing the Mexican economy by integrating it into the formidable productive apparatus of the world's greatest power. The economy was revitalized, but Mexican nationalism, so laboriously constructed over the course of two centuries, disappeared. Mexico, as the authors affirm, is destined to become more and more a "normal" country, that is, like any other at the same stage of development. The consequences of the disappearance of Mexican independence and nationalism remain to be studied.

Political stability was the central characteristic of the old authoritarian Mexican regime. The price of more than seven decades of the stability that Mexican elites and the outside world valued so much — especially the United States, since, among other things, it allowed for great security along its southern border during the Cold War — was paid by the majority of Mexican society with a lack of liberty, the perpetuation of an antidemocratic civil society, the institutionalization of corruption in all levels of government, the uncontrolled growth of organizations linked to drug trafficking, and, finally, the consolidation of great social inequality. It is with this heavy weight on its back that Mexican society must quickly construct new democratic institutions, now the only kind that are compatible with the internationalization of its economy.

The authors of this book are fully conscious of the formidable task that the Mexicans are facing. Nevertheless, in the end, they are cautiously optimistic. Those of us most directly affected, the Mexicans them-

selves, are obliged to do nothing less than adopt a similar attitude, quite simply because any other alternative is so terrible as to be unacceptable. We must move toward the future — the possible democracy — with our eyes wide open. This book — thanks to the measure of anxiety it instills in the reader — will help to keep us in a state of alert.

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