

## **From the editor: Fox's New Mexico: Is It More Than Smoke and Mirrors?**

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Special Issue on The New Mexico Under Fox: Is it Happening?

Too few Canadians understand the importance and significance of the Fox administration. Not since the coming to power of Castro over forty years ago has there been such a signal change in political regime in the hemisphere. The question is whether the modern presidency of Fox is all spin provided thanks to the small army of communications specialists he has hired to give him and his Presidency a modern, forward looking image as a branded product? Canadians also want to know whether, beyond the glitter and hoopla, unannounced and unheard of, there is a quiet revolution happening in Mexico, a transition from one-party rule to modern democracy? If there is, what's the evidence for it?

This special issue of Canada Watch, *The New Mexico Under Fox: Is it Happening?* offers a unique behind the scenes examination of the first six months of the Fox Administration. All of the contributors are specialists and the issue is a joint effort of the Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies and Centre of North American Studies (CISEAN), UNAM in Mexico City.

Fox, like Chrétien, was elected as a reformer and an alternative to the discredited neo-liberal policies of his predecessor. But the public's confidence with newly elected governments quickly turns to disillusionment if promises are not kept. Public apathy, low voter turn-out and cynicism are much in evidence in Canada. As many Mexican contributors to this issue contend, the Fox Administration enjoyed one of the highest approval ratings of any modern presidency but in many policy areas the change in political power has been one more of style than substance. Will voter apathy and disillusionment be far behind?

Many Mexicans have become Fox sceptics and have lost their innocence about Mexico's transition to democracy? Why?

### **Public Apathy and Anger**

The Fox government has learned to manage the public rather than serve its needs and interests. So far his administration has not addressed Mexico's crushing debt. Public sector debts amount to 48% of GDP. With such indebtedness Fox will have precious few resources for addressing Mexico's most pressing social issues – poverty, public housing, health care, a modern education

system, environmental issues and labour reform.

It is disturbing that initially Fox wanted to tax the poor more on food, medicine and other necessities. Mexico has one of the most leaky tax systems in Latin America and the wealthy, the rich and foreign corporations do not pay their fair share. Some experts argue that the Fox Administration does not have to raise taxes but to simply collect the taxes that are owed them by rich Mexicans. Its administrative system is so corrupt and inefficient that one of the first steps the Fox presidency needed to take was to reform the government and all of its ministries. So far there is little evidence that this task is on his legislative agenda.

Some reform is happening but it is at the edges of government and there is little sign that Fox has the political commitment to make a clean break with the past.

The paradox is that Mexico, like Canada, has a highly organized, sophisticated and experienced social movement which could be a formidable opponent to Fox's rather disappointing start. The fact that increasingly it is the domestic arena that defines Mexico's foreign policy interests will surprise few. The high profile issues for Mexico's civil society are not those of the hemisphere.

Where does this leave Canada and its relationship with Mexico? Our trade with Mexico is small, even if growing. To raise it to five percent of our total exports from its current mini-levels as a share of total exports would take nothing short of a revolution on Canada's and Mexico's part.

Simply put, the glue will never be economic. It will be geo-political, to limit US intrusion into Canadian and Mexican affairs. As contributors to this special issue of *Canada Watch* underline, the fit between the *dos amigos* has never been easy, even if the timing for a much closer relationship could not be better in theory. Politics in international relations is never a theoretical exercise. So far a closer Canada-Mexico accord has not happened naturally, spontaneously or effortlessly.

We need to get up to speed and figure out where the obstacles are. Canadians and Mexicans need to look at the different kinds of initiatives and frameworks that would lead to a strategic alliance. It seems a lot to expect and much is riding on it. For fifty years Mexicans and Canadians have been looking at each anxiously across the continental dance floor and its time they learned to Fox-trot together.

Daniel Drache Editor in Chief