

The Wall of Shame

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In the coming days, the president of Mexico and some of his secretaries of state will be the first to cross over, in an official capacity, the wall – thus far virtual – of shame. According to their public statement, they are setting out determined to defend Mexico's national sovereignty, economic and political independence, with a strategy to keep the trade border and globalisation open for business at any cost if necessary.

The public wonders what they can really do in the face of the threats being issued by the new United States government. Should they apply pressure, ask for understanding and a period to adjust to the changes? Or would introducing retaliation measures be the appropriate response, with higher tariffs to defend manufacturing and the primary sector such as mining, oil and gas, steel and the whole chain of transformation industries and the automotive and electronics sector, industries so vital to our nation's development.

The current level of trade between both nations is substantial, of all Mexican exports, around 80 per cent go to the US market, valued at nearly \$400 million. Imports from America are much lower, meaning Mexico has a trade surplus over its neighbour, something Donald Trump has used to argue that our country has an enormous advantage which he definitively wants to correct and rebalance.

This is why he has insisted on establishing a 35 per cent tariff on imports from Mexico, a tax on cross-border financial transfers made by migrants living in the United States and restricting the free movement of Mexicans to the US, as well as expelling undocumented immigrants and people with criminal records.

During his presidential campaign Trump said he would abandon the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TTP, or ATP in Spanish) and revise or cancel the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA, or TLCAN in Spanish) between Canada, Mexico and the United States. Yesterday, official sources in Ottawa announced that NAFTA was dead in the water, leaving Mexico alone in the trade negotiations, right on the eve of Enrique Peña Nieto's visit to Washington, due to take place next week with certain members of his cabinet.

Mexico now has to negotiate the new framework on its own, and to decide whether it will accept conditions or amendments, or if it will simply decide to leave and abandon a trade deal that



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began 22 years ago, riddled with flaws and inequalities, under Carlos Salinas de Gortari's administration.

Seemingly, the Canadian government's position is this: we love our Mexican friends, but our national interests come first, and friendship second. Canada does also have a very close trading relationship with the States, with 74 per cent of its exports relying on the US market, a similar level to Mexico. That said, its economy is far more diversified and it has a much more stable domestic market. According to the newspaper *El País*, a second government source told Reuters news agency that Mexico is effectively being dangled out of a skyscraper window by its feet. This is an awful situation. We can't do this.

NAFTA will undoubtedly be one of the main issues on the negotiating table when the Mexican and US presidents meet, but there will be other fundamental issues too, such as migration, security, protectionism and restrictions on the growing number of American companies and industries basing themselves in Mexico in recent years, which will have a dramatic effect on jobs and the market. With all this in mind, this meeting between leaders is crucial to our nation's economic future, not least because it comes at a time when the peso finds itself weak against the dollar and other currencies. Added to this, inflation has increased and uncertainty has started to set in amongst national and foreign investors.

We can now see more clearly that the neoliberal economic policy pursued in Mexico over the past 30 years is on the verge of deep crisis. Some of us have long maintained that this model of focused dependence on one country was a mistake. We also said that we needed to diversify and strengthen industry and the domestic market through genuine, sustained wage increases to improve purchasing power, stimulate demand and establish a dynamic of domestic growth that could fortify the country against the sort of crises that unfortunately seem to be on the horizon.

Mexico isn't prepared for these prospective radical changes, let alone to receive and provide decent employment for its fellow citizens that may be about to be deported. After all, who is going to pay the salaries and guarantee the standard of living they currently have in the United States, which they have fought to achieve through great effort, risk and sacrifice? Society's most negative forces could lead them to become mixed up in unlawful activities, totally destabilising the structure of political power and security in Mexico.

When we add to all the above the dubious wall of shame that Donald Trump's government is considering building along the more than 3,000 kilometres of border between the two countries, then the situation becomes much more complex. Mexico will be left in a highly vulnerable position not only



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as a result of the unilateral measures of our northern neighbours, but also thanks to isolation and complicated domestic issues, potentially unleashing all sorts of greed and opportunism. But there's

still time for us to fix the current model and change our course towards one of growth and shared prosperity, where those who have benefited most from the exploitation and pillaging of the last 30 to 40 years will now contribute more for the good of the country, but also for their own good, for history will not forgive them.

Every single one of us, but political leaders most of all, has a duty and responsibility towards our children and future generations. Let us rise up, unite, organise and fight with a plan of action, bravery, passion and the vision to build a better future for all of us.