Chapter 6

Neoliberal Technocracy and Opposition Exams for Hiring Tenured Full–Time Professors in a Mexican Public University

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the introduction of technocratic neoliberal policies in Mexico, starting in the mid-1980s, and their repercussions in higher education are analyzed. Special focus is set on its negative consequences for hiring tenured full-time professors at public universities. A case study from a public university is used to demonstrate how suppressing candidates and arbitrarily favoring others through sham dealing are almost part of the formal procedures now. This case was used because access to all the documentation was granted, and it was possible to interview in depth a female candidate who was suppressed twice. Unfortunately, experiencing suppression, workplace bullying, and mobbing for some candidates is almost the norm now. Also, when suppressed, they are left in a powerless position with almost no resources to confront injustice.

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INTRODUCTION

Starting in the mid-1980’s, the introduction of technocratic neoliberal policies in Mexico, along with their repercussions on higher education, has negatively impacted the dynamics of hiring tenured full-time professors through opposition exams in public universities (Valenzuela, 1991). Such dynamics are the central focus of this text.

Based on the neoliberal economic system, structural adjustment measures were imposed with the goal of “freeing” the economy, such as: reducing the public budget by selling off and cutting back on State enterprises; curbing the general population’s salaries while disproportionately increasing those of government officials; as well as strategies indirectly fostering precarious work, self-employment, underemployment, etc. (Tello, 2019). “Cutbacks” to State intervention led to an increase in national and foreign private sector investments, especially in profitable areas of the economy such as health, education, petrochemicals, etc. Borders were opened, based on the belief that trade would be regulated through competition, putting national products at a disadvantage with respect to their international counterparts (Tello, 2019).

Such policies impacted social dynamics through multiple recursive relationships between national and international areas and contexts. Some of the most relevant transformations in this respect include: the redistribution of socially produced wealth through the concentration of enormous fortunes in the hands of a few, a rise in poverty, and a decline in a majority of the population’s standard of living.

Preexisting inequalities were deepened as the State redefined its relationships and commitments to society by eliminating subsidies on basic consumer goods and defunding public health, education, and housing. While many state services were transferred directly into private hands, the private sector also began to intervene in these areas through so-called public-private associations (Pérez del Castillo, 2018). This led citizens to shoulder many of the costs for which the State relinquished responsibility, triggering a process of privatization of life that contributed to the impoverishment of the vast majority. Interpersonal relationships in the job market, in social life, and in the private sphere were also modified. Competition and individualism were enhanced, which explains, in part, the significant rise in violence during recent years (Vieyra, 2015).

Ultimately, these measures exacerbated poverty and extreme poverty, deteriorating standards of living through a combination of low salaries, underemployment, unemployment (the product of short-term contracts without social benefits, the subcontracting of workers, outsourcing, precarious jobs, and self-employment) and lack of institutional social benefits (de la Garza, 2011). In this way, large sectors of
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