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Zedillo Forced to Shuffle Cabinet Again

by LADB Staff

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In late January, President Ernesto Zedillo was forced to reshuffle his cabinet for the second time since he took office on Dec. 1, 1994, raising some questions whether the executive used good judgement in selecting his original cabinet. In both the previous and present cabinet reshuffles, the changes were forced by the resignation of one central figure. In the latest case, announced on Jan. 22, the cabinet reshuffle followed the resignation of Public Education Secretary Fausto Alzati, who was forced to leave his post following news that the secretary had falsified his academic credentials.

The development was a strong blow to Zedillo, since Alzati had been considered one of Zedillo's closest advisers in the cabinet. Alzati claimed to have received a Ph.D. degree from Harvard University, when in reality he did not even complete the equivalent of a Bachelor's degree. To replace Alzati as Public Education Secretary, Zedillo appointed Miguel Limon Rojas, who had previously held the post of Agrarian Reform Secretary. In turn, Agriculture Secretary Arturo Warman left that post to take Limon's position as Agrarian Reform Secretary. Francisco Labastida Ochoa, a long-time member of the governing Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), was appointed to the post of Agriculture Secretary, replacing Limon. Labastida's inclusion in the cabinet, however, drew strong criticism from political analysts and members of opposition parties. Labastida, a former governor of Sinaloa state, is considered to be a member of the "old guard" of the (PRI), which has been accused of resisting the very political reforms that Zedillo is pushing. Those reforms include an agreement with opposition parties to ensure fair and clean elections at the local and federal levels.

In another minor change, Zedillo accepted the resignation of former Mexico City General Attorney Ruben Valdes Abascal, who left the post "for health reasons." Valdes was replaced by Jose Antonio Gonzalez, who served as the head of legal affairs for the office of the presidency under former president Carlos Salinas de Gortari. In the first cabinet reshuffle, announced on Dec. 29, 1994, former finance secretary Jaime Serra Puche left his post after mishandling the devaluation of the peso in late December. He was replaced by then-Communications and Transportation Secretary Guillermo Ortiz Martinez (see SourceMex, 01/11/95). As in the resignation of Serra Puche, however, the Alzati case has proved to be a strong embarrassment for the Zedillo administration, raising questions about the President's judgement, as well as his leadership capabilities. (Sources: United Press International, 01/22/95; La Jornada, 01/23/95; New York Times, 01/24/95; El Financiero International, 01/30/95)

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