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Mexico

The Mexican elections in the crucible of crisis

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Mexico's July 1 elections will take place amid a profound crisis unfolding across Mexico. With voters deeply alienated by the alliance of Mexico's two main pro-business parties, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and the National Action Party (PAN), the question of what the country's anti-capitalist left should do is critical.

Should the left vote for Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) of the center-left Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional (MORENA)? The following statement by the Revolutionary Workers' Party (PRT) argues that the question of whether or not to vote is secondary to the need to organize the anti-capitalist left. Though AMLO is the leading contender, Mexico's history of naked electoral fraud could mean that "victory" goes to another candidate.

But whatever the official outcome, the anti-capitalist left should seek to advance in the period that will begin after the vote. This may mean an effort to seize the opening that a victory by AMLO could provide to build a united workers' movement to the left of his party, or it might necessitate a struggle in the streets to resist another fraudulent election unjustly handed to the candidates of the PRI-PAN alliance.

The PRT is the Mexican Section of the Fourth International, and this statement first appeared at *Correspondencia de Prensa*, and was translated by Brian M. Napoletano, Héctor Agredano Rivera and Fernando Estañol Tecuatl.

The current electoral process presents itself to us as a moment of political restructuring in the context of a profound crisis and recomposition of Mexico's political regime.

Not that the electoral process and its campaigns have caused the crisis; rather the electoral process is taking place during a high point in the accumulation of grievances and in the crisis of the political regime and its political institutions, including the establishment parties. Divisions within the ruling class caused by the 2008 crisis and the global economic changes are finally exploding in a rupture in the oligarchy.

In opposition to this, the constant mobilizations, protests and popular resistance, although unsuccessful in repealing neoliberal reforms, have further discredited the current regime. This conjuncture has resulted in the crisis of the political regime that established the foundation of the regime that emerged from the historical turn signified by the PRI-PAN pact and the Salinas de Gortari-Fernández de Cevallos alliance of 1988. [In 1988, Diego Fernández de Cevallos, one of the leaders of PAN, which at the time was an opposition party, recognized Salinas as president despite electoral fraud.]

The form of domination by a neoliberal oligarchy that displaced other sectors of the ruling class and that was represented in the PRI-PAN alliance is breaking down and pointing to a new restructuring, a new arrangement. This moment is not only evinced in opposing electoral campaigns, but in the very broad division of the ruling class that points to a new expression of class domination more in keeping with the turn to the extreme right in other parts of the world.

The dominant bloc, represented in the political sphere by the PRIAN (PRI-PAN alliance), managed to complete the most serious cycle of neoliberal reforms, of "structural reforms," particularly in the energy sector.

Now, with the crisis of legitimacy (amid permanent and widespread protest), with the shifts brought by Trump's arrival, and the uncertain future and lack of credibility of all the institutional parties, especially the "Pacto por México"

(Pact for Mexico), a violent division within the bourgeoisie has arisen, which is being reflected in the electoral process.

However, a political restructuring like the one taking place does not mean that the neoliberal economic model is being questioned, let alone contested, in the next elections. None of the candidates are really questioning the central elements of neoliberal policy that in the course of three decades has created a scandalously unequal and violent country in permanent crisis.

This does not negate the fact that business leaders have tried to establish themselves as the great electors, in which they do nothing but show a deep contempt for working people and social movement leaders who “dare” to involve themselves in politics. This is shown in the nefarious defamation of Nestora Salgado [leader of the community police in the state of Guerrero], for example, or the illegal quest to coerce and condition the votes of the workers in the country’s mega-corporations. The PRT repudiates and condemns these demonstrations of class hatred, manipulation and blackmail by the bourgeoisie.

The neoliberal economic model is not being questioned by the candidates, which is merely a symptom of how the electoral program of each party generally skews to the right. The major national problems are not on the agendas of the candidates or their parties.

There is silence, evasive answers or, worse, an opportunistic use of, for example, the victims of more than a decade of militarization and a false “war on drugs.” The scandalous working conditions in the country, poverty wages, the lack of basic workers’ rights, employment instability and precarity are also not included in the electoral agendas.

Neither are the rights of women and the violence they suffer under these agendas, nor the most crude expression of this oppression — the ever-growing thousands of instances of femicide. The agenda and demands of women are evaded by calls to “put them up to a vote,” which is especially scandalous coming from parties that call themselves “progressive.” Either due to open opposition to the recognition of women’s rights to control their own bodies or for fear of losing campaign contributions, the demands of women are excluded from the electoral debate.

The rights of the entire LGBT community are being similarly discarded and even openly attacked by various electoral forces across the spectrum while they deceptively seek to maintain the appearance of tolerance and inclusion. The most worrisome in this regard is that, whatever the final outcome of the election, we face a much more belligerent Congress on these issues, with a new extreme religious right irresponsibly catapulted from the margins to a position of legislative power by MORENA.

The way the candidates frame the debate around the new airport in Mexico City also shows that the terrible ecocide the country is experiencing — the mega-projects, the rapacious mining, the water crises in several regions, among other serious environmental problems — are not part of the electoral agenda.

On the contrary, all the candidates are committed to pursuing a destructive development model dependent on extractive industries, the abuse of natural resources and especially the dispossession of lands and territories of indigenous peoples and popular classes in general.

Despite the above, however, huge sectors of the working population are looking for ways to express their anger and discontent. Thus, despite the concessions and scandalous alliances, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) is emerging as the main leader in various polls and is projected to obtain the majority of votes on July 1. For the peremptory date that the election signifies, there is no alternative that clearly represents the demands and interests of the popular classes in the country.

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In the absence of a political alternative belonging to the working classes themselves, millions of indignant people whose numbers are steadily increasing – in spite of the repression and violence that exists throughout the entire country – will express the popular rejection of the PRIAN by voting for AMLO.

Despite the daily concessions that AMLO announces to obtain respect among the dominating classes for his triumph, and despite more than anything his rightist turn (as various commentators call it), he has raised hopes in the popular imagination that his election would herald a radical change in the regime. This popular illusion is enhanced, paradoxically, by the violent and dirty war waged by the right against AMLO by means of slander and condescension, which does nothing but paint the entire governing body as an arrogant oligarchy that despises working people.

For those of us who are anti-capitalists and socialists, the current debate should not be about how to construct a voting formula for the next election, but about how the post-election landscape, whatever it is, can pave the way for the construction of new alternatives based on an appreciation of the massive expected vote for AMLO.

It is not for those of us who seek the construction of alternatives for working people to build formulas of “critical support” for a project in which the left does not feel represented and which, if it arrives at the presidency, would be more of an administrator of the crisis and lead to more than a few disappointments for its many voters.

But a parallel error would be to confront in a belligerent and sectarian way, with supposed moral or intellectual superiority, those who will vote their hopes on the July 1 ballot.

Our challenge, much more difficult than simple short-term departures, is to understand the new period that will open following the election and, in this context, to find ways to reorganize anti-capitalist alternatives. For this reason, instead of a voting formula, we have reiterated the slogan “whether you vote or not, organize” to guide the anti-capitalist struggle, which will face serious challenges in any post-electoral scenario.

Moreover, based on previous experience with electoral victories of so-called “progressive” governments in Latin America (as AMLO may be), the anti-capitalist left must not hesitate to construct point of reference to the left of such governments if it is to avoid political suicide. This same lesson can be drawn from the tragicomic cycle of degradation of the PRD, which once sought to win hegemony over the entire left end of the political spectrum but today is staring its own demise in the face.

In the search to construct an anti-capitalist option on this terrain, we participated in and backed the campaign of MarÃ-a de JesÃs Patricio MartÃ-nez – also known as Marichuy – spokesperson of the Indigenous Council of Government (Concejo IndÃ-gena de Gobierno) to qualify for the ballot as an independent candidate.

The campaign was a step forward in the necessary search for an anti-capitalist alternative to the present crisis of the political regime – as a means to give left-wing expression to the general popular discontent and to challenge the anti-capitalist left to act on a much larger scale.

And although the campaign of Marichuy has the prestige and moral authority that the other candidates lack – especially the “independents” – for having obtained signatures honestly and for the militant activism that supported it, it did not gain the legally required number of signatures within the confines of an anti-democratic system so dominated by money that such signatures are routinely bought – to say nothing of the system’s racism and misogyny.

However, the results of Marichuy’s campaign represent a crucial illustration of the bankrupt nature of the present

electoral system, in which fraud was even used to register independent candidates for the ballot. The mechanism was designed to make it impossible to legally obtain the requisite number of signatures to qualify for the presidential ballot. In fact, none of the aspirants legally obtained the number of signatures required.

As further proof of fraud, the INE [National Electoral Institute] approved the inclusion of Margarita Zavala on the ballot, despite her use of fraudulent methods to obtain the necessary signatures. Even worse was the decision by the INE to allow Bronco's registration. El Bronco was approved for inclusion on the ballot by the Electoral Tribunal, the same body that will evaluate the July vote, even though the vast majority of signatures he presented were fake.

The message is very clear: it does not matter that the INE itself recognizes that the majority of the signatures are false, since the Tribunal itself can decide that he has the right to appear as a candidate on the ballots. Today, polls indicate that "you know who" will have the most votes. Tomorrow the Tribunal, with the same impudence as in the case of Bronco, can decide that another candidate is the "real" victor.

This electoral cycle is already by far the most violent in the country's history — in keeping with a country that has become a cemetery sown with clandestine graves. Political violence, the bloodiest expression of the restructuring of political forces, is becoming one of the election's defining traits — not just verbal violence and insults, including the "dirty wars" of these campaigns, but a violence that now accounts for the combined deaths of more than 100 candidates from all parties, especially at the local level and especially targeting women.

But also worrying is the violence employed to destroy candidates, through institutional means, that occurs at the national level, for example, in the election of senators: the attempts to discredit and destroy candidates through legal chicanery as with Napoleón Gómez Urrutia, leader of the mining union, or the calumnies against Nestora Salgado García denouncing her as a "kidnapper."

The violence already expressed in the campaigns reflects the climate of violence nationally, evincing a deep social and institutional decomposition, now bursting forth into a deep crisis of human rights across the country, amid a wave of extra-judicial killings, forced disappearances and femicide. It is not simply a continuation of the violence already present throughout the previous six-year presidential term, but could be the harbinger of the form of electoral fraud, already carried out, that polls are insufficient to banish.

At the same time — and historical experience is rich in examples — the sword of fraud always hangs over the head of Mexico's false democracy.

AMLO himself, together with the ruling class as a whole, fears the social protest that could arise from imposing a new fraud, a protest which they compare to a "tiger on the loose" — a tiger that politicians have wanted to keep subjected, tied down, controlled and respectful of institutional ways.

In reality, this tiger is not a savage animal, because the barbarism has already been sown by the powerful, as evidenced by how the neoliberal regime is dripping with blood. The tiger would be nothing but the eruption of the popular masses, already fed up with the chicanery of the system and seeking to shape their own destiny — not through the ballot box, but in the streets, on the roads, in mobilizations and through self-organization.

Although it would appear that the oligarchy fears that the rage against fraud would spill out of the ballot boxes and into the streets, and despite the increasingly firm guarantees that leading candidates offer, fraud cannot be excluded from the immediate scenario. If this is to be the case, anti-capitalists and socialists will need to be on the front lines in defense of the popular will.

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This was the position of the PRT in 1988, in which we maintained all the way to the end a wholehearted commitment to the fight against fraud around the campaign of Rosario Ibarra de Piedra, after the “fall of the system” imposed on Salinas.

If this is the scenario that results from the election, our position will be the same, for the left has historically been the true promoter and defender of political and democratic rights — from the struggle for universal suffrage and a woman’s right to vote, to the legalization of workers’ organizations and in defense of voters in the face of all manner of electoral fraud.

The end — and mutation — of this regime of death is approaching. If the right prevails without resistance, the new regime and the realignment of new political forces will be marked by a shift to far-right positions, as we have seen in other parts of the world.

The Law of Internal Security (Ley de Seguridad Interior), the violence already unleashed, the Electoral Tribunal’s fraudulent imposition of the “independents” already in this campaign and more indicate that the risk of fraud, and violent fraud, is not yet banished — despite the division within the bourgeoisie and the support of AMLO by sectors that previously opposed him.

If fraud is imposed before or after the vote (surprisingly, the PRI in the Chamber of Deputies approved the elimination of presidential immunity, and the Senate is waiting until after the elections to decide), sinking definitively into illegitimacy, we must not only fight back, but advance the possibility — greater if there is a social and political anti-capitalist bloc — that with the social explosion the interests of the working people can be present in the restructuring of forces with the fall of the current regime.

In any scenario, there exists a general conclusion: the need to organize and articulate the demands of the anti-capitalist left, which openly questions and combats ecocide, patriarchy and sexist violence, and promotes popular self-organization, either to consistently defend the popular will, or if the government of AMLO opens a new political moment.

In any case, the construction of an anti-capitalist pole that brings together those who seek a profound transformation of the country is urgent. More important than what one chooses to do on July — to vote or not — is for us to organize, to open the space for common ground and debate, to build unity in the middle of the diverse mosaic that is today to the left of AMLO’s party.

This, for the socialists of the PRT, is the primary task of the present moment, and every day it becomes more urgent in the face of a new political cycle that will undoubtedly begin after the July election.

Our hopes are not in the ballot boxes, but in the people who fight, with women in struggle, with indigenous peoples in resistance, with every person who faces war and defends life. This is the much larger and substantial meeting point than the meaning of a vote.

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