

Over a million march to demand recount in Mexican election

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In the largest demonstration in Mexican history, between 1 and 2 million people rallied Sunday in Mexico City's central square, the Zocalo, to demand a recount in the presidential election that was held on July 2. Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, the candidate of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), called on his supporters to engage in acts of civil resistance to demand that the Federal Judicial Electoral Tribunal authorize the recount. His speech indicated a turn to more aggressive tactics in the month-long dispute over the official results of the election.

The Federal Elections Institute (IFE) declared National Action Party (PAN) candidate Felipe Calderón the winner by a margin of less than 0.6 percent of the vote. Sunday's rally was the third mass demonstration held in support of Obrador since the July 2 poll.

Columns of thousands and tens of thousands of citizens from every Mexican state marched for more than four hours and converged on the rally site from every corner of Mexico City. Many people from outside Mexico City were unable to attend due to a lack of transportation, but local rallies were held in a number of other cities.

Hundreds protested in the cities of Jalapa (Veracruz state) and Merida (Yucatan state). At the Jalapa rally, protesters watched on giant TV screens the scenes of the Mexico City mobilization.

The Mexico City demonstration was dominated by employed and unemployed workers from the working class neighborhoods that encircle the city and university and high school students. Peasants, small farmers and merchants arrived from southern Mexico.

The geographical composition of the march reflected the division in Mexico between the export-oriented and industrialized north and the rural south. While buses

did arrive from PAN-controlled states in the north, the bulk of marchers from outside Mexico City came from the south. Over 40,000 protesters arrived in 500 buses from oil-producing Veracruz state. Many parents marched together with their children.

At the rally, Lopez Obrador declared that the protest would become permanent. "I propose that we stay here in permanent assembly until the Tribunal makes a decision," he said. Obrador denounced President Vicente Fox, of the PAN, for "transforming himself into a traitor of democracy" by putting partisan gains above "being the guardian of effective suffrage," an allusion to Francisco Madero. Electoral fraud and the theft of the 1910 election sparked the Mexican Revolution in November 1910, when Madero called on his followers to rise up against the Porfirio Diaz dictatorship.

Lopez Obrador claims that the official result was the result of electoral fraud and the intervention of the current president, Fox, who, under Mexican election law, is supposed to remain neutral.

Appealing to the PRD's electoral base among workers and the poor, Lopez Obrador charged that the moneyed elite was conspiring to hand the election to the PAN candidate, who has the open support of the US government.

Since the election, Lopez Obrador has taken an increasingly critical attitude toward the Federal Elections Institute. In an interview with the *Washington Post* last week, he said he opposed having the IFE oversee a recount if the electoral tribunal agrees to hold one. The PRD candidate has given the tribunal until August 15 to decide on a recount, adding that if it fails to authorize one by then, "we will have to arrive at a new strategy."

In the Zocalo and across Mexico City, 47 tent camps

have been set up to press for a recount. On July 21, protesters' tents blocked some of the city's main arteries, including Paseo La Reforma, which leads to the Mexican Stock Exchange and business district, as well as to the US Embassy and many of the city's hotels.

The escalation of the campaign for a recount is causing alarm in the PAN and the Calderon camp. Calderon denounced Lopez Obrador for "kidnapping" Mexico City and demanded that the PRD "rein Lopez in." At the same time, the PAN plans to organize a media campaign to counter the mass protests. The Calderon camp holds that Lopez is blackmailing the electoral tribunal. Newspapers that support the PAN accuse Lopez Obrador of manipulating the masses and charge that trade unions supporting the PRD are forcing their members to attend the rallies.

The US press has been even more hysterical, carrying numerous right-wing commentaries denouncing Lopez Obrador as a would-be populist dictator and enemy of democracy. The *Washington Post* went so far as to publish an editorial July 29 comparing the left-talking reformist politician to the former Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin.

The British press, without as much need to stir up anti-Mexican propaganda in case Lopez Obrador comes to power, gave a more objective assessment of his role as a safety valve for the Mexican ruling class. The *Financial Times* reported the statement of one PRD leader spelling this out: "If Andrés Manuel does not assume leadership," the official said, "there will be chaos. The people are very angry."

Lopez Obrador alternates his national-populist message with assurances to the business community that it has nothing to fear, and in fact will profit from a Lopez Obrador administration. He has a close relationship with some of the leading representatives of Mexico's moneyed oligarchy, including multibillionaires such as Carlos Slim, Mexico's richest man, and Manuel Camacho Solis, a wealthy politician associated with the policies of former president Carlos Salinas.

In his speeches, Lopez Obrador makes nationalist appeals to the working class and the middle classes, his main slogan being "put the poor first." However, his proposed reforms—government-funded jobs programs and expanded benefits for pensioners and the

young—even if implemented would not seriously compensate for the enormous human cost imposed on the Mexican working class and poor since 1982, when the Mexican ruling elite began implementing US-backed "free market" policies while slashing social benefits. As a result, Mexican society has become even more polarized between the working masses and a fabulously rich financial oligarchy.

For the vast majority of the population, conditions have become more and more unbearable. Living standards have declined, and job creation has not kept up with the increase in population. In addition to the unemployed, millions more are underemployed. Unable to find jobs, tens of thousands emigrate every year, mostly to the United States. These are the explosive conditions that underlie the current electoral crisis.



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