Mexico's political crises intensifies after Calderón is certified as president

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On Tuesday, September 5, Mexico's Federal Judicial Elections Tribunal (TEPJF) declared Felipe Calderón Hinojosa the winner of the July 2 presidential election. The decision has only inflamed the ongoing political crisis, under conditions in which Mexican society is deeply polarized and class relations are at a breaking point. Calderón is a member of the National Action Party (PAN).

The TEPJF indicated that even though it found serious irregularities in the manner in which the elections were conducted, they were not serious enough to change the results of the vote, which it said favored Calderón over Andrés Manuel López Obrador, of the nationalist populist Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). The reported margin of victory was just 240,000 votes out of 41 million cast, a difference of 0.56 percent.

The court was unable to give a clear and unambiguous answer to who actually won the popular vote. In a ruling that singled out the Federal Elections Institute for procedures that facilitated fraud, the seven-member TEPJF simply indicated that it did not have enough information to confirm that, absent the many irregularities, the outcome would have been different. The tribunal also singled out President Vicente Fox and Mexican corporate interests for engaging in practices that were "unjust and a source of concern" to manipulate the vote. It added, however, that it considered these practices to be "isolated events with no determining effect on the results of the vote."

The finding was immediately welcomed by the PAN, which downplayed the TEPJF's criticisms. Also indifferent to the TEPJF's language were US President George Bush, Latin American leaders—including Argentina's Nestor Kirchner and Chile's Socialist Party President Michelle Bachelet—and Paul Wolfowitz of the World Bank. Calderón reported that he spoke at length with Bush on the issue of immigration. Wolfowitz advised the Mexican government to attend to the needs of the poor, but without taxing the rich; instead he recommended an acceleration of the neo-liberal policies that have been responsible for Mexico's social and economic crisis.

The Institutionalist Revolutionary Party (PRI), the party that ruled Mexico uninterruptedly from 1929 to 2000, accepted the decision. PRI spokesperson Carlos Jimenez Macías declared that the TEJPF's ruling left a "foul taste in one's mouth, but we will go along with it." PRI congressional leader Malio Fabio Beltrones expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of fairness of the July 2 elections and called for legislation to prevent corporate interests from manipulating the vote.

PRD leaders indicated that they would appeal to human rights organizations in Europe, Asia and Latin America. Typical of the PRD response was the statement by Senator Ricardo Monreal that "this finding deepens the political crisis; the opposition and hatred that it engenders will feed repudiation and distrust.... In the same manner that nobody governs for long sitting on bayonets, nobody can last on the basis of a failed judicial decision."

Questions were raised about the legitimacy of the TEJPF itself. Porfirio Muñoz Ledo, a former PRI official and ambassador to the UN, who also served as ambassador to the European Union for Fox, charged that President Fox had met with the members of the TEJPF and pressured them to certify Calderón, on the grounds that any other decision would result in a political and economic catastrophe in Mexico. Government officials denounced Muñoz as a liar; but the politician—now a López supporter—insists that he has good evidence from the court itself that the meeting took place.

Further suspicion was cast on the entire election when the Federal Elections Institute announced that it would deny Mexico City's prestigious political journal *El Proceso* access to the ballots, and instead would move to destroy them.

Popular hostility to Calderón is evident wherever he goes. During a visit to Morelia, capital of Michoacan State, he was hounded by López Obrador supporters who prevented him from speaking at several events. Michoacan is a PRD stronghold whose governor Cuahutemoc Cárdenas Bartlett, accepted the TEJPF's decision.

Meanwhile, López Obrador is campaigning to convene a National Convention in Mexico City's Zocalo Square on September 16. Hundreds of thousands of delegates from across Mexico are expected to attend and declare López the winner of the elections. In response to the TEPJF ruling, the PRD candidate urged his followers to build the National Convention and said that he still considers Calderón a "usurper," the product of a "coup d'état." López also predicted that the new government would implode from internal conflicts within the PAN itself, driven by the fight for positions within the new administration.

On September 7, López listed proposals that he will ask the convention to a approve; these include as-yet-unspecified changes to the presidential system, the protection of the poor, the protection of Mexico's national industries, and the struggle against corruption.

The refusal of the López Obrador camp to recognize Calderón's legitimacy and the threat that two rival presidencies will emerge is

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unprecedented in modern Mexican history and can only be understood in the context of profound social polarization, characterized by a 30-year decline in living standards for large layers of the working class and peasantry.

The chronic decay of living standards and the destruction of social programs is a byproduct of the privatization of Mexican industry. Beginning in the late 1970s, under pressure from an increasingly globalized economy, successive governments abandoned the import-substitution model of development and scrapped the social compact between the working class, the peasantry and the bourgeoisie that had been constructed by the generals that created the PRI and stabilized Mexico in the 1920s and 1930s.

Globally mobile capital demanded that the dismantling of Mexico's national industries go hand-in-hand with what can only be described as a savage assault on social programs. In reaction to a series of financial crises, funds were siphoned off from the poor to the international financial institutions and Mexican banks. The recipe was always the same with each change of government: cuts in social programs were combined with the sale of state enterprises to domestic and foreign capitalists, followed by capital flight, devaluations of the peso, and interest rate hikes, followed by another round of cuts in social programs and privatizations.

The reforms that ended the social compact exacted a huge social cost, from which workers and peasants have never recovered. The "social rights" that had been guaranteed by the Mexican constitution are now largely ignored. Living standards have plummeted for millions, while a tiny elite enjoys great wealth. An explosion in direct investment since 1994—Mexico is the third largest recipient of US investments behind China and Brazil—has had an uneven impact on this country of 100 million people, beneficial to the export-oriented north, disastrous for the agricultural south.

Of the nation's 44 million workers, only 22 million are employed in the formal sector, working "regular jobs" with a modicum of job protection and decent wages. Approximately 9 million are working in the United States. The rest are either unemployed or employed in the so-called informal sector, at very low wages and with no legal rights. At the same time, Mexico's agricultural sector is reeling from the country's integration into the North American economy. Fifteen million corn producers on small and medium farms, unable to compete with cheaper US corn, are being driven out of the fields and into the cities, adding to the millions of unemployed.

In northern Mexico and around Mexico City, Guadalajara and Monterrey, new industries have sprung up to better exploit cheap labor, recruiting new layers of young workers in sectors such as auto, electronic products, and machine goods. Marginalized from the PRI and the corporatist trade unions, these layers have yet to find their political expression as an independent force.

Social conflict is already escalating. In Oaxaca, what began as a struggle by teachers over wages has become a political struggle. Striking teachers and their supporters have occupied the center of the city, government offices and radio stations, demanding that Governor Ulises Ruiz, a corrupt PRI politician, responsible for the repression and killing of protesting teachers last June, resign and new elections take place. Other militant struggles have broken out among steel workers in Michoacan and the copper miners in Sonora. Increasingly, they can no longer be contained by the traditional, state-endorsed unions.

López Obrador insists to his supporters that they hold the "moral high ground" and that the National Democratic Assembly will prevail as Mexico's genuine government. His intransigent stand is consistent with a strategy to channel the explosive social discontent expressed in the Oaxaca rebellion through new institutions that would both insure profits and allow for a minimum of social welfare.

López Obrador's program of modest concessions to the poor is based on sensitivity to the de-stabilizing consequences of the social and economic policies promoted by both Calderón's PAN and the PRI since the late 1970s. He is representative of dissident and more farsighted groups within the ruling elite that view with alarm the potential for the instability implicit in this social and economic crisis plunging the nation into revolutionary struggles, threatening capitalism itself.

In contrast, the Harvard-educated Calderón follows the model favored by the United States and world financial institutions, such as the World Bank, for whom the profit needs of transnational capital are primary. These institutions demand policies that guarantee profits, including the use of force to repress the struggles of workers and farmers. The real question, however, is whether Calderón will be able to govern at all, let alone complete his six-year term.

For his part, López Obrador is playing the role of sorcerer's apprentice, attempting to mobilize and control powerful social forces, driven by long pent-up demands for jobs, a genuine land reform, an equitable distribution of income and wealth, and decent living standards, including health and education and retirement—demands that cannot be fulfilled outside of a direct revolutionary challenge to Mexican and global capitalism.

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