

Mexican election results: an escalating crisis of class rule

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13 July 2009

The crushing defeat of the ruling National Action Party (PAN) in México at the hands of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in the July 5 midterm election signals an escalation of the crisis of bourgeois rule in that nation.

The midterm elections combined the vote for a new House of Deputies (Mexico's lower house of Congress), the selection of governors in the states of Campeche, Colima, Nuevo León, Querétaro, San Luis Potosí and Sonora and the renewal of a portion of the Senate. In addition there were local elections in cities across the country.

The rout for PAN represents a repudiation of President Felipe Calderón's government, and a rejection of its pro-free-market policies in the face of the blows being felt from the severe global recession. These policies included the attempted privatization of the state-owned oil company, Pemex, and state-owned electrical utilities, plus an ongoing educational reform that is an attack on teacher's jobs and working conditions.

The big winner was the PRI, which obtained 40 percent of the vote. The PAN won 29 percent and the PRD (Revolutionary Democratic Party) won 12 percent. The balance of the votes went to smaller parties: the Green Ecology Party (PVEM), the New Alliance Party (PANAL), the Party of Labor (PT), the Convergence Party (Convergencia) and the Social Democrats (PSD).

The exact distribution of seats in the House of Deputies is still being determined. The PAN will have between 135 and 144 votes, down from a plurality of 207, and the PRD will have 69-74 seats, down from 158. The PRI will have about 238 votes, up from 107 in 2006.

PANAL, a right-wing party created in 2006 and funded by the bureaucracy of the National Education Workers Union (SNTE) with the considerable resources of that union will have 11 representatives.

The PVEM, with 22 seats, announced in the wake of the vote that it would throw its support to the PRI, insuring the PRI-led coalition an absolute majority in the lower house.

The PRI victories included five of the six contested state governorships. Despite its losses, the PRD retained control of Mexico City.

The voting was marked by an abstention rate of about 70 percent. A last minute effort by a middle class group calling on voters to spoil their ballots netted 6 percent of the vote.

The return by voters to an alternative from the past—the PRI lost its majorities to the PAN and PRD in 2000, after being in power for over 70 years—stems from the ability of PRI politicians to emphasize the disastrous economic failure of the Calderón administration, illusions in a more stable and prosperous past and the inability of the left-nationalist PRD to present a coherent alternative. Instead, the PRD, which in the eyes of many was cheated out of the presidency in 2006 and had emerged as the second political force in México, succumbed to factional rivalries.

Before claiming victory on July 5, the PRI had undergone a transformation. Gone from its program is the old corporatism that

attempted to reconcile class interests between the peasantry, the working class and the bourgeoisie. That has been replaced by a program that combines feminism and identity politics and calls for efficiency and "good government."

In an interview with the on-line Mexican journal *Reporte Índigo*, Beatriz Paredes, president of the PRI's National Executive Committee attributed her party's success to a pragmatic rejection of any one electoral strategy. "It was not one election, it was 300 elections with 300 different strategies and with candidates selected broadly" declared Paredes, who likes to refer to her party as a "force for stability." She also made it clear that the PRI has made a clean break with its past. Today's PRI has more in common with the Democratic Party of Barack Obama than with the PRI that descended from the Mexican Revolution of 1910-17.

Part of this new strategy involved forming coalitions between the PRI and the PVEM in some states and between the PRI and PANAL in others. The PRI-PVEM alliance is a clear indication of the movement to the right by the PRI. In 2000, the PVEM was in coalition with PAN, with which it has no fundamental political differences.

More telling is the PRI's relationship with PANAL, a party that is run by laissez-faire technocrats and that is the brainchild of SNTE leader Esther Gordillo, a notoriously corrupt and thuggish union bureaucrat and federal deputy, who was herself expelled from the PRI in 2006 for supporting the PAN.

The new PRI, rebuilt after the very poor performance of its presidential candidate, Roberto Madrazo, in 2006, has moved away from its former claim, however dubious, of revolutionary nationalism. A commentator in *Reporte Índigo* aptly described the PRI's transformation: "The PRI, acting like the PAN, defeated a PAN that acts like the old PRI."

Paredes herself, a few days after the election, tabled any idea that the PRI would return to redistributive measures. "We have learned the lessons of the past," she declared. "We have learned that our institutional vision is often interpreted as a weakness." She added that "Mexico is above political currents and parties; we administer a whole." In a speech peppered with platitudes, Paredes declared vaguely that Mexicans deserved "employment opportunities and ways of dealing with high prices."

By any measure—health, education, employment, potable water, energy—Mexican society is in a crisis that predates the financial crash of 2008. For years, the economy has been unable to generate enough jobs to keep up with the increase in the labor force, effectively expelling to the United States hundreds of thousands of its citizens, who send the remittances upon which many families depend to survive. On average, between 2001 and 2007, the economy generated 1.2 million jobs, an anemic performance, which was one third of what would have been required. In 2008, 750,000 jobs were destroyed, followed by 700,000 in the first trimester of 2009—erasing the previous year's gains.

The current global recession brought devastation to this very weak economy. US \$50 billion in capital left the country, resulting in a 50

percent fall in the value of the Mexican peso with respect to the US dollar.

The fall in the value of the peso, in a nation that depends on imports for 35 percent of its food supply, is having a brutal effect on the poorest Mexicans. An article in the Mexican daily *La Jornada* written in March 2009 reports on an increase in the robberies of corn and beans following a 50 percent rise in the price of beans this year. In the case of corn, the increase in crime is attributed to desperate, hungry families. In the case of beans, the increase is attributed to organized crime.

A similar report last February in *Proceso*, a Mexican weekly, quotes railroad officials from the Ferromex and Kansas City Southern railway companies who report a massive rise in the theft of corn and other foods. Throughout 2008, on average, the railroads lost 35 tons of corn per month. In January 2009, the robberies increased to 700 tons. Similarly, the agribusiness giant Cargill reported monthly thefts of 35 tons this year up, from a three year average of 2.5 tons.

Families foraging along the rail lines for grain or other foodstuffs—including animal feed—that may have spilled out of rail cars have become a common sight.

Other reports indicate that many Mexicans, unable to pay their electricity bills are resorting to the illegal and dangerous practice of stealing electricity by hanging metal hooks and cables from transmission lines.

Despite the cheaper peso, exports in 2009 have fallen at a yearly rate of 31 percent. As a result, the worst impact of the job implosion was felt in the border economies. Cities like Ciudad Juárez, on the border with Texas, whose export-oriented factories rely on a healthy US economy, have been severely affected.

This economic emergency is coupled with the fall in remittances from the US. According to a study by the Inter-American Development Bank, in 2008, 600,000 Mexicans were affected by the drop in monthly remittances from their relatives—typically US \$100-\$300 per family. In the first quarter of 2009, remittances fell by 5 percent compared to the same period in 2008. At their high point, in 2007, remittances represented 2.5 percent of Mexico's GDP, comparable to what that nation earns on oil or tourism.

In the 2006 elections, President Calderón ran on a program of job creation, arguing that, by completing the privatization of the economy and liberalizing regulations, the economy would take off.

Faced with the failure of his proposals, Calderón turned to an anti-crime campaign that militarized the country, precisely in those areas with the largest numbers of unemployed, such as Ciudad Juárez, and resulted in gross violations of human rights. Taking advantage of the virtual military occupation of the region, the rate of exploitation and labor violations by export-oriented sweatshops—the maquiladoras—has increased, while the Calderón government looks the other way.

Initially, the Calderón government denied that the economic crisis would affect Mexico at all. Government officials spent months trying to demonstrate how the Mexican economy was insulated against the financial collapse. Calderón himself denounced the “catastrofistas,” or catastrophe mongers. Earlier this year, at the Davos economic conference, Calderón contradicted his own advisors and predicted that the Mexican economy would grow by one percent this year.

Needless to say, the Calderón administration’s response to the effects of the crisis has been totally inadequate. Recently, the president proposed a combination of measures, including subsidies to businesses, to promote technological innovations, both as a way of stimulating the economy and of increasing productivity.

Other measures include subsidies to exporters, allowing workers to borrow from their privatized retirement savings, freezing gasoline prices and extended medical benefits for unemployed workers.

Calderón may as well have told his fellow citizens to eat cake. These paltry sums will do nothing for the average Mexican, who, lacking

subsidize food and housing, or even an unemployment compensation system, is facing ever more dire circumstances.

The economic meltdown and Calderón’s response have met with resistance both from important sections of the working class as well as those middle class layers closest to them, such as truck owner-operators and fishermen. In the last six months, electrical workers, communications workers, teachers, miners and food workers have all mobilized and organized strike action in defense of wages and pensions and against the North American Free Trade Act (NAFTA).

The resistance so far has been blocked by México’s discredited main labor federation, the Confederation of Mexican Labor (CTM). CTM officials favor a social contract between management and the working class, which would consist of a no-strike pact on the part of the workers in return for a no-layoff pledge on the part of big business.

It is in this context that sections of the Mexican ruling class have dusted off the PRI.

In her confirmation hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on January 13, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that the Obama administration intended to reframe the US relationship with México. She placed emphasis on issues of security, energy and immigration, in that order. Her aim, which is that of US imperialism, is an extension of Washington’s domestic policies: disciplining the working class and forcing it to accept unemployment, hunger and war in order to restore profits.

Clinton framed her remarks within the need for the US to reestablish influence over Latin America to defend strategic interests that are in direct conflict with those of the working class, within the US, Mexico and entire hemisphere.

As recent events in Honduras underscore, the Mexican and world crises have reached a new phase. All of Mexico’s bourgeois parties, including the PAN, the PRI and the PRD, and the trade unions are aligned with US imperialism, ready to sacrifice the needs of working families in the defense of profits.

There are no capitalist solutions to the attacks on jobs and living standards for millions of Mexican workers, peasants and small business people; there are no nationalist solutions either. Rather, the working class must chart an independent political course that unites the struggles of Mexican, US and Latin American workers with the struggles of workers across the world in the fight for a socialist society.



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