

Mexico's former ruling party, the PRI, gains in governors' races

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Mexico's Institutional Revolutionary Party or PRI—which controlled national politics for 70 years before it was unseated by the National Action party (PAN) in 2000—has managed to parlay popular opposition to President Felipe Calderon into electoral gains in three more Mexican states this month—adding to similar victories in the summer of 2010 when the PRI took nine out of twelve state governorships.

While voter turn out was relatively low, PRI candidates decisively captured governorships in Coahuila—a border state shaken by the drug war, Nayarit—a tourist destination on the Pacific Coast, also impacted by drug war violence and the state of Mexico. The victory in the state of Mexico—the most populous state in the country with some 15 million inhabitants—is seen as predictive of the presidential race in 2012.

Notwithstanding the allegations of electoral fraud, the shift in political winds to the PRI—considered a corrupt dinosaur for most of the last decade, finishing last in the 2006 presidential campaign—has been interpreted largely as a reaction to the worsening poverty, economic dislocation and the disastrous drug war over the last decade.

The idea that the PRI will stop the drug war—the mechanism for more directly yoking Mexico and Central America to the security and economic agenda of US imperialism—is absurd on its face. On his first visit to Washington in 2010 following the party's initial electoral resurgence, Enrique Pena Nieto—current governor of the state of Mexico and PRI's likely presidential candidate—expressed his full solidarity with the drug war telling a packed audience at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars, “It's about the survival of the state.”

On July 4, 2011 the party's national director, Humberto Moriera, made it clear that the PRI will seek to use its renewed political clout to create alliances with other major parties—namely Calderon's PAN and the phony left Party of Democratic Revolution (PRD)—with the aim of passing a number of controversial “reforms.” These would amount to a total revision of the country's liberal constitution on questions of executive war powers, democratic rights, labor law and education, among other things. He told reporters that he would begin sounding out other political groups to facilitate an “extraordinary period” of legislative sessions in an effort to pass all the reforms “that interest all parties and the federal executive.”

Above all else, the party leadership has signaled its strong backing of the drug war by championing so-called “security

reform” as legislation that must be passed before next year's presidential race.

The security reform sought by the PRI—penned by the office of the Secretary of Defense and endorsed by Calderon himself—would essentially rewrite the constitution to legalize and expand all the worst excesses of the drug war militarization. Specifically, it would empower the national executive to unilaterally deploy the military to suffocate social, political and labor movements by declaring a “state of exception” over certain regions, or “entities”, within the country.

Significantly, the measure is an end-run around Article 29 of the Mexican constitution—a product of the Mexican revolution—which requires that Congress ratify such an extreme departure from bourgeois democracy or, if it is not in session, requires that it be convoked without delay to grant the executive such sweeping powers. The reform would instead put the declaration of martial law firmly in the hands of the executive.

The proposed reform would also replace the rigorous criteria needed to justify martial law with more malleable language. According to *La Jornada*, a Mexican daily, the reform was presented to the legislature and explained by its supporters thus: “The constitution doesn't expressly state that there are diverse ‘levels or grades’ of peace, so we can't interpret this concept (what justifies a declaration of martial law) in ‘black and white’.” The most varied shades of gray exist; peace in all places and times is relative.” Again, the executive, without any restraint by the legislature, would be empowered to parse the fine distinction between war and peace.

As WikiLeaks cables revealed late last year, the legality of the drug war has been a source of stress among military and political elites in the country since 2009, when international human rights groups began to expose the brutal militarization of Ciudad Juarez. A central link in the chain of northern sweatshops or *maquiladoras*, Ciudad Juarez is the core of the Mexican cheap labor platform for US corporations—largely auto related, of about 200,000 industrial workers, there are 70,000 auto workers. It is also the most extreme example of drug war militarization. Over the last four years, over ten thousand soldiers have occupied the city subordinating its massive working population to de facto martial law, rife with illegal harassment, torture and murder.

Although the written constitution has never been an obstacle to any injustice the ruling class wishes to foist on Mexican workers, and no real opposition to militarization exists among the three

capitalist parties, the proposed reforms are important in the sense that they will help shield the authors of the drug war from international prosecution. Moreover, a PRI-led legal change of this magnitude would send a powerful message to Washington that it will be as reliable an agent of US imperialism as Calderon and the PAN party.

All three major parties in Mexico represent a section of the national bourgeoisie which finds itself, as a class, in an existential crisis. The gravity of this crisis has served to efface even nominal tactical differences, increasingly welding them together more firmly in an effort to keep the population out of political life. The gravity of the situation has led to a renewed longing among the national bourgeois for the PRI-dominated past.

This increased class solidarity was demonstrated as early as 2009 according to WikiLeaks cable 09MEXICO2205, which revealed that all three major parties—PAN, PRD and PRI—secretly agreed not to reveal or discuss recent poverty statistics until after legislative elections that year. Of the three conspirators against the public, the PRI party benefited the most from the alliance, gaining the greatest number of legislative seats.

More recently, the country's phony left party, the PRD, finally liquidated the left nationalist image it had cultivated under Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador by brokering a successful political alliance with its sworn enemy the PAN—the traditional party of US Imperialism in Mexico. The deal aided it in seizing governorships in states traditionally held by the PRI, despite its current political weakness.

The PRI seems likely to reap continued benefits from the crisis-consensus of the bourgeois parties and their desire to pass any and every unpopular reform measure before the 2012 campaign, so as to stave off the type of destabilizing popular involvement engendered in 2006.

According to the World Bank, the legions of the poor in Mexico have increased by 10 million during Calderon's presidency, comprising over 51 percent of the population. According to the Bank of Mexico, food prices generally have shot up by 21.2 percent since the global economic collapse of 2008. For corn in particular, a national staple, the price increase has been even more pronounced, rising 73 percent since June 2010. According to the World Bank, such price inflation is reaching "dangerous levels" not seen since 2008.

The brutal social reality confronting Mexican workers has created an increasingly tense political situation. Last month PAN-appointed Finance Minister, Ernesto Javier Cordero Arroyo, scandalized public opinion telling an audience that, "Mexico is no longer a poor country...it is now a middle income country..."

Despite the public furor, there is some important truth to this seemingly idiotic observation. According to the World Bank in 2009, the average annual income for Mexico was about \$8,960.00 and for this reason the country is, in fact, considered "middle income" relative to other countries. Yet, the average is severely distorted by the offensive concentration of wealth at the very top.

The wealth of 39 Mexican families amounts to \$135 billion, equivalent to 12.3 percent of the country's gross domestic product. Most of this is concentrated in the hands of the world's richest man, Carlos Slim, whose fortune grew this year by \$20 billion to a

total of \$74 billion. Yet, he is not the only Mexican on the Forbes 500 richest list. At number 39 is the chairman of copper and silver mine Grupo Mexico, German Larrea Mota Velasco, whose estimated wealth of \$16 billion increased by \$6.3 billion for the year. Number 66 on the list is Alberto Bailleres Gonzalez of the mining corporation Industrias Penoles, with \$11.9 billion. There are several lesser Mexican billionaires in the Forbes 500 associated with banks, supermarkets and media outlets.

The country has moved from poor to "middle income" over the last several decades despite the rapid expansion of poverty and misery via an unprecedented transfer of social wealth to its richest families, which continues apace. Although the PAN has accelerated the social polarization and militarized the country in an effort to maintain it at all costs, the current state of affairs is largely the legacy of the PRI party.

Although the PRI, formed in the 1930s, seeks to reinvigorate its nationalist and social reformist image on the strength of its roots in the Mexican Revolution, the reality is that it presided over the wholesale liquidation of nationalized industry—the heritage and economic backbone of the revolution. Beginning in 1982 with President Miguel de la Madrid, the PRI party ushered in a sweeping program of privatizations, deregulation, foreign investment and austerity measures, at the behest of international finance capital. From this point to the end of its political monopoly in 2000, the PRI oversaw the privatization of over a thousand state firms including TELMEX—spawning the same Carlos Slim—the national pension system and the railroads.

This process culminated in the signing of the NAFTA agreement in 1994, integrating the country into a trade bloc dominated by US imperialism. Ensuing decades saw Mexico's north—predominately the border region due to its easy access to the US consumer market—converted into a cheap labor platform in tandem with the deindustrialization of the US. In a few decades, over a million workers found themselves slaving for subsistence wages, a fraction of that paid to American workers for the same work in a previous era. At the same time, NAFTA has largely destroyed peasant agriculture in Mexico, opening it up to competition from agribusiness in the US and provoking a massive migration to northern *maquiladoras* or similar exploitation as "illegal" labor in the shadows of the US economy.

Thus, the real legacy of the PRI party in Mexico is crushing poverty, extreme social polarization and desperation which has provided, in turn, grist for the country's drug trade.



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