

Mexican presidential candidates have no answers to social crisis

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There is less than one week to go before the July 1 elections in Mexico that will decide which presidential candidate will rule during the next six years and which party or parties will control the Mexican Congress and numerous state governments.

The election is dominated by devastating social issues: corruption, the war on drugs, the crisis in jobs and living standards, and malnutrition and famine in the north. Things are getting worse for working people with each passing day and the four bourgeois political campaigns are unable to offer any serious solution.

None of the candidates represents or even seriously appeals to the Mexican working class, an increasingly powerful social force—Mexico is now the world's fifth largest exporter of automobiles, for example.

The two front-running candidates are Enrique Peña Nieto, of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the former governor of the state of Mexico, and Andres Manuel López Obrador, of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), the former mayor of Mexico City.

Also running are Josefina Vazquez Mota of the ruling National Action Party (PAN) and Gabriel Quadri, of the New Alliance Party (PANAL,) which represents Elba Esther Gordillo, the corrupt and opportunist leader of the SNTE, the main union of public school teachers.

Peña Nieto, the descendant of former governors, who claims to be the “new face” of the PRI, the longtime ruling party that was ousted from the presidency in 2000, has maintained a significant albeit shrinking lead in the opinion polls. He has overwhelming support in the media and from the PRI apparatus, which still controls 20 of Mexico's 31 states, and the majority of municipalities.

The Obama administration has already signaled its comfort with a Peña Nieto victory, with one official telling the *New York Times* that the occasional nationalist noises from the PRI candidate about excessive US involvement in the drug war were no more than “a sound bite he is using for obvious political purposes.” In private meetings with Peña Nieto, “what we basically get is that he fully appreciates and

understands that if/when he wins, he is going to keep working with us.”

As for López Obrador, who ran a populist campaign for the presidency in 2006, only to see the election narrowly stolen for Felipe Calderon of the PAN, he has shifted markedly to the right in 2012. He has largely dropped his promises of expanded social benefits for the poor and sought out business audiences to reassure the capitalist class that he is no threat to their profits, while declaring his campaign to be based on “love”—that is, the reconciliation of Mexico's masses of exploited workers and peasants with their Mexican and imperialist exploiters.

The PRI campaign seems to have survived the impact of an exposé in the *Guardian* of a corrupt relationship between TV giant Televisa and Peña Nieto (and the PRI as a whole). The British daily based its report in part on documents released by WikiLeaks, in which US diplomats raised the alarm that Peña Nieto has been paying Televisa—out of public funds—for favorable TV coverage disguised as news.

One of the diplomatic cables describe how Televisa provided Peña Nieto “extraordinary amounts of airtime and other kinds of coverage.” Peña Nieto may also have paid pollsters to alter surveys.

The revelations confirmed to many Mexicans what has been reported before, by magazines such as *Proceso*, the Mexico City weekly. At a debate, Peña Nieto did not deny the charges. He merely accused the PRD candidate, during his term as mayor of Mexico City, of engaging in similar maneuvers.

Televisa is the biggest TV company in the Spanish-speaking world. It has had close ties with the PRI for 30 years. Televisa's role in this campaign became grossly apparent on May 11, when angry students expelled Peña Nieto and his campaign from the Ibero-american University in Mexico City, angry over the candidate's repression of the Atenco villagers in 2006.

Together with TV Azteca, Televisa presented the incident as a political dirty trick from the PRD, claiming that the people present were not students but paid operatives from

the López Obrador campaign. In response, 131 youth posted their student IDs on YouTube, declaring they had participated in the protest against Peña Nieto, and touching off an Internet-based solidarity campaign under the hashtag #YoSoy131 (“I am 132”).

The two media companies combined control about 95 percent of free TV channels in the country, from which millions of Mexicans derive their news and entertainment.

The Televisa/TV Azteca alliance with the PRI sparked mass protests in Mexico City, on May 23, over 20,000 students and workers marched and rallied, demanding a democratic TV media and warning that Nieto would be imposed on the people of Mexico by the media.

The corruption—cronyism, nepotism, fraud, payolas—that #YoSoy132 associates with the PRI and Peña Nieto is endemic to Mexican society. Capitalism cannot be cleansed of corruption, no matter which capitalist politician wins.

It is important to note that none of the candidates even favors the break-up of Televisa, TV Azteca or any other monopoly or oligopoly—this in a semi-colonial nation that is largely dominated by a handful of billionaires, big banks and transnational corporations—López Obrador, when questioned about Televisa, replied: “We will not require the disappearance of any company.”

At best, Peña Nieto, Lopez Obrador and Vazquez Mota are for some sort of regulation these companies, in the name of transparency, to which the billionaire owners would have to agree to beforehand.

The drug war has left some 50,000 people dead since President Calderón mobilized the military against drug syndicates that operate in Mexico. The war has militarized and brutalized much of Mexican society, and has deepened the ties between the Mexican police and military and their US counterparts.

At the same time, scores of military officers have been accused of connections with the various organized drug trafficking cartels, including 12 generals, most recently Tomás Ángeles Dauahare, Roberto Dawe and Ricardo Escorcia, who in May were accused of working for the Beltrán Leyva or Gulf Cartel. They are now under arrest and awaiting arraignment.

The PRD’s López Obrador, commenting on the arrests, blamed the Calderón administration for having soiled the army’s image by exposing it to the cartels and to charges of human rights abuses. He presents the corruption as merely a consequence of the war on drugs, not of the repressive role of the military as an institution. Instead, he proposes the creation of a national police force that would gradually substitute the military in the struggle against the cartels.

Peña Nieto, who has mentioned creating a 40,000-strong paramilitary police controlled by the federal government to

pursue the war on the drug syndicates, essentially echoes López Obrador on this issue.

As the gap between rich and poor widens across that nation, real wages for Mexican workers are stagnant. The López Obrador campaign estimates that some 6,000 jobs disappear each day across the country.

While both leading candidates call for more jobs in the formal sector and higher incomes for urban workers, their proposals are short on details, other than repeating the neo-liberal mantra of “raising productivity” by protecting profits and through so-called flexibility in the labor markets—making it easier to fire workers.

In addressing teachers in the city of Oaxaca, who have been in near continuous struggle over jobs, wages and working conditions since May 2006, the PRD candidate suggested that teachers work harder. “We cannot accept that teachers only work Tuesday through Thursday,” said López Obrador, “They must be in the community Monday through Friday.”

Another issue in the Mexican election is the famine in the north. The most recent figures on the devastating food crisis show a 400 percent increase in malnutrition since the crisis began last year. In the hard-hit state of Durango, more than 80,000 households in 1,250 villages, some 250,000 people, are in various states of famine, ranging from moderate to severe.

Despite public and private efforts to aid the hungry, not enough food aid is arriving into those communities. Furthermore, this crisis is having a serious impact on those migrants—driven by the worsening economic crisis in Central America—on their way to the US-Mexico border. This issue has been ignored by the presidential campaigns.



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