

Trump repeats ultimatums to Mexico after call with Peña Nieto

Eric London
28 January 2017

The governments of Mexico and the US announced that presidents Enrique Peña Nieto and Donald Trump spoke for an hour on the telephone yesterday, the day after the Mexican president cancelled a state visit to Washington scheduled for January 31.

Though Trump said the discussion was “very, very friendly” and an official statement from the Mexican government called the conversation “constructive and productive,” initial reports of the call indicate that Trump did not move an inch on his plan to build a wall and force Mexico to pay for it.

Following the call, the Mexican government announced that “the presidents also agreed for now not to publicly discuss this controversial issue.” This face-saving measure on Peña Nieto’s part was not even mentioned in the US government’s communiqué and in all likelihood will not be honored. The Mexican government is hoping to conceal from the public its efforts to work out a deal with Trump to benefit the Mexican bourgeoisie at the expense of Mexican workers.

Trump’s aggressive behavior toward Mexico in recent days has thrown bilateral relations into their greatest crisis in decades. In an underreported development this week, Trump also announced that the White House would publish a weekly list of immigrants accused of committing crimes, a tactic aimed at whipping up anti-immigrant hysteria and appropriated from the Nazi press of the 1930s.

At a joint press conference with UK Prime Minister Theresa May yesterday afternoon, Trump again threatened Mexico with trade war and an immigration crackdown: “Mexico has out negotiated us and beat us to a pulp. They have made us look foolish,” he said. “The border is soft and weak, drugs are pouring in. General Kelly is going to do a fantastic job at

Homeland Security.” He had tweeted similar sentiments earlier in the day.

The *Wall Street Journal* published an editorial yesterday describing Trump’s provocation against Mexico as “amateur hour.” Sections of the US ruling class fear that Trump’s attacks on Mexico will ignite social opposition on both sides of the border. The *Journal* stated its fear that Trump may force Mexico to regress “to its ways before its reformation began in the 1980s. For decades our southern neighbor was known for one-party government, anti-Americanism, hyperinflation and political turmoil.”

In its editorial, the *New York Times* called the Trump administration’s threat to impose a 20 percent tax on Mexican imports “absurd” and “the latest in a head-spinning torrent of lies, dangerous policy ideas and threats from the White House since Mr. Trump was sworn in last Friday.” The *Times* wrote that “sending the Mexican economy into a tailspin” would likely increase the flow of immigration to the US and increase unemployment in both countries.

The Mexican political establishment has responded with nationalist bravado. Former President Vicente Fox told NBC News that Mexico “is ready for a trade war.” In fact, Mexico is highly dependent on exports to the US and is negotiating from a position of extreme weakness, which Trump is exploiting.

Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (known as AMLO), the leader of the Movement for National Regeneration (Morena) and candidate for president of Mexico in 2018, called on Peña Nieto to “represent our people with dignity” in negotiations with Trump, and implored him to file a complaint for human rights abuses with the United Nations. This hollow bombast is aimed at channeling working class opposition to US imperialism’s insulting and dangerous provocations

behind the Mexican state in the name of “national unity.”

The US-Mexico crisis has thrust AMLO further into the spotlight. A headline in yesterday’s *El Pais* reads: “The Trump hurricane works in favor of Lopez Obrador in Mexico.” AMLO’s “nationalist discourse in defense of Mexico” is aiding his chances of winning the 2018 presidential elections, the article states. AMLO recently announced he would tour the United States beginning in February, with scheduled stops in Los Angeles, Phoenix, El Paso, Chicago, New York, and Laredo.

A January 2017 poll by SDPNoticias and Mexico Elige puts AMLO at between 40 and 45 percent, well above the candidates of the PAN (15-25 percent), PRI (7-10 percent), and PRD (2-5 percent). The low poll numbers for the traditional ruling party (PRI) and its right and left split-offs (PAN and PRD) express the crisis of legitimacy facing the political establishment as a result of decades of attacks on living standards and explosive levels of social inequality and violence.

Popular hostility to the Peña Nieto regime’s kowtowing to Trump comes in the wake of mass protests against the government’s decision to cut a gas subsidy, leading to higher costs of living across the board for Mexican workers and poor peasants. Several protesters and police have been killed in demonstrations, which continue to date, albeit at a lower level of intensity.

While AMLO’s program is of a wholly pro-capitalist character, even the moderate reforms he proposes to social programs make his candidacy unacceptable to sections of the Mexican elite. So hated are the main parties that the bourgeois press is advancing the idea of a presidential run by multi-billionaire Carlos Slim.

La Opinion noted earlier in January that “the name of mogul Carlos Slim began to circulate through social networks in recent hours when hundreds of users proposed the businessman as candidate for Mexican President in 2018, in a convulsive moment for the country because of the protests over the rising price of gas.”

Yesterday, Slim called a press conference and addressed the state of US-Mexico relations, capturing headlines throughout the country. Slim has publicly sparred with Trump in recent months, but met with him at a Florida restaurant in mid-December. He supported

Peña Nieto’s decision to cancel his meeting with Trump, but said that Trump is “intelligent” and has “common sense.” Slim said: “We can make the US see the importance of not stopping their production here, they can produce more because we are good workers, they can produce more cheaply...these are real advantages.”

The fact that the Mexican political establishment is responding to the serious threat posed by Trump by floating the candidacy of an even wealthier billionaire shows the extent of the crisis gripping the ruling establishments on both sides of the US-Mexican border.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact