

In face of US threats, Mexican president calls for “national unity”

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Last week, Enrique Peña Nieto issued a call for “national unity” during a brief televised address. It was clearly a bid to redirect social anger from the crisis-ridden PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) government and deflect it onto the Trump administration, which is reviled in Mexico in roughly equal measure.

Referring obliquely to the telephone exchange in which Trump thuggishly threatened to send troops into Mexico, Peña Nieto recounted that, “Although we haven’t reached agreement on any issue, this conversation opened a space for the Mexican government and the US government to continue a dialogue.”

He said these “issues” included “national sovereignty,” “respect of our dignity and independence” and “cooperation between two countries that are neighbors, friends and allies in trade,” all of which euphemistically point to the Trump administration’s intention to renegotiate harsher terms for Mexico’s subordination to US imperialism.

Unmentioned in the address was the PRI’s inability and unwillingness to do anything other than accede on every point of substance relating to Trump’s proposed border wall, plans to carry out the deportation of millions of undocumented immigrants, the potential scrapping of NAFTA and a more bellicose footing throughout the Americas on the pretext of “national security,” all of which are of a piece with Washington’s “America-first” strategy.

The Mexican president promised to provide over one billion pesos in additional funding to the country’s consulates in the United States in an effort to appear invested in the defense of immigrants of Mexican origin against predatory US immigration policies. The Mexican Secretariat of Foreign Affairs (SRE) issued a statement last Friday urging Mexican nationals living in the US to “take precautions and stay in contact with their nearest consulate to obtain the necessary help,” citing the recent deportation of Guadalupe García de Rayos, a Mexican-born mother of two in Arizona, whose deportation was “not deemed a priority” for ICE officials under the Obama administration.

“The case of Mrs. Garcia de Rayos illustrates the new reality that the Mexican community in US territory is living before the severest application of migratory control measures,” the SRE explained. The SRE’s recommendation and Peña Nieto’s

measly influx of funds to Mexican consulates is a fraud, given the PRI government’s broad cooperation with the Obama administration’s 3 million deportations, and the Peña Nieto administration’s own heavy-handed policing of its southern border with Central America. The Trump administration’s policies represent not a break, but a continuity and escalation of those pursued by his predecessor in the White House.

The PRI government invocation of nationalism is utterly cynical. It has followed Washington’s dictates slavishly in terms of the raft of the counter-reforms dubbed the “Pact for Mexico,” in large part engineered by Washington, including a privatization of the country’s energy sector that was essentially cooked up by the State Department during Hillary Clinton’s tenure.

The Mexican ruling elite finds itself in a weak position, caught between the intransigence of the Trump administration, on the one hand, and mounting social anger from its own population, on the other.

Peña’s nationalist appeal rings false to the broad mass of the Mexican public, which has correctly taken his address for what it is: a desperate effort to shore up public support for a despised and discredited political establishment that extends beyond Peña himself and the PRI government.

The popular reaction to Peña’s appeals stands in stark contrast to that of Mexico’s ruling circles, which have rallied around the slogan of “national unity,” while disagreeing over who will be its standard bearer.

None other than Carlos Slim, the fourth-wealthiest person in the world, insists on lining up firmly behind the Peña Nieto administration. “We have to support him. The whole country must do it before a special threat in relation to the US that we have not seen.” He made his remarks days before the centenary of the 1917 Constitution, demagogically invoking the historical memory of US intervention in the Mexican Revolution. This nationalist bluster gives way to negotiating trade relations with the Trump administration from its present position of weakness, with Slim concluding that, “the best border wall is investment, economic activity and employment opportunities in Mexico.”

Expressing the most minor tactical differences with Slim, Miguel Angel Mancera, the PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution) mayor of Mexico City, stated, “It is the national

unity of Mexicans, not [national unity] with the government.” He continued, “The president has a vote of confidence from a lot of people because he’s the one who has to represent the country in a negotiation with Trump. But he has a mandate not to give in, to go in with force and dignity. If the president were to err, then a very unfavorable wave would sweep in. My proposal is not to give Mexico bad news. There shouldn’t be another increase in the price of gasoline, for example.”

The social basis for the embattled president’s “vote of confidence,” comes from within the Mexican bourgeoisie itself, while the references to the possibility of an “unfavorable wave” unless there are some paltry concessions in areas such as the implementation of the *gasolinazo* point to a deep nervousness within Mexican ruling circles.

On this point, it is unlikely that Peña’s recent announcement postponing the next round of fuel price hikes by one week will do anything to steer the Mexican political establishment out of the adverse currents that so trouble Mancera.

The invocation of “national unity” flies in the face of the deep social chasm that exists in Mexico. According to a recent Oxfam report, the country’s four wealthiest billionaires control as much wealth as the poorest half of the population. What’s more, the study points out that the top 10 percent as a whole accounts for 67 percent of Mexico’s national wealth.

“There can be no social cohesion with these levels of concentration of wealth globally and nationally,” noted the director of Oxfam Mexico, Ricardo Fuentes Nieva.

Nevertheless, the Mexican pseudo-left, whose outlook has its material basis in the “next 9 percent,” also seeks to shackle the Mexican working class to a regime of inequality on the basis of “national unity.”

Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (popularly known as AMLO), head of Morena (Movement of National Regeneration) and the current favorite in the 2018 presidential elections, is in fact the initiator of the call for “national unity.” His recent statement, “Political Accord of Unity for the Prosperity of the People and the Rebirth of Mexico,” repeats his ongoing targeting of “the mafia in power,” while avoiding any mention of Mexico’s relationship to US imperialism—indeed, he has gone on record as stating that Obama, the president known as the deporter-in-chief, was “a good, but not exceptional president.”

AMLO’s lenient attitude to the architects of the miserable conditions facing the Mexican working class extends to the “mafia in power” so often called out in his stump speeches. Last year he stated, “we do not consider the members of the group in power, in spite of the great harm that they have caused to the people and the country, to have any ill intention, and we assure them, before their possible defeat in 2018, that there will be no reprisals or persecutions of anyone.”

His frequently invoked promise to combat corruption and “establish an authentic democracy” is contradicted by his unwillingness to hold any of the political establishment legally accountable for mass killings, disappearances and wholesale

corruption. Beginning its existence as a split from the PRD, Morena as a political party has its social base not in the working class, but in the more privileged layers of the upper middle class, with links to academics, professionals and trade union bureaucrats.

The pseudo-left organization Izquierda Socialista (Socialist Left) falsifies the historical origins and social base of Morena, falsely portraying it as a workers’ party burdened by an opportunist leadership: “We make a call to the base of Morena ... to recuperate control of the party ... to demand respect for party democracy, to prevent Morena ending up becoming another version of the PRD and the rest of the parties of the regime.”

It is an absurdity to speak of Morena, founded by Lopez Obrador, a bourgeois politician, in terms of “recuperating” control over the party by the working class. It only exposes Socialist Left’s own orientation, which is not to the Mexican working class, but to Morena’s social base in the upper middle class.

For its part, the Movement of Socialist Workers (MTS), the Mexican section of the Morenoite FT-CI, counterposes to Izquierda Socialista’s outright tailing behind Morena little else than a nationalist course independent of Morena: “For the socialists of the MTS, the working population must reject unity with our executioners ... The unity that socialists propose is ... [a] unity to achieve national independence.”

Characteristically for the MTS, the rest of the world—particularly in terms of the international working class—is wholly absent from its strategy. The glaring indifference to international questions of both the MTS and Socialist Left is not merely a question of “mistaken” positions, but a political strategy that is rooted in the strivings of the upper middle class to maintain its privileged position within the capitalist system.

The interests of the Mexican working class cannot be defended on the basis of a strategy of “national unity” that presupposes a community of interest between workers and figures like Carlos Slim. Mexican workers are economically linked and united in a production process that stretches across national boundaries to the rest of the international working class, and in particular the working class of the United States. To effectively defend their social interests, this economic unity brought about by capitalist globalization must be shaped into a political unity on the basis of an internationalist and socialist program.



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