

Mexican presidential candidate López Obrador campaigns on both sides of the border

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In the run-up to Mexico's 2018 election, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (popularly known as AMLO), the head of the Movement of National Regeneration (Morena), has been on a speaking tour to prepare his presidential candidacy, appearing across Mexico and traveling to seven US cities. Having already spoken in Los Angeles and Chicago, he is appearing this week in El Paso, Texas, and Phoenix, Arizona.

In 2006, AMLO was the candidate of the center-"left" Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), which was itself a split-off from the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which ruled Mexico without interruption from 1929 to 2000. He lost the 2006 presidential election to Felipe Calderón of the right-wing National Action Party (PAN) due to widespread electoral fraud. AMLO, again as the PRD candidate, also claims that fraud cost him the 2012 presidential election, which saw the return to power of the PRI under President Enrique Peña Nieto after 12 years of PAN rule.

AMLO founded Morena as a political party in 2014 to serve as a vehicle for his personal candidacy and to disassociate himself from the PRD, which was discredited by its corruption and support for the "Pact for Mexico," which led to a series of right-wing "reforms," attacking public education and paving the way to privatization of Mexico's state-run oil corporation, PEMEX.

Peña Nieto's approval rating has sunk this year to as low as 12 percent. For months, AMLO has been leading in the polls for likely candidates in the 2018 presidential election. One poll in January had him at 45 percent, compared to candidates of the PAN (15-25 percent), PRI (a dismal 7-10 percent), and PRD (an abysmal 2-5 percent).

On his current tour, AMLO is asking Mexicans, regardless of their class position, to sign on to his "Political Agreement of Unity for the Prosperity of the People and the Renaissance of Mexico," which consists of a handful of sentences filled with empty patriotic appeals and platitudes

about a rebirth for Mexico.

AMLO and Morena call for uniting all sectors of society, "women and men, poor and rich, religious and free thinkers," as long as they don't participate in the corruption endemic to the Mexican ruling class, which he calls Mexico's "main problem."

Thus, billionaire Carlos Slim Helú, ranked as recently as 2013 as the world's richest man, with a net worth of \$55 billion or 6 percent of Mexico's GDP, and who acquired Mexico's national telephone company Telmex for a song, is welcome to participate in AMLO's unity campaign. In Morena's eyes, he is an "honest businessman," rather than part of what AMLO calls the corrupt "mafia in power" who "traffic in influence."

This in a country whose four wealthiest billionaires control as much wealth as the bottom half of the population—the 65 million that live in poverty (which includes 13 million living in extreme poverty)—and where the top 10 percent as a whole accounts for 67 percent of Mexico's national wealth.

The threadbare nationalist program advanced by AMLO and Morena makes not even a pretense of challenging this grotesque social inequality and the capitalist property relations that are the source of the corruption that it condemns. Nor does it make any mention of imperialism—this despite the domination of the country and its economy for over a century by its northern neighbor, the United States.

Instead, Morena, in the more nationalistic pre-1980 tradition of the Mexican bourgeoisie, seeks better terms for Mexican business when dealing with US capital. AMLO stresses that the largest plants installed in Mexico belong to American investors or businessmen "who export merchandise and their profits to the United States and leave very few jobs or taxes" in Mexico.

Morena's official program calls for "cooperative development" with US businesses and for "higher competition internally and competitiveness externally."

With its invocation of universal civic, social and democratic values and vague moral appeals, AMLO and Morena orient themselves to Mexico's middle class, which they claim has a "profound desire for liberation, to make justice a reality." But much of the 9 percent under the top 1 percent in Mexico that constitutes Morena's real social base, views the masses of workers and poor as a threat to their wealth and privileges. This layer includes the trade union operatives, academics and state bureaucrats.

Calling for a "moral and cultural revolution," AMLO and Morena clearly oppose a social revolution and are determined to prevent Mexico's working class from forging its political independence and fighting for power.

The so-called reforms currently put forward by AMLO are at best flaccid, and in many cases reactionary.

AMLO's current flagship proposal is to "guarantee the right to education" (a right already enshrined in the Mexican constitution) by paying 300,000 youth a paltry \$120-a-month scholarship to study. At the same time, AMLO proposes to guarantee an additional 2.3 million young people a \$225-a-month salary for job training. AMLO absurdly claims that this will guarantee full employment for young people and remove the temptation of "antisocial behavior," that is entering the drug trade.

The second proposal AMLO is highlighting is to establish a 12-mile-deep "free or open zone" along the 1,800-mile border with the United States, which would include all of Mexico's border cities with the US, such as Tijuana and Juarez, in order to "promote growth" in this region of Mexico. Under this proposal, "incentives will be given, taxes will be lowered, gasoline prices will be lowered and job creation will be encouraged." The 11 percent-16 percent value-added tax previously imposed in the border area would be repealed.

More generally, while Morena's program calls on the state to "promote the national economy," AMLO insists that Mexican development is to be accomplished without increasing taxes on the wealthy, by freeing up funds lost to corruption and by the government "acting with austerity"—that is, not spending significantly on social programs or infrastructure. The country, AMLO says "should no longer be indebted."

This is a right-wing program. Mexican economic development will continue on as it has under the counter-reforms implemented through Peña Nieto's 2013 "Pact for Mexico," which is grounded on increasing exploitation of Mexican workers and poor peasants by the Mexican ruling class.

Last year, AMLO sold out the struggles of teachers in poor southern Mexico states who were opposing education "reform," that is attacks on their wages and rights, pushing

them to sit down with intransigent federal officials who were heading up these attacks.

When masses of Mexicans protested a 20 percent hike in gas prices in January, AMLO attacked some who blocked refinery facilities or looted stores for employing "fascist strategies." Order, he said, had to be brought to such "chaos." Any and all violence had to be avoided in order to assure a "peaceful and democratic" road to change, despite the ever-increasing violence of the Mexican state and its military and police agencies against the population.

In the speech he gave in Los Angeles last month, AMLO attempted to reason with Trump against the latter's threats to impose vindictive tariffs on Mexico exports to the United States, rewrite the North American Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in favor of the US and deport millions of Mexicans to Mexico.

In response to Trump's attempts to whip up anti-immigrant chauvinism, AMLO called on "American academicians and intellectuals who hold civic, social and democratic values" to draw up a plan to "convince and persuade workers and the middle class in the United States that migrants are not their enemies." He said that Morena would work with such academicians and social leaders to create committees in the US to spread "the message of reason and fellowship among the U.S. population."

AMLO's ideology, which, like Trump's, proceeds from nationalist and patriotic appeals, can offer no solution whatsoever to the very real problems he raises. Workers in both countries must reject the nationalism and fake "left" populism of AMLO and Morena.

At AMLO's speech in Los Angeles, the WSWS interviewed Juan Rivera, a retired Mexican worker who came to the US in 1968 to work in the fields. After hearing AMLO speak, Rivera put forward an entirely different perspective. He said that the "unity of Mexican and American workers presented the way forward; that the day is not far off when the working classes of both those countries will make capitalism collapse and fall."

Rather than making appeals to academics and social leaders, that is, to layers who are invariably tied to the Democratic Party, what is needed is for Mexican and US workers, who are already united in terms of production chains, to unite through an independent political struggle on a program against capitalism and for socialism.



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