

Mexican election season begins

Part One: Corrupt major parties struggle for legitimacy in 2018 Mexican election

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Mexico's election for a new president and both houses of Congress is July 1. On Sunday the major political parties selected their official candidates.

The ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) of current president Enrique Peña Nieto is running under the slogan "Everyone for Mexico" in a coalition with the Mexican Green Ecological Party (Partido Verde Ecologista de México, PVEM) and the New Alliance Party (Nueva Alianza or PANAL), a party with origins in the corrupt National Union of Education Workers (the SNTE).

Bogged down in corruption allegations and with dismal approval ratings, for the first time in its nine-decade history the PRI has chosen a nonparty member as its candidate, José Antonio Meade Kuribreña, largely because he is not personally suspected of corruption.

Meade served as Secretary of Finance (Treasury) and Secretary of Energy towards the end of the immediately prior presidency of Felipe Calderón Hinojosa of the right-wing National Action Party (PAN), where he was a proponent of the energy reform adopted early in Peña Nieto's subsequent administration. Under Peña Nieto, Meade served as Secretary of Foreign Affairs for three years, Secretary of Social Development (SEDESOL) for a year, and then as Secretary of Finance until he resigned that position in November to run for president.

Meade headed the Finance Ministry at the time of the "gasolinazo" explosion of mass opposition to rising gasoline prices in early 2017, garnering him the hashtag #LordGasolinazo.

While Meade may not have personally benefited, corruption scandals have come to light arising from the time Meade headed SENESOL and the Finance Ministry.

As to SENESOL, *Proceso* magazine has documented widespread diversion of funds slated for its anti-hunger

campaign while Meade headed it.

According to the *Reforma* newspaper, money was sent by the Finance Ministry when Meade headed it to Alejandro Gutierrez, who was arrested in December based on allegations that when he controlled the PRI's financial accounts he funneled \$13.3 million in public money to political campaigns in Chihuahua state.

More broadly, a growing list of top PRI officials, from eight former governors to the former CEO of state oil company Pemex, have faced corruption accusations over the last year. This comes on top of the exposure of personal corruption on the part of Peña Nieto and his wife involving business cronies and the awarding of public contracts.

Despite this stench, in the last two months the PRI appointed the controversial ex-governor of the state of Coahuila, Rubén Moreira, to two key electoral posts, even though he faces accusations that he embezzled almost \$20 million directed to teachers to buy votes, and that he received money from organized crime—first as its secretary of its electoral action, and then, more importantly, as secretary of its electoral organization.

Meade's campaign coordinator is Aurelio Nuño Mayer, Peña Nieto's Secretary of Public Education from 2015 to 2017, who crushed the work stoppages of dissident teachers in southern Mexico in 2013 against Peña Nieto's education "reform," a code word stripping teachers of their rights, while funneling money to the corrupt SNTE to assure its election loyalty.

Traditionally Mexican presidents, who are limited to one six-year term, select a successor candidate from their party, exercising the "dedazo" (tap of the finger). But it is Luis Videgaray Caso, who himself claims to have displaced the massively unpopular lame duck president Peña Nieto as the most powerful figure in the PRI, who

selected Meade to be the PRI's candidate in this election.

It was Videgaray who preceded candidate Meade as Secretary of Finance, and succeeded Meade as Secretary of Foreign Affairs in 2016. Videgaray is in charge of the critical renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with the Trump administration and Canada. Videgaray has paid obeisance to the "security" imperatives of the United States in Mexico, and cultivated Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser, Jared Kushner. Videgaray is himself widely unpopular for having pushed Peña Nieto to invite then candidate Donald Trump to visit him in Mexico.

Meade was a late selection over the three who had been considered contenders the last two years—Videgaray himself, Nuño Mayer, and Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong, the Interior Minister who covered up the 2014 killing of the 43 Ayotzinapa teaching students, and resigned from that post last month because he does not believe the PRI has a chance to win. None had any prospect of winning, hence the turn to Meade.

Despite the PRI's attempt at new garb, it is surprising to no one that Meade has barely been able to reach a high of 20 percent to date in election polls and is now polling at 18 percent. This reflects the extreme political crisis of the PRI.

No supposedly "clean" candidate can wave a wand and disentangle himself and the PRI from its history of corruption and violence. The Mexican population cannot forget that the PRI, the military and the police are implicated in the disappearance of the Ayotzinapa 43, and other violent attacks on the population, including teachers.

Nor can the Mexican working class forget that under Peña Nieto's 2012 "Pact for Mexico" approved by the PRI, PAN and the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) it has suffered concerted attacks on its social position, high unemployment, low wages, high prices, including skyrocketing gas prices as a result of the legislation's deregulation of the energy and oil sectors, and a drooping peso.

Rising poverty and extreme inequality have been the outcome. Mexico's four wealthiest billionaires control as much wealth as the bottom half of the population—the 65 million that live in poverty, including 13 million living in extreme poverty. The top ten percent as a whole account for 67 percent of Mexico's national wealth. Mexico registers the second highest level of inequality amongst the 34 advanced economies that make up the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.

The technocrat Meade, like Videgaray, is simply

another prime exponent of the policies that have opened the floodgates to increased exploitation by the Mexican bourgeoisie, in tandem with the depredations of foreign, and primarily American, capital.

Meade is further tarred by his service under the presidency of Calderón, who was also reviled. Calderón launched a war on the drug cartels that led to tens of thousands of deaths and even more corruption. His rule was so disastrous that the first PAN president, his predecessor Vicente Fox, supported Peña Nieto in the 2012 election rather than the PAN candidate, Josefina Vázquez Mota.

As for the right-wing PAN, the party and its presidential candidate Ricardo Anaya Cortés have also fared poorly in polling, even after solidifying their electoral coalition—"For Mexico to the Front"—with the once "center-left" PRD, which has essentially abandoned its once populist pretensions, and the PRD's long-time allied party, the Citizen's Movement (MC). The bedraggled PRD, whose 2006 presidential candidate was former Mexico City mayor Andrés Manuel López Obrador (popularly known as AMLO), could not run independently due to its sinking political fortunes in the wake of casting its lot with the Pact for Mexico, and the factional infighting that has torn apart the party since.

Anaya asserts that three "cancerous tumors" have overwhelmed Mexico, "corruption, violence and inequality." He has adopted the PRD's vacuous slogan of "Democracy Now, Homeland for All." In reality the PAN-PRD coalition offers nothing more than continued attacks on the working class, and the corruption and violence that was also endemic to the PAN presidencies of Fox and Calderón and goes hand in hand with those attacks.

Polls over the last four years show that like the PRI, the PAN and PRD are also widely distrusted by the populace. It is little wonder that Anaya has been running in the range of no more than 19 to 27 percent in the polls. The Mexican masses know that there is no democratic reflection of their interests in the dominant parties.

To be continued



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