AMLO accuses US of meddling in Mexico

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Tensions rose last week between the US and Mexican governments as President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) condemned US threats against his government and scaled back his cooperation with the US-led onslaught against migrants.

The Mexican president posted an open letter to US President Joe Biden and made a formal diplomatic protest over US financing of NGOs tied to Mexico's political opposition. "How are they going to be funding an organization openly opposed to a legal, legitimate, and democratic government?" AMLO demanded during the announcement Wednesday. "This violates our sovereignty and constitutes interventionism."

Among similar statements, AMLO said on Thursday that Mexico is being "used as a piñata for politicking," adding that US claims that fentanyl crossing the border is being produced in Mexico are "almost entirely lies."

On Friday, however, AMLO endorsed a key element of Washington's fentanyl claims: blaming China. While US intelligence agencies have insisted that only the main components of the drug are shipped from China, AMLO claimed on Friday that the Mexican Navy had found a container with 600 bags of finished fentanyl and methamphetamine that had arrived from China.

AMLO sent a letter to Chinese President Xi Jinping demanding that he inform the Mexican authorities about future fentanyl shipments, effectively backing US propaganda that the Chinese government is knowingly flooding the US with the substance and is responsible for overdose deaths. This latest episode confirms that AMLO ultimately bows to the US war drive against China, which is the basis of near-shoring production from Asia to North America.

Regarding migration, AMLO agreed to and even praised the implementation of Biden's new policy to send migrants at the border back to Mexico, denying them the right to apply for asylum. This policy is to replace Title 42, which hypocritically exploited the COVID-19 pandemic as a pretext to do the same and will expire on May 11.

On Thursday, however, the Mexican Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard said the country is not willing to accept the 100,000 Central American migrants the United States expects to send back. Moreover, on April 29, Mexican migration authorities reached a deal with about 3,000 migrants marching together in southern Mexico, promising to let them reach the US border unimpeded if they dissolved into smaller groups, to the dismay of Washington.

This decision followed the release of new footage of the March 27 fire at a migrant detention center in Ciudad Juárez, which showed Mexican officials and soldiers refusing to let the migrants out for several minutes as the fire and smoke spread and killed 40.

The Biden administration has since ordered 1,500 additional US troops to the border as thousands of migrants are expected to try to cross after May 11. The US military buildup at the border also serves as a threat against AMLO, who has condemned the demands by leading Republicans to invade Mexico, supposedly to fight drug cartels.

AMLO's recent statements are the latest in a long series of nationalist appeals ostensibly aimed against the predatory and imperialist character of US policy toward its historically oppressed neighbor and closest trade partner. In February, he denounced the Biden administration for "meddling" when it backed protests organized by the right-wing opposition against change to the National Electoral Institute. In March, he proposed in a call with Brazilian President Lula to establish new trade partnerships regionally that don't require the dollar.

In mid-April he accused the Pentagon and DEA of spying upon and hacking the Mexican military and giving tips to Mexican media. "They want to rule here, to violate our sovereignty," he said.

AMLO has repeatedly denounced the US and NATO for prolonging and partially causing the war in Ukraine, and called for a peaceful settlement, challenging the propaganda lies of an "unprovoked war" by Putin. He has also demanded the liberation of Julian Assange and offered him asylum.

The pseudo-left backers of AMLO are enthusiastically promoting his nationalist demagogy. *Jacobin* magazine recently insisted, "AMLO is not undermining Mexican democracy," as his government "refuses total obedience to US hegemony" and takes up the "role of regional leadership in Latin America" against US domination. Last year, one article was even titled, "AMLO is trying to free Mexico and Latin America from the US's Imperial Grip."

AMLO's nationalist bluster, however, serves only to cover his government's subordination to US imperialism on all fundamental questions and, like all demagoguery, is aimed chiefly against the working class.

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Under the slogan of a “Fourth Transformation,” AMLO vowed to radically depart from his predecessors, who sought to “surrender our national assets” and turn Mexico into “a real factory of poor people.” Instead, he promised to place the “poor first” and provide “a decent life” to all Mexicans.

But, as soon as he came to power, he created a free trade zone along the US-Mexico border with massive corporate tax cuts, prioritized interest payments to creditors over social spending and sacrificed the lives of over 600,000 people during the COVID-19 pandemic to guarantee the flow of profits.

His minimum wage increases have proven inadequate, with four out of ten formal workers still making less than the poverty level. And six out of ten workers belong to the informal sector, largely deprived of even the minimum wage, healthcare, and other benefits. Meanwhile, numerous economists have concluded that his welfare programs have been inadequate and not really aimed at the poor.

As summed up by a recent study: “The urban and rural population making less than the poverty line (and who don’t possess at least 2.5 hectares of land) [are] not eligible for social programs aimed at alleviating their plight.” (Martínez Espinoza, UNAM, 2023)

According to official figures, there are about 4 million more poor today than when AMLO took power in 2018, and analysts expect that rampant inflation will further increase poverty.

In sum, AMLO is doing the exact opposite of confronting US imperialism to defend workers’ interests. As he oversees the implementation of the new US, Mexico, Canada trade pact, he has maintained high poverty rates and massively under-financed social services as bludgeons to keep wages low, lowered tax rates and offered other incentives to prostitute Mexico’s workers and natural resources to US and Canadian corporations more than any other president since the Mexican Revolution. This is the real content of his “Fourth Transformation.”

In February, he personally reached an agreement with Elon Musk to build a massive Tesla factory in Monterrey, shortly after opposing the location because “there is no water” in the region. And there are ongoing talks to build advanced chips in Mexico under Biden’s “Chips Act” aimed at lowering US dependence on microprocessors produced in Asia.

By deepening the already fundamental role played by Mexico in the North American economic platform used by US and Canadian imperialism to confront China, Russia and Washington’s so-called allies in Europe, AMLO hopes to gain leverage to negotiate a greater slice of the profits for his sponsors in the Mexican oligarchy, including his supporters Carlos Slim and German Larrea, the two richest men in Mexico.

The support for “near-shoring” production away from China was the basis for the ties between AMLO and his “friend” Donald Trump. AMLO backed Trump’s attempted coup by legitimizing Trump’s bogus claims of electoral fraud, refusing to recognize Biden’s clear electoral victory for six weeks while Trump continued to push for overturning the results, and condemning Trump’s suspension on social media.

At the time, Trump was aiming to establish a dictatorship based on “America First” imperialism, which involved repeated threats to invade Mexico and the use of violent anti-Mexican chauvinism to mobilize fascist militias and layers within the state as his core constituency.

A section of the national bourgeoisie fears that AMLO’s confrontational statements could cost them US investments. These elements also seek to undermine AMLO’s efforts to gain a stronger grip over the state by cultivating a constituency among the military leadership.

AMLO’s anti-US rhetoric serves both to advance the trade and investment demands of the Mexican ruling elite and to protect his clique in the military and police from corruption allegations—in turn used by the US and the Mexican opposition as political capital.

Most fundamentally, however, beyond just electoral calculations, the promotion of popular illusions in AMLO have played a crucial role since the late 1990s in suppressing the class struggle and concealing the class character of the state. This is at the heart of the services he provides to the ruling class and the most important card in his hand. But the fear of awakening the giant industrial workforce south of the Rio Grande in joint struggle with American workers also explains why the Biden administration and the US corporate media limit the aggressiveness of their criticisms of AMLO.

In fact, AMLO’s party Morena and the White House have worked very closely to channel an ongoing rebellion among rank-and-file workers against the hated trade union bureaucracy behind so-called “independent unions,” which have been trained as lackeys of management and sponsored by the US State Department through the Solidarity Center, which is a US-government-funded arm of the AFL-CIO.

But as the gulf between AMLO’s promises and reality becomes increasingly apparent and opposition from below inevitably grows, US imperialism will move more swiftly against him and his party Morena.

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