

After new Mexico City airport is canceled, López Obrador rushes to reassure finance capital

By Alex González
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On October 29, Mexico's president-elect, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), announced that the incoming administration would cancel a massive new airport in Mexico City after the proposal was rejected in a referendum involving a small fraction of eligible voters. The announcement provoked a wave of indignation from domestic and foreign investors, who have already completed about one third of the US\$13 billion project and have widely speculated on properties surrounding the new airport.

The New International Airport for Mexico City (NAICM) would have been the largest public infrastructure project in Mexico in a century and was set to replace the capital's current international airport, the busiest in Latin America. By the final stages of the project in 2065, the airport was set to have a capacity of 125 million passengers annually, making it the second largest airport in the world by today's standards.

AMLO made canceling the project one of the key promises of his presidential campaign. About 2 percent of voters nationwide cast ballots in the airport vote, most of them from municipalities that voted for his party, the Movement for National Regeneration (Morena), in the July 1 national elections. Media reports alleged that polling places were staffed by former Morena campaign volunteers and that there were no checks to prevent individuals from voting multiple times.

There is undoubtedly real social opposition to the NAICM. To the masses, the new airport exemplifies the corruption and criminality of the ruling class. The airport's designer was the son-in-law of Mexican billionaire Carlos Slim, the seventh richest person in

the world, while the contract for the construction of the terminal building was awarded to a consortium led by a company owned by Slim himself. There were fortunes to be made through land speculation, with the value of properties surrounding the airport increasing by 50 to 60 percent.

According to the official results, about 70 percent of those who participated in the referendum voted for AMLO's alternative proposal, which involves adding two runways to an existing military airbase rather than building a new airport. Given Mexico City's mountainous location, the viability of operating the existing international airport and the military base simultaneously is unclear, with multiple experts urging a study to assess the operational risks involved.

After AMLO announced that the project would be canceled, the peso had its largest one-day drop since the election of Donald Trump in 2016, while the Mexican stock exchange fell by 4 percent. Fitch Rating downgraded the country from "stable" to "negative." Worried commentaries from the international press noted that AMLO's decision had generated "uncertainty" about his ability to drop his "left" facade in order to ruthlessly repress social opposition and implement measures necessary for guaranteeing the bottom line of the ruling class.

Quickly answering this call from his true constituency, AMLO rushed to reassure big business that his administration could be trusted to guarantee their interests. "From the beginning of the analysis on this issue, we have made it clear that companies' and investors' interests will be safe," he said. "There are funds that back up the claims made by contractors and investors. We have the bank guarantees to fulfill any

claim made by companies.” The incoming administration’s communications director assured that investors and contractors would “not lose one peso of their money” as a result of AMLO’s decision.

The current international airport has been operating over capacity for more than 20 years. However, NAIM has been entirely centered on maximizing the wealth of a tiny layer at the top, not on addressing the social needs of the working class. Throughout the election, AMLO made populist appeals against the new airport in order to exploit and channel social anger behind his campaign. AMLO’s reaction to finance capital lays bare that he is as faithful a representative of the ruling class as any other capitalist politician.

The crisis surrounding the new airport coincided with a massive water shutoff in Mexico City, the largest city in North America. This past week, about 4 million residents of Mexico City went without water due to maintenance to the reservoir pipelines feeding the metropolitan area. Three million people from the neighboring State of Mexico were also affected. For three days, all public schools in the capital shut down due to a lack of water. A city of 21 million people witnessed scenes fitting another century, with millions of people relying on water stored in buckets, bathtubs or containers for cooking, cleaning, and bathing for days at a time.

The government estimates that as much as 40 percent of water coming into Mexico City is lost due to leaks, and some reports estimate that the city will run out of water in the next 50 years if current patterns hold.

The water crisis in Mexico City and the NAIM project are directly linked, with scientists repeatedly warning that building the new airport would exacerbate Mexico City’s water crisis. Whether it be lining the pockets of the ruling elite, as was the case with NAIM, or insisting that “there is no money” for a mass infrastructure project, the profit system has no progressive answer for the working class. Neither the water crisis nor the transportation needs of the masses can be solved on a rational basis under capitalism.

A recent Credit Suisse report revealed that the top 10 percent of Mexicans own 70 percent of the country’s wealth, while the top 1 percent—or 130,000 individuals—own 40 percent of Mexico’s wealth. Millions are squandered each year militarizing the border between Mexico and Central America to prevent

some of the most exploited and vulnerable layers of the international working class from seeking a better life.

Genuine socialists insist that not a single social problem facing the working class can be solved without a frontal assault on the wealth of the ruling elite. Workers and youth should judge AMLO and Morena not by his populist phrases, but by the history, program, and class orientation of this party, all of which are based on nationalism and a constituency in privileged layers of the upper-middle class. The Mexican working class, together with its class brothers and sisters throughout the Americas and internationally, need a socialist revolution in order to scientifically plan and organize society based on their objective social needs.

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