

# López Obrador's rise in Mexico sets stage for explosive class struggles

4 December 2018

On Saturday, Andrés Manuel López Obrador—or “AMLO,” as he is known—was sworn in for a six-year term as president of Mexico, the world’s tenth largest country by population, home to 130 million people.

The coming to power of López Obrador sets the stage for an escalation of the class struggle across North America. No Mexican president since Francisco Madero was elected in 1911 has confronted as acute a contradiction between the progressive expectations of the masses of people and the reactionary aims of the ruling class. As in 1911, at the onset of the Mexican Revolution of 1910–1920, Mexico is a social powder keg waiting to explode.

López Obrador is a 65-year-old former mayor of Mexico City who has spent his entire political life as a bourgeois functionary and political climber. Hailing from the southern gulf state of Tabasco, he became active in the ruling Party of the Institutional Revolution (PRI) in his early 20s and won appointments to positions at various government agencies in the years that followed.

In 1988, AMLO joined the populist Democratic Currents opposition within the PRI, whose leader, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas (grandson of Mexican President Lázaro Cárdenas), split with the PRI and ran unsuccessfully for president that year. AMLO rose as a leading figure in Democratic Current’s successor party, the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), and served as head of the party from 1996 to 1999 before winning election for Mexico City mayor in 2000, a position he held until 2005.

He ran for president as a member of the PRD in 2006 and again in 2012. Though it is likely AMLO won the vote in both elections, he was prevented from taking office both times by electoral fraud perpetrated by the ruling class with the support of the military and the media.

In this year’s election, however, AMLO won 30 million votes, double the total in each of his prior two campaigns. His National Regeneration Movement (MORENA) party, which was founded only four years ago after he split from the PRD in 2012, won an absolute majority in both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate and captured five of the nine governor’s seats up for election. The traditional parties

of the Mexican ruling class were reduced to parliamentary rumps.

The results marked a massive repudiation of the Mexican political establishment. Seeing AMLO as a mechanism for diffusing growing social opposition, dominant sections of the ruling class have supported his transition to power.

But now, with the hated PRI administration of Enrique Peña Nieto out of power, millions of Mexican workers, peasants and young people believe that AMLO and MORENA will have no excuse if they fail to deliver on campaign promises to reduce inequality and poverty, rein in government corruption, defend Mexican émigrés in the US and end the disastrous “war on drugs.” According to a recent poll from *El Financiero*, 83 percent of Mexicans believe AMLO will generate economic growth and jobs and 74 percent think he will reduce poverty and inequality.

AMLO’s proposed policies, packaged in pseudo-populist verbiage, make clear that these aspirations will soon be shattered.

While denouncing the “repressive strategies” of past administrations, AMLO has called for nearly doubling the size of the military and keeping it on the streets to conduct the hated “war on drugs,” which has resulted in over 260,000 deaths since 2006.

AMLO claims to oppose big business, but he has pledged to veto anti-bank legislation and called for passage of an austerity budget. He has rejected calls to re-expropriate the oil industry and proposes setting up a number of “special economic zones” in both the northern border region and the impoverished south, where transnational corporations will be allowed to hyper-exploit the land and the impoverished residents.

He has promised to work on behalf of the US to block the flow of Central American immigrants across Mexico’s southern border with Guatemala. Some 10,000 asylum seekers remain encamped under horrible conditions in Tijuana, and AMLO is reportedly considering Trump’s proposal that Mexico hold them in internment camps instead of allowing them passage to the US as is required under international law.

As AMLO faithfully carries out the policies of the ruling class, he will set a fuse igniting the anger of millions of workers, youth and peasants. Under conditions where workers will be breaking from AMLO and entering into the class struggle, various self-proclaimed “socialist” groups in the US and Latin America are already fighting to keep them tied to AMLO and the state.

In a December 1 article, *Jacobin* magazine, which is politically linked to the Democratic Socialists of America, tells its readers that AMLO “will hit the ground running” with “a welcome set of proposals to be fought for and defended.” It urges Mexican workers to apply pressure on López Obrador to distance himself from his right-wing cabinet.

After the elections in July, the International Socialist Organization (ISO) wrote that “AMLO and his government will come under a lot of pressure to deliver to all sides,” including both the working class and the ruling elite. “The ruling class and the US establishment are by far the most organized of these sources of pressure. The radical left will have to organize to make sure the urgent call for change that the elections represented isn’t silenced.”

The argument that a bourgeois politician and the capitalist Mexican state can be pressured to implement genuinely progressive, let alone socialist, policies is absurd and dangerous.

It is a formula for politically subordinating the working class to the ruling elite by promoting illusions in left-talking defenders of capitalism. It opposes an independent and revolutionary policy for the working class and thereby paves the way for the violent suppression of the class struggle. It is a repetition, at an even lower level, of the “popular front” politics that have proven so disastrous in Latin America, most tragically in Chile, where the refusal of the popular front government of Salvador Allende to oppose the counterrevolutionary, CIA-backed conspiracies of the Chilean corporate elite and military paved the way for the bloody dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet.

The policies of the Mexican government are not determined by the degree of pressure AMLO receives from his “left,” but by the class character of the state and Mexico’s position in the global capitalist market. Above all, this means the domination of the country by American banks and corporations and the hyper-exploitation of the Mexican working class.

From 1993, the last year before the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), to 2016, the value of regional trade between Canada, the US and Mexico increased from \$290 billion to \$1.1 trillion. Over that same period, US foreign direct investment in Mexico grew from \$15 billion to over \$100 billion.

On the one hand, this economic domination means political subservience. When Trump rounds up Mexican immigrants, throws Mexican children in jail without their parents, calls Mexican nationals rapists and deploys the military to the border, the Mexican government pledges its readiness to work with his administration and honors his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, with the highest state honor, the Order of the Aztec Eagle!

The domination of Yankee imperialism does not lessen the intensity of the conflict between the Mexican bourgeoisie and working class, it heightens it. The ruling elite and all of its political representatives, AMLO no less than the openly right-wing leaders of the PRI and the National Action Party (PAN), fear the revolutionary threat to their property and power from the workers infinitely more than the depredations of Washington and Wall Street.

At the same time, the increasing economic interconnectivity between Mexico and the US has created a powerful working class. Mexico has become a formidable industrial country, with the 11th highest manufacturing output in the world. There are 9.1 million manufacturing workers in Mexico—three times the total in the UK.

In economic terms, the Mexican, Canadian and American working classes are not three separate entities, but a single social force, exploited by the same companies at different stages in the same process of production. Under capitalism, however, workers are held down by the nation-state system and pitted against each other by the corporations. While Mexico’s natural resources can flow freely across the border to American corporations, the children of Mexican workers cannot cross to join their parents.

The task for workers across North America is to unite in a common revolutionary movement, tear down this irrational system and reorganize the hemisphere on a planned, socialist basis through the establishment of the United Socialist States of the Americas.

Eric London

To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>