



Mexico: greet the president with mass action

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Populist candidate for president, Lopez Obrador, has challenged the outcome of the elections after appearing to lose by a few thousand votes to Calderon of the right-wing National Action Party.

But whoever wins, Lopez or Calderon, the workers and peasants will still have to struggle against a neo-liberal government committed to privatisation and the free market.

And those struggles are already gathering momentum. In Oaxaca there has been a month-long struggle of teachers against the right-wing state governor Ortiz. The teachers went out on strike in May over pay, occupying the city centre, setting up their own radio station and then calling out workers and community activists in support. On the 14 June, helicopters flew overhead spraying tear gas and Ortiz sent in the police to smash up an occupation of 70,000 people, teachers and their families, in the main square. Hundreds were beaten and organisers claim two people were killed. But the teachers fought back and retook the square from the police.

The next day a march of 120,000 supported the teachers followed by a march of 400,00 people the day after - the biggest mobilisations in the city and local state's history. The teachers have occupied town halls and government buildings in the region. Students occupied the university and lent the teachers use of their own radio station. What started as a strike over pay in May became a mass movement to oust the state governor.

The people of the city have already formed a Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca (Appo), which meets in the former government palace. Appo is urging everyone to organise popular assemblies at every level: neighborhoods, street blocks, unions, and towns. "No leader is going to solve our problems," its manifesto says. The goals, in addition to forcing governor Ortiz to resign or be impeached, is to retake the wealth of natural resources to benefit the people.

Meanwhile, miners came out in a national one-day strike on 1 March while workers at the Cananea and La Claridad mines, which produce half the country's copper, have been out since in a bitter strike. There is also a bitter strike at Sicartsa, a large steel company.

To support these strikes the leaders of mine, telephone and university workers called out their members for a general strike on 28 June - four days before the elections. But they called it off the day before claiming they didn't want to harm Obrador's chances in the elections.

And this is the problem. Obrador as mayor of Mexico city carried out populist measures such as public works that benefited the urban poor and earned popularity ratings of more than 80 per cent. Last year, more than a million people came out in support of him against a politically motivated prosecution, which quickly folded. But along with these measures he has jailed strikers and had the police smash up student protests. He has said he opposes the sell-off of the oil industry and the North American Free Trade Agreement and has been heavily criticised by the Mexican business community for being a leftist and a "dinosaur". His last election rally drew crowds of 150,000 people in Mexico city. But even *The Economist* magazine came out in support of him as being an "outsider" and as someone who could "reform" the Mexican state.

Obrador is a populist with a mass base in the electorate. As a result he has the ability to pass reforms but also to carry out the policies of the bosses and their northern neighbours in the US. The danger for workers and peasants is that they hold back on their own struggles in the belief that Obrador offers something different and will "give him a chance" and

time to implement his policies. If he delivers any reforms, it will be as a response to the emerging mass movements and their demands.

But they could achieve more if they organised independently for their own demands, including those unacceptable to Obrador. They should stand their own democratically agreed candidates of struggle in elections, and went on to found a party of struggle that could unite all the organisations in a political alternative.

The way forward

Workers and peasants must immediately restart actions against the bosses. The postponed general strike must be recovered as soon as possible. Other unions must be called out in support. Strike committees must be formed to take control of action and to link up the unions, students and organisations of the poor and peasants.

The rebellion in Oaxaca is of great importance and must continue. The Appo should debate its next steps and lay out its goals. It must continue its struggle, organising the defence of demonstrations and occupations by arming the people, and take over basic economic tasks such as the distribution of food, communication and transport. By spreading support into other towns and rural areas of the regional state it can offset the Mexican state concentrating its forces on Oaxaca and avoid being isolated.

Such links could develop a national Appo movement and debate out a strategy to oust not just Ortiz but the new president himself. Then the question is, what power should stand in their place? The answer to this lies in the future development of the Appo itself. It should not put in his place not another corrupt ruling class politician but a workers' government to rule in favour of workers and peasants. The goal should be to build out of the Oaxaca struggles the Appo into a workers' council, formed of delegates from the workplaces, schools, campuses, working class districts, peasant settlements ? and crucially, soldiers ? to create an alternative state government.

To carry out that strategy a popular assembly, much less populist leaders, will not be enough. And the Zapatista guerrilla movement, which leaves politics and elections to be monopolised by the capitalist parties, has also failed its test. The Mexican workers must organise and develop a party of their own which bases itself in the trade unions and popular organisations. Revolutionaries must join with the workers and argue for a party that can not just challenge capitalism but overthrow it for good, taking the nation's resources into the hands of the workers, peasants, and poor.

Vincent Fox's neo-liberal reforms have been met with a rising tide of resistance in Mexico. The close presidential vote is a reflection of this: it shows the polarisation of society. The masses of Mexico have must put their trust in their own strength and ability to continue their resistance and fight to free themselves from global capitalism.

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