

Inauguration of President Felipe Calderon: The Spirit of Resistance in Mexico City

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National Action Party (PAN) candidate Felipe Calderon had center stage at 12:01 AM, December 1 at the presidential residence of Los Pinos as Mexico's new president addressed the country on national television after a brief stealth swearing-in ceremony for him to the office he didn't win and will now assume illegitimately because of the fraud-laden electoral coup d'état that gave it to him. He then had to be slipped in a back door of the Congress later that morning to take the oath of office there, as constitutionally required, in a second "lightning-fast" chaotic ceremony preceded by a brawl between lawmakers for and against the new president who then left as fast as he entered and is now off to a rocky start.

At the same time, outside in Mexico City's streets, hundreds of thousands of people assembled early in the morning in the vast Zocalo square supporting opposition Democratic Revolution Party (PRD) candidate Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, who changed his earlier plans to march on Congress and instead held a peaceful mass-protest march of his supporters through the city center to avoid clashes with the police that might have turned violent. It went as far as Chapultepec Park, the entrance to the secured area, to demonstrate opposition to Mr. Calderon and to support Lopez Obrador who was denied the presidency he won now handed over illegitimately to Mr. Calderon. Obrador told the crowd his fight will continue because "it is not possible that there are no democratic elections in Mexico. We are not rebels without a cause, like the media want to portray us. Sometimes they forget the real issue at hand, they forget that we were robbed of the presidential election."

Earlier on Tuesday, November 28, opposition legislators occupied the speaker's podium in the Parliament's Chamber of Deputies lower house where Calderon was scheduled to be sworn in as is customary. They remained there, humiliating Mr. Calderon and forcing him first to settle for a well-guarded private bewitching hour ceremony, unprecedented in the country's history, and then have to repeat it in the brawling environment of the lower house and mass-opposition controlled anger in the streets outside. Not a good way to begin a presidency that may not get any easier ahead. It led the Council on Hemispheric Affairs (COHA) on December 1 to write an article with the long and ominous title - "With Calderon's Deeply Troubled Inauguration Last Night, Amidst a Deteriorating Security Situation in Oaxaca, the Possibility of a New Mexican Revolution Cannot Be Ruled Out." What COHA didn't say was that it appears that revolution may have already begun and is beginning to spread slowly throughout most parts of the country where "the people the color of the earth" live and are now demanding their rights.

In the earlier wee-hours ceremony COHA referred to, Calderon was presented the tri-color ceremonial sash by outgoing PAN president Vincente Fox, and it now remains to be seen

what he can do with it as he assumes his new office in a weakened position against an opposition with vast support determined to continue resisting his legitimacy. For weeks following the fraud-laden July 2 general election, mass protests filled the streets of Mexico City and its vast Zocalo square.

The struggle continued in an atmosphere of post-election turmoil that energized the Mexican public including the courageous people of Oaxaca who've been battling since May for the rights they've long been denied including the removal of the corrupt and repressive state governor Ulises Ruiz and united to do it by forming the Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca (APPO). They're now faced off against 4500 of the country's Federal Preventative Police (PFP) and thuggish paramilitary assassins sent to the state to target them. Still, they've stood their ground bravely in their determined confrontation that shows no signs of ending despite brutal police harassment on the streets with tear-gassing, illegal home searches and seizures, people disappeared, many dozens or hundreds illegally arrested for protesting injustice and falsely accused of "hindering free passage, sedition, criminal association, conspiracy, theft, rebellion, and threats" and at least 17 killed including American documentary filmmaker and journalist Brad Will and dozens wounded.

Weeks before the early morning stealth inauguration in Mexico City, the ruling PAN party set up a militarized zone around the Chamber of Deputies in the capital preparing for whatever might unfold in the run-up to December 1 and its aftermath still to come. The area was turned into an armed camp with 1200 elite PFP in riot gear along with Police of the Presidential Guard manning checkpoints in the surrounding streets in an atmosphere of martial law that persists and may signal trouble ahead on the streets of Mexico City similar to what's now happening in Oaxaca and beginning to spread elsewhere.

In addition, three-meter high metal fences were erected around the Chamber of Deputies building and remain in place, closing it off like a fortress needing protection from the people of Mexico the elected leaders are supposed to represent but never do in a country with a long tradition of authoritarian rule, corruption, dismissiveness of peoples' rights, and service only to the interests of wealth and power. The scene there represents an ominous symbol of state repression past and more likely to come that Felipe Calderon signaled on November 20 when he said: "My government will make use of all the force of the Mexican state, with the laws at hand and the power of the institutions. This is a war that we are going to win..."

Straightaway, this man shows he means it by his appointment of Jalisco Governor Francisco Ramirez Acuna to the powerful post of Interior Minister that effectively puts him in charge of state-directed repression. He assumes his new office with a well-earned reputation in his home state as a hard line authoritarian known for cracking down on protesters and imprisoning dissidents while, at the same time, allowing narco-traffickers and criminal entrepreneurs safe haven under his jurisdiction and benefitting along with them.

He, Mr. Calderon, and others in the new government will get plenty of support for what they have in mind from the Bush administration. It has its eye on exploiting all remaining parts of Mexico it hasn't yet gotten its hands on since it grabbed so much of it from the IMF-imposed structural adjustment policies of the 1980s that resulted in large-scale privatizations of state-owned industries, economic deregulation favorable to Washington, and mandated wage restraint that held pay increases below the rate of inflation whenever any were gotten at all.

Calderon and Bush will also be close allies working together to further the business gains already in place from the destructive 1994 NAFTA agreement that predatory corporate giants benefitted hugely from and now want to broaden into a North American union, effectively erasing the borders of the three NAFTA-participating countries and surrendering the sovereignty of the two smaller ones to the hegemony of the one dominant one, adversely affecting the people of all three countries who always end up the losers in deals like this, if it happens.

If the opposition in Mexico has any say about it, post-election schemes cooked up by the PAN in service to its dominant northern neighbor may not go as planned. Opposition PRD candidate Lopez Obrador (ALMO, as he's affectionately known) promises to resist the new illegitimate government, and on November 20 (the anniversary date of Mexico's 1910 revolution) conducted his own swearing-in ceremony in Mexico City's Zocalo as Mexico's "legitimate president" before hundreds of thousands of supporters. He named his cabinet members joining him and told the crowd "There are millions of Mexicans who are not willing to accept more abuses (and that his) legitimate government (would work for the poor)." He added Mr. Calderon (he calls a US "puppet") "cannot feel secure (in the office he didn't win and he's) the lowly servant of the white-collar criminals (who stole it for him)." He also presented 20 measures he intends to work for including preventing the privatization of the nation's energy sector Big US Oil has long eyed to control.

The battle lines are now drawn and began peacefully on the streets near the Parliament building on December 1 in response to Lopez Obrador asking his supporters to come out in them in protest with more sure to follow. Security forces have been there for months and will be aligned against them whenever they're in the streets or square and were joined by hundreds of Navy officers deployed around the Parliament, at least for the inauguration, already protected by several thousand elite police and members of the Presidential Guard. This was just day one of round one as Felipe Calderon begins his potentially turbulent six-year term in office that may hold many surprises as it unfolds.

The people of Mexico have shown they're fed up with decades of fraud, corruption and abuse and for months have taken to the streets in numbers large enough to make a difference and for the world to take note. They're joined in protest by their comrades in Oaxaca, other states, and by Subcomandante Marcos and the many thousands of his supporters and organizations across the country. He's leading them in his national Zapatista Other Campaign organized outside the political process to end Mexico's unjust economic system of neoliberal predatory capitalism wanting to replace it with a democratic system of social and economic justice for the people in a country long denied either.

Events ebb and flow south of the border, but overall the atmosphere's electric and more ripe for change now than it's been since Emiliano Zapata Salazar's heroic efforts led a national revolutionary movement against the Porfirio Diaz dictatorship in 1910 that overthrew him the following year. It was historic and now is a symbol of what courageous people hope will ignite a new spirit of resistance leading to change in what may be a watershed moment in Mexico's history.

If it happens, it won't come without struggle. Mexican governments aren't known for yielding easily to protests against their authority, and this one can expect plenty of help from the Bush administration already reeling from the opposition it faces in a growing number of Latin American nations and sure to become more hostile and determined to resist new threats in the region as they arise. For Washington, Mexico is the cornerstone of the

hemisphere it feels it has a lien on and losing it would be another catastrophic blow adding to its strategic defeats in the Middle East brought on by the Bush administration's arrogance, blunders and ineptness.

The people of Mexico have other ideas, they're now playing out in real time, and as events ahead unfold it may be that Mexican history will be made in the hearts of the people and the spirit they show in the streets they take to and not in the halls of power where it usually happens.

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