

Mexican officials to recount votes in last week's election

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The controversy over the vote count coming out of Sunday's elections in Mexico reflects a crisis of leadership in the Mexican ruling class. The "left" faction of the capitalist class has yet to accept the vote count. Its political organ, the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) is claiming massive vote rigging jointly carried out by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI).

In reality, this seemingly bitter argument over votes is the contradictory appearance of horse-trading now taking place behind the scenes within the Mexican establishment and between it and the US Embassy in Mexico City.

The official vote count is surrounded by controversy. On Wednesday the Federal Elections Commission (IFE) released a detailed count of 54 percent of voting locations that gave Enrique Peña Nieto a 38.15 percent plurality over Andrés Manuel López Obrador of the PRD, who got 31.64 percent. Josefina Vázquez Mota of the National Action Party (PAN) came in third place, with 24 percent of the vote. The IFE announced that it would also do a recount on about 75 percent of the voting stations to examine the votes for the federal legislature.

Both Vázquez Mota and outgoing president Felipe Calderón accepted Peña Nieto's victory Sunday night while López Obrador reserved judgment. The PRD and its presidential candidate have now rejected the results and demand a full recount of every vote cast.

Among the evidence that López Obrador and his supporters in the Movement for National Regeneration (MORENA) movement have come up with are voting locations in which more than 100 percent of voters cast ballots, locations that never opened, protests by voters who sold their votes to the PRI and have yet to be paid, and receipts from a supermarket chain that accepted a PRI-issued debit card.

The cards, with amounts ranging from 100 to 1000 pesos (approximately US\$7.50 to \$75), were allegedly distributed in the state of Mexico and could only be exchanged for merchandise at supermarket chains Soriana and Bodegas Aurrerá. According to the accusation, after having voted for Peña Nieto, people could claim the cards. Both Soriana and Peña Nieto denied the charges, claiming that the evidence, including cards and video, had been falsified by the López Obrador campaign. Peña Nieto accused the PRD candidate of being a sore loser. The escalating scandal now has a name: SorianaGate.

MORENA's on-line periodical, *Regeneración*, listed some 800 voting stations with more ballots cast than voters registered in that station. In one Veracruz location, *Regeneración* alleges that 300 percent of the registered voters cast ballots. The López Obrador campaign

is demanding that the Federal Election Commission investigate all voting locations with a participation rate higher than 80 percent.

Participants in a Monday demonstration organized by #YoSoy132, an online youth activist group, were informed of other incidents of fraud—including the theft of ballot boxes, shootings, and the kidnapping of election officials —by police and security forces.

It would be a mistake to blame López Obrador's defeat to SorianaGate or to electoral fraud. The vote against the PAN, which has held the presidency for 12 years, was a rejection of Mexico's dirty war on the gangs, and of the collapse of living standards for millions of Mexicans.

Faced with candidates who were in basic agreement on most things, from beefing up security forces to fight the drug war, to liberalizing labor market, to protecting corporate and media monopolies, many voters had nothing to go on except media presence and personal appeal.

At the same time, this was not just another election. Mexico is a social powder keg waiting to explode. Escalating social inequality, collapsing living standards, increasing unemployment, famine and malnutrition, and a seemingly endless war on drugs are driving social conflict, from Oaxaca to Veracruz to Sonora.

This is the second time that López Obrador claims to be the victim of fraud. In 2006, where Calderón's margin of victory was about ½ percent, the PRD candidate alleged fraud, declared himself the winner and mobilized his supporters in Mexico City to protest the result. Aside from ballot tampering, in that election López Obrador had been the object of a campaign that branded him as a "danger to Mexico," for his so-called radical views.

In the 2012 campaign, the candidate presented an image more acceptable to the political establishment. In line with that, López Obrador has ruled out mass mobilizations or occupations of the kind that he led in 2006 in Mexico City.

Wikileaks documents from 2006 obtained by the Mexico City daily *La Jornada* indicate that the United States was informed and involved in the political maneuvers to insure López Obrador's defeat. One cable, titled "AMLO: Apocalypse not" describes conversations between the PRD candidate, referred to by his acronym, and US Ambassador Tony Garza and other US embassy officials. Despite the cable's title, it is clear from the content of the cable that the Garza did not necessarily consider a López Obrador victory a problem for the US—though it is clear from the diplomatic exchanges that the US expected and favored a PAN victory.

Despite López Obrador's 2006 nationalist rhetoric, Garza reported that the PRD leader "tried to ease our minds ... an experienced politician, AMLO geared his discussion to his audience, showing his willingness to discuss the difficult issues and appearing open to our suggestions." The memo also places emphasis on López Obrador's willingness to use the military and expanded security forces to combat the drug cartels.

Other US cables from that period took note of López Obrador's ability to appeal to rally mass support, and his support for the Oaxaca teachers who were then engaged in a struggle against Governor Ulises Ruiz. Six years later, there is no doubt that the Obama administration is as informed and involved in Mexican affairs as was the Bush White House

in 2006—or more. Yet other embassy cables report on lobbying efforts by the Catholic Church and the Mexican right wing to sabotage an AMLO victory.

The anger and bitterness of the 2006 outcome, did not prevent the PRD and PAN from forming electoral alliances when they saw fit. Under the pressure of the class struggle, old recriminations will be pushed aside and both the PRI and PRD will present a counterrevolutionary united front.

Assuming Peña Nieto, as is expected, successfully fights off López Obrador's electoral challenge, his administration may, in fact, be discredited from the start. This poses a dilemma for the Obama administration, at a time in which it is asserting imperial control over oil and other natural resources around the world against its European and Asian rivals.

As a major oil and commodity producer on the US southern frontier, Mexico is a major piece in its global strategy. In that context the assistance of López Obrador and the PRD in dealing with an increasingly restive working class will become increasingly important.

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