

Mexico's election tribunal denies López Obrador's challenge to July vote

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Mexico's Electoral Tribunal (TEPJF) went into public session on Monday and threw out most of challenges to the results of the July second presidential elections. The challenges, questioning the votes cast at some 40,000 ballot boxes, came from Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the candidate of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD).

The tribunal nullified 237,736 votes, but did not disclose where the votes were cast. Of the nullified votes, 81,080 went to Felipe Calderón of the National Action Party (PAN), 76,897 corresponded to the coalition led by the PRD, and 63,000 went to Roberto Madrazo, of the coalition led by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI).

Though the TEPJF was careful to point out that its calculation was preliminary and subject to change, there is no doubt that its ruling paves the way for the tribunal to certify Calderón as the winner of the July election. The TEPJF must certify a winner by September 6. In the July vote, neither candidate won an absolute majority; official returns gave Calderón and López Obrador each about 35 percent of the vote. According to the initial count, Calderón edged out López by a narrow margin of 244,000 votes (0.58 percent of the votes cast). The Electoral tribunal's decision narrows Calderón's margin; it does not reverse it. López Obrador considers himself the real winner of the elections and had mobilized millions of his followers to obtain a recount of all the ballots. Since the July election, López has led massive protest marches and addressed rallies of hundreds of thousands to press for a full recount of all the votes cast. The PRD candidate has called for a mass rally on Mexico's Independence Day, September 16, which would either declare him president or "chief of government in resistance" to a Calderón administration.

López refers to the September 16 rally as a "National Democratic Convention" (CND). Meetings across the country are being set up by his supporters to elect hundreds of thousands of delegates to this protest. In addition to declaring him president, López called on the CND to create new institutions that "respond to the people's mandate."

Anticipating Monday's TEPJF decision he said, "We have no respect for their institutions; they are not of the people; we will create new institutions according to article 39 of the Constitution." Mexico's article 39 states that political power belongs to the people.

López Obrador was careful not to spell out what new institutions he is demanding. In challenging the PAN and Calderón, López has been short on specifics. While insisting that the government put "the poor first" and promising a "New Deal," those policies are never explained or spelled out.

López's tactic of popular mobilization is well within the norm in Mexico and Latin America. López and the PRD are committed to and financed by big business interests, such as Mexico's richest man, Carlos Slim.

At the heart of López's and the PRD's campaign is a fear among sections of the ruling elite that behind this election crisis lies a much more profound social crisis, threatening the eruption of class struggle. Conditions are at a breaking point for the middle and working classes following years of decaying living standards, government repression, and increasing levels of unemployment.

Feeding the flames of this crisis are the increasingly untenable economic and social conditions facing most Mexicans, particularly the poorest. While in 1978 a family had to earn two minimum wages to meet the costs of basic necessities, today it takes four, condemning 40 percent of the population to poverty.

At its current growth rate of 5 percent a year, Mexico creates 600,000 jobs out of the one million needed each year, forcing hundreds of thousands to emigrate.

Major events this year alone include:

* The explosion and collapse of the Pasta de Conchos mine in Coahuila State on February 19, in which 65 miners died. The disaster sparked a wave of walkouts at copper and zinc mines in late February. Tens of thousands of miners and mine workers left their jobs in solidarity with the Pasta de Conchos miners, victims of negligence by the government, mine management, and their own union.

* A two-day national strike in March, which shut hundreds of mines and mills, following a decision by the government of PAN leader Vicente Fox to remove the leader of the miners union from his post.

* The shooting death April 20 of two young workers as a result of an armed assault to end a strike at the privatized Sicartsa steel mill in the port city of Lazaro Cardenas in Michoacan state. Thirty others were wounded.

* The brutal attack last May by Mexican police and security forces against small merchants in the community of San Salvador de Atenco, in the state of Mexico. Scores were attacked, including a paraplegic who was beaten for refusing to get up. Seventeen women have charged that they were sexually assaulted by the police while in custody. Nearly four months later, many are still in jail.

* The ongoing occupation by teachers of central Oaxaca in response to a brutal assault on striking teachers on June 15. The teachers and their supporters are demanding that the state governor, Ulises Ruiz of the PRI, resign. Last week armed vigilantes and plainclothes police invaded the public TV channel that had been taken over by the strikers and destroyed essential equipment to take it off the air. The assault is widely attributed to Ulises Ruiz himself. Undeterred, the strikers occupied radio stations to transmit their demands.

What concerns López Obrador and the PRD is that these struggles could get out of control. His central role is to present himself as a representative of “the people” in order to preempt and block an independent movement of the working class.

In an interview published in the *Financial Times* on August 22, after denouncing the current administration

for being controlled by the rich and special interests, López Obrador made it clear that rather than replacing the government intuitions, his aim is to restore popular confidence in the constitution and the government.

In a separate interview with the same publication, López Obrador’s financial advisor, Rogelio Ramirez de la O, stressed fiscal discipline and made it clear that behind the candidate’s populist rhetoric was a pro-business program. “It is essential,” declared Ramirez, to distinguish “electioneering on the campaign trail from communications with the [financial] markets once you are settled in.”



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