México: Year One of the “Fourth Transformation”

January 6, 2020

This is an statement marking the first year in office of Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador [AMLO] published in Unidad Socialista, the publication of the Liga de Unidad Socialista, a socialist organization in México. The editorial refers to the “Fourth Transformation,” AMLO’s name for his program that seeks to place it historically among the three great transformations in the country’s history: independence from Spain, the period of liberal reform under President Benito Juarez, and the Mexican revolution. The editorial appeared in Correspondencia de Prensa on December 21, 2019. It was translated by Lance Selfa.

Presidential candidate Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador gestures after casting his ballot at a polling station during the presidential election in Mexico City, Mexico July 1, 2018. REUTERS/Edgard Garrido –

Nothing to celebrate

Or very little, because 2019 is already the most violent year of the decade, with the highest number of femicides; and the ongoing murders of journalists that make México the most dangerous country in the world for their work; with a “National Guard” turned into an adjunct of the U.S. Border Patrol in the surveillance of the northern and southern borders of the country; with the first sign of military opposition to the president in decades arising from the events in Culiacan (where AMLO decided to

release the captured drug kingpin Ovidio Gúzman to head off a wave of Sinaloa cartel violence). What's more, the government has made an absolute bet on the exploitation of the oil fields when all over the world, steps are being taken to create a world without hydrocarbons. And there is a stagnant economy, with zero or negative growth, along with uncertainty about where the governing party wants to take the country. MORENA (AMLO's party, the National Regeneration Movement) is not a true party that brings together disparate forces that disagree with each other, but a weak conglomeration held together by AMLO's leadership.

The huge turnout at a rally in the Zócalo [the main government square in México City] on December 1 testifies to AMLO's continued popularity. Yet he and his government continue to propagate the same message, *ad nauseum*, in the president's daily briefings. That is, that his government "inherited" a "mess" that won't be easy to clean up and, of course, won't be done by the end of 2019. How long will the government be credibly able to offer these excuses for a situation where things don't change, and where we continue to live in the hell of a decaying society indelibly marked by the precariousness of life for the absolute majority of the population? Events in South America and throughout the world tell us that those times of satisfaction and apathy are coming to an end. México will not be exempt from those winds of rebellion and conflict.

In fact, all of AMLO's supporters, both ordinary people and the most sophisticated intellectuals, recognize that while there has been no coherent expression yet, there is considerable opposition to the government. [The mainstream historian] Lorenzo Meyer estimates that a third of the population opposes him. But Meyer, like the great majority, considers the government to be on the "left" and destined to carry out the "difficult and dangerous" task of what Machiavelli called "a change of regime". An in-depth reading of the electoral tsunami of July 1, 2018 [when AMLO was elected in a landslide] points to this widely held desire for change among the country's population—a population of poorly paid workers, subjected to long working hours, job insecurity and a future with few prospects. This is a population that longs for a radical change that, in this first year of México's pompously titled "Fourth Transformation," is far from being realized.

When one looks at the main points of AMLO's policies, they can be reduced essentially to government anti-poverty programs. What's forgotten is that, historically, these policies don't really work if they aren't also combined with an economic project for large-scale productive investment. The fact that 50 percent of families receive state aid (eight million senior citizens, one million scholarship students, among others) is no small thing, as is the 16 percent increase in the minimum wage. But these programs are based on México's anemic economy: a decline in foreign investment, under-utilization of government financial resources, and a total dependence on large México-based private investors (clearly favored by the president) to move a stagnant economy forward.

The next five years in AMLO's term will be more contentious. Already in the first year of the "Fourth Transformation," and in spite of AMLO's speeches (which are also increasingly moderate, moralizing and vague), his government is basically a continuation of previous neoliberal governments. The aspiration for radical change in the political regime, which powered AMLO's victory on July 1, 2018, remains unrealized. The government's daily briefings and its demagogic rhetoric can't evade the harsh reality that savage, neoliberal capitalism continues to dominate society and will deepen social inequality in the country that, according to the UN's Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, ranks above only Haiti, Honduras, and El Salvador in the region. This will be the real reason why the electoral tsunami that brought AMLO to power will continue to be frustrated. And it will be the reason why sooner, rather than later, other tsunamis—and not just electoral ones— are coming in México.