

# Mexico's MORENA Party Obtains Legal Status—What Will Be the Impact?

Will MORENA, the National Regeneration Movement founded and led by former presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador, be able to change Mexican politics and what sort of change might that mean? We will soon have an idea. Founded in November 2012, MORENA is now a legitimate political party with the right to run candidates in elections.

MORENA received official recognition as a political party from the National Electoral Institute in early July. López Obrador and his followers, who had previously been members of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), now have the electoral vehicle they have desired and worked for as they prepare to enter the mid-term Mexican elections in 2015. The expectation is that MORENA will nominate López Obrador for president in the 2018 elections.

## **No *Chiles*, Please**

López Obrador who lost the 2006 and 2012 elections—both of which he and many other believe were stolen—had previously run as the candidate of the PRD. Frustrated with that party's infighting, corruption, and political compromises, he and his supporters left to found MORENA, first as a social movement and now as a political party. Since his defeat in the controversial and fraudulent 2006 election, López Obrador has traveled throughout Mexico virtually continuously, speaking to the issues, recruiting followers, and building up local and state organizations. That work came to fruition with the organization being granted political party status this month.

MORENA's like the PRD from which it sprang, has a political program, that essentially accepts the existing neoliberal

economic frame, though with a nationalist, progressive, and democratic flavor. One finds no reference to fundamental structural changes or to socialism in the program, but there are several references to the role of the private sector and to the elimination of monopolies in order to to increase competition.

There are no *chiles* here, nothing *picante*. MORENA is not socialist, is not radical, and is not a working class party. MORENA'S politics represent only another tepid version of the Mexican nationalist tradition. While its acronym, which means "the dark girl," may suggest Mexico's working class majority, this is not *tortilla de maíz* but rather *pan blanco*. Yet it is not impossible that this party could become a vehicle for modest social change. The party's rural and urban working class base and discontented middle class members may engage in militant protests and push the party to take more far-reaching positions, though it is doubtful that it could ever become the kind of genuinely radical party needed to begin to transform Mexico.

### **The Size and Power of the Parties**

MORENA was one of three would-be parties which passed muster, the other two being the Humanist Front (Frente Humanista or FH), a conservative party, and the Social Encounter Party (Encuentro Social – PES), based on the Evangelical churches, bringing the number of electoral parties in the country to ten. To become a party, according to the 1946 electoral law, the three pretenders had to demonstrate that they had a national presence, now defined as 220,000 supporters or more in a large proportion of the country's states and municipalities. In order to maintain their party registration, each must win at least 3 percent of the vote in the 2015 elections.

Of the three parties seeking legal status, MORENA was by far the strongest. FH had 270,966 accredited members and 221

district assemblies and PES had 308,997 members and 236 district meetings, while MORENA had 496,729 members and held 30 (out of 32) state-wide assemblies.

Mexico's political spectrum now looks like this: there are ten parties, six of which are conservative and four of which are on the left. The conservative parties are the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) which is in power; the National Action Party (PAN) which held the presidency during the previous two terms; the Ecological Green Party (PVEM), a satellite of the PRI; the Nueva Alianza (NA) which is the party of the Mexican Teachers Union (el SNTE) and is also allied with the PRI; and the two new conservative parties FH and PES. On the left there are the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD); the Workers Party (PT) which came out of the Maoist movement; the Citizens Movement (MC – formerly Convergencia); and now MORENA.

According to María Marván Laborde of *Excelsior*, based on federal electoral statistics, some 13 million Mexicans are affiliated with one or another of the political parties. The existing parties' numbers are as follows: The PRI has 5,848,944 members; the PRD, 3,435,979; the PVEM, 947,346; the PT 892,756; MC, 795,281; NA, 639,174; and the PAN, 271,632.

How, one might wonder, has the PAN with so few members been able in the past to win the presidency and sometimes control about a third of the congress? The answer is that the PAN has relied heavily on its influence in the media. What is clear above all from these statistics is the enormous electoral capacity of the PRI which not only now plays a dominant role in the media but with its allies the PVEM and NA controls or influences about 7.5 million party members, that is about half of all party members.

Party members alone are not everything. López Obrador and his followers demonstrated in 2006 and again in 2012 that they are capable of organizing hundreds of thousands of people in

massive demonstrations and sit-ins. Though, at the same time, it is not clear on the basis of past experience that López Obrador and his party have the ability to win a majority or even the necessary plurality of the vote.

Will MORENA be able to pull voters from the PRD and the PRI, as well as mobilizing new voters? The entrance of MORENA into the national elections in 2015 could lead to a reshaping and realignment of the political parties, and one can imagine a variety of possibilities, that will make the 2015 elections more interesting, though probably not more significant.