

President Peña Nieto on a Roll

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Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto is definitely on a roll. For Peña Nieto, the Institutional Revolutionary Party which he heads, and the business class that he represents, things could hardly be going better.

Even before becoming president, the former administration of Felipe Calderón of the even more conservative National Action Party (PAN) passed the Labor Law Reform sought by business organizations since the 1980s.

Then, Peña Nieto and his party passed the Education Reform Law through the Congress and saw it ratified by the states. While the word “reform” is used in connection with both of these laws, we should understand that there is nothing progressive about these laws in any sense. Both are intended to strengthen the hand of the state and the employers and to weaken that of labor.

Next, shortly after passing the Education Reform Law, Peña Nieto’s Attorney General arrested and jailed the President of the Mexican Teachers Union on charges of embezzlement, not only ignominiously ending her long corrupt career, but also warning other unions not to cross the government.

Now Peña Nieto is pushing through Congress a law to reform telecommunications, aimed at breaking up the monopolies of Televisa, TV Azteca, Telmex and Telcel. This move takes some of the wind out of the sails of Andrés Manuel López Obrador and his Morena Party which have criticized the role of the media in controlling Mexican politics, and it is bound to be popular with the public.

Taking a page from López Obrador, Peña Nieto has also proposed a pension for those over 65 years old. It was López Obrador who won great popularity by giving pensions to Mexico City’s older citizens when he was mayor.

On the political front, things couldn’t look brighter as the PRI’s two competitors are both busy slitting their throats or their wrists in different fashions. The left-of-center Party of the Democratic Revolution finds itself divided over whether or not to support the Pact for Mexico proposed by Peña Nieto at the beginning of his term. Some in the PRD want opportunistically to support the measure, while others just as opportunistically want to oppose.

At the same time PAN, which went down to defeat in the presidential elections because of the Calderón administration’s disastrous six years of economic stagnation and drug war violence in extremis (60,000 killed and 20,000 disappeared), just held a convention that voted for the direct election of the PAN leadership. This surprising vote represents a repudiation of all factions of the old leadership and will lead in the short term to civil war within the party, now that no one is in charge.

While the dissident teachers of the National Coordinating Committee recently held a demonstration for union democracy and against the Education Reform Act, they are about the only ones at the base of Mexican society with any politically conscious forces and the only ones fighting.

Enrique Peña Nieto is on a roll, and it’s a steamroller that he’s riding.