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# AMLO's Mexico: Fourth Transformation?

Saturday 9 September 2023, by [LA BOTZ Dan](#) (Date first published: 1 September 2023).

**MEXICO'S PRESIDENT ANDRÉS Manuel López Obrador (or AMLO) has now been in power for five years, long enough to assess the successes and failures of his administration and to look toward the future. AMLO was elected to his six-year term in 2018 by a landslide, with 54.71% of the vote while his closest competitor in the conservative National Action Party (PAN) won only 22.91%.**

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The party that AMLO had created, Morena, Movimiento Regeneración Nacional (National Regeneration Movement) — Morena also means brown, the color of the common people of Mexico — won a majority of 55 seats in the Senate and a plurality of 156 seats in the Chamber of Deputies. With allied parties, Morena had a majority.

AMLO and Morena had put forward a democratic, inclusive, and progressive vision for the country. The media described AMLO as a leftist, and so it seemed to many. Some still think so. [\[1\]](#)

AMLO promised change. And things certainly needed changing. For 70 years, from 1928 to 2000, the country had been a one-party state, ruled by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) under which corruption and inequality prevailed (brilliantly depicted in the 1999 black comedy “Herod’s Law”).

Then from 2000 to 2018 it was governed by a series of corrupt and incompetent presidents from the conservative National Action Party (PAN) or the equally pro-business PRI. The results were disastrous, in some ways catastrophic.

When AMLO took office, he faced enormous challenges in leading his nation, then of 124 million souls. A few snapshots — and a trigger warning: The drug business earned hundreds of billions. The year he was elected, in 2018, 33,000 people were murdered in the drug wars; some 200,000 had been killed since 2006.

There were thousands of femicides, women murdered around the country. Some 48 journalists were killed in 2016; 42 in 2017. Over 100 politicians were assassinated during the 2018 election campaign. The minimum wage in 2018 was US\$135 a month, among the lowest in Latin America. Millions lived in poverty. Those in rural areas, the Indigenous, and women were poorer than others, often much poorer.

Corruption was rampant. Former Veracruz governor Javier Duarte, for example, stole US\$3 billion,

leaving his state in bankruptcy. The police were notoriously corrupt and violent: murdering, raping and torturing with impunity. When the army was mobilized for the drug war in the early 2000s, soldiers soon did much the same.

Given all that, it is not surprising that millions of younger Mexicans had migrated to the United States, many better educated than those who stayed behind. At the same time, hundreds of thousands of Central Americans and others passed through Mexico, exploited by coyotes, robbed by the police, some murdered by gangs, some suffocating in truck trailers as they tried to make their way to the United States.

Since January of 1994 when the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) took effect, the Mexican economy existed in a complex, quasi-common market with the United States and Canada. U.S. and Canadian foreign direct investment, and that from other countries, amounted to tens of billions of dollars a year.

Foreign investors created new industrial zones with hundreds of factories and millions of workers in the maquiladora plants (mostly on the U.S.-Mexico border), in auto plants (U.S., Japanese, and German) a little further south, and in many other industries.

When AMLO's term began, almost all of those workers were controlled by a corporatist system of labor relations where the state protected its "official" labor unions, which in turn protected employers from real unions, keeping productivity high and wages low. Most workers could not vote for the union they wanted, could not vote on the contract, and risked their jobs if they spoke up.

That was Mexico when AMLO was inaugurated — a permanent social tragedy. AMLO promised that his new government would carry out the "Fourth Transformation," a fundamental change in the country that would usher in a new era and a better future for all Mexicans.

He compared this 4T, as it came to be called, to Mexico's other great transformative periods: the Independence struggle that lasted from 1810-1821 and established Mexico as a sovereign nation; the Reform period of 1855-1876 that expelled the French who had invaded and conquered Mexico and also broke the power of the conservative parties and the Church, establishing a liberal state; and the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1940 that gave land to peasants, labor rights to workers, and nationalized the British and American oil industry.

Clearly AMLO imagined that he, Morena and Mexico would do great things. AMLO not only put his administration in a historical framework, he also imbued it with a mystique. He believed the force was with him.

So these are the questions: Are we seeing a Fourth Transformation? Has AMLO carried out the structural changes that would be necessary for a genuine progressive transformation? If not, what is happening in Mexico?

## The Caudillo

The first problem of AMLO's government has been the man himself. AMLO is a caudillo, a charismatic leader of authoritarian populist tendencies, a larger-than-life-size figure who dominates his party, political life, and the national media. But as one academic observes, "unlike other charismatic leftist leaders who came to power with the backing of major social movements or a mass party, as Evo Morales in Bolivia or Lula in Brazil, AMLO commands a largely personalistic movement supported by unorganized popular constituencies." [2]

AMLO has gradually mesmerized a large segment of society. A master of symbolic gestures, AMLO declined to live in Los Pinos, the presidential palace, and turned it into a museum open to the public. He stopped using and eventually sold off Mexico's luxurious presidential airplane, instead taking commercial flights. He also unloaded the fleet of presidential automobiles.

To fight corruption, he said he wanted a "poor" government, a state of "Franciscan poverty." He himself took a 40% pay cut and stripped former presidents of their pensions. His personal austerity, he suggested, would be a model of "republican austerity" for other government officials, and he laid off many of them and reduced everyone's salary.

All this, he said, was central to the fight against corruption. And of course it enhanced his popularity amongst the masses, many of whom had come to loathe the worse than worthless PRI and PAN governments and resent the wealthy elite. Initially he had the support of 80% of the population.

AMLO is a populist who blames the country's "fifi" (we might say "posh") elite, whom he also calls an economic mafia, for creating the neoliberal economic system and perpetuating the country's political corruption. He uses his position to slam not only the elite but also political opponents and the media. They are bad, the people are good.

And so he speaks directly to the people. His mañaneras, daily 7:00 a.m. press conferences — there have been about a thousand of them — average 90 minutes but some last for hours. They are watched by 13.2 million viewers.

Caudillismo, the domination of such leaders, almost always men, is an historic feature of Mexico since its founding. The caudillo as president reinforces that model of leadership throughout the society, in political parties, in labor unions, community groups and social movements.

It is a style and a system that tends to engender clique politics, favoritism, nepotism and corruption. The presidential caudillo may have a vast popular following and organize enormous rallies, may be beloved by the people — but participation in a rally does not equal a voice in government, and certainly not popular control of the state. AMLO concentrates power in his own hands.

Historically, caudillos emerged from the military. The caudillo was a man on a horse. AMLO did not emerge from the military, but he has increasingly relied on it. The army, the navy, the marines, and the national guard deal with crime, handle immigration, own banks that distribute social welfare payments, and run the airports and the new Maya Train. As president he is, of course, the commander in chief.

## **The Caudillo and Covid**

We can see how caudillismo affected AMLO's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic, which was very like Donald Trump's. [3] As Covid began to appear in Mexico, AMLO not only ignored but disdained scientists' and physicians' public health recommendations. In one of his mañaneras in late March 2020 he held up two amulets that he said protected him, suggesting divine providence or magical powers.

He urged people to continue to go about their business, to use public transportation, go to restaurants, to keep the economy humming. He told people to keep hugging each other and for months afterwards he continued to mingle in his crowds of admirers, shaking hands and kissing babies.

Only very gradually and too late did his government begin to make recommendations on social distancing, masking and other safety practices. Even then he publicly flouted the rules himself. Of course, like Trump, AMLO got Covid.

There was also, however, the problem of the healthcare system. For years Mexico had been cutting the health budget, and AMLO himself, imposing his republican austerity, did the same, cutting the health budget and laying off 10,000 medical professionals in 2019. Health workers protested, blocking highways to call attention to the need for supplies.

There were not enough medicines. Mexico had too few ventilators and not enough hospital beds. [4] AMLO later reversed these policies, but the change came too little and too late. With poor presidential leadership and an inadequate public health system, Mexico had 7,633,355 Covid cases and 334,336 deaths between January 23, 2020 and July 12, 2023.

These deaths are proportionally on a par with the United States under Trump, who did an equally poor job. AMLO bears responsibility for that loss of hundreds of thousands of lives. With such a health crisis, the economy also suffered: "The Mexican economy shrank 4.5% in 2020 as the pandemic ravaged factories, businesses and households. It was the greatest contraction since the 1994 Tequila Crisis that followed a peso devaluation." [5]

Since Covid the economy has improved, growing significantly in the last year, but given its long history of erratic growth spurts, the significance of the recent uptick is unclear.

Drug Cartels and Ayotzinapa

AMLO has also been faced with the enormous challenge of Mexico's drug cartels, which run a multi-billion-dollar business, maintain small, well-armed private armies, exercise control over cities and entire states, and buy politicians, police, and military officers.

In 2006 PAN president Felipe Calderón launched a full-scale drug war, mobilizing the army against the cartels, splitting the cartels into smaller, competing, and more violent organizations. The violence took tens of thousands of lives and the army engaged in widespread human rights violations.

Mexican attitudes toward the drug war violence changed in September 26, 2014 when 43 male students at the Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers' College were kidnapped and murdered in Iguala, Guerrero, Mexico.

Every year the students of Ayotzinapa had commandeered city buses and drove them to Mexico City to commemorate the Tlatelolco Massacre of 1968. But in 2014 the students were gathered up and disappeared either by a drug gang, by local politicians and the police, or by the army or, as became clear, by some combination of those.

The students' disappearance led to national and international protests, the Guerrero governor and other politicians were forced to resign. [6] Various agencies of the Mexican government conducted investigations which in turn were discredited by a U.N. investigation, but the crime remained unsolved and the perpetrators unpunished.

AMLO stood with the people against the PRD politicians in Guerrero, demanding that the PRI national government provide answers.

When he became president, AMLO created a Commission for Truth and Access to Justice that once again investigated the kidnappings and declared it a "state crime." Warrants were issued for the arrest of 88 people, military commanders, soldiers, police officers and drug gang members.

Still, with authorities hiding evidence, lying, and torturing witnesses, the crime remained unsolved and top officials untouched. Only three students' remains were found and no one was tried and convicted.

Inter-American Human Rights Commission's experts who had investigated the crime for eight years ended its work in July, 2023 saying, "The evidence demonstrates that several authorities knew what was happening or had important information that has not been provided, perhaps because they thought it could expose their personnel who might have been involved."

As Tyler Mattiace of Human Rights Watch told the Washington Post, "President López Obrador made a commitment to Ayotzinapa when he was first elected. But when push came to shove and he had to choose between pursuing truth and justice for Ayotzinapa or protecting the military, he chose to protect the military."

As a candidate AMLO had promised to send the soldiers back to the barracks and handle the drug crisis differently; he would offer abrazos, no balazos (hugs not bullets) to the lower-level cartel soldiers and workers, like growers and distributors.

But he soon decided he needed some bullets. In 2019 the Mexican congress agreed to create a 60,000-member national guard — made up of Federal police, army and navy troops — provided that it remained under civilian control. But with the government still losing the drug war, in September 2022 congress, infuriating human rights groups, voted to militarize the guard, which by then numbered 115,000. AMLO broke his promise of demilitarization.

Nor did remilitarization of the drug war solve the problem; in 2022 Mexico had some 42,888 homicides. When the drug war began, it was often argued that most victims were cartel soldiers, killed fighting each other or dying fighting the Mexican police, army or guard. After Ayotzinapa, it seemed, the cartels working with the politicians, police, and army were killing the people.

Despite thousands of arrests, the drug war against the Sinaloa cartel, the Gulf cartel and half a dozen others went on under AMLO with Mexico having lost more than 360,000 lives since it was launched in 2006. [7]

In the same period, 100,000 people have been disappeared, most of whom can be presumed to have been murdered. Amidst this slaughter there is the issue of femicide, the murder of women, with total of 3,754 reported in 2020.

Throughout these years before and during the AMLO presidency there have been large demonstrations against the government for its failure to stop the violence and to solve the crimes, and protests against the authorities' human rights abuses. These movements, often led by survivors — mothers, husbands, wives, friends — have had little impact. Meanwhile fentanyl — cheaper to produce and with a growing U.S. market — has made the cartels even richer.

#### AMLO and the Migrants

When campaigning for president, AMLO suggested he would be the protector and defender of the migrants, most of them Central Americans, passing through Mexico. [8] The migrants from El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala, as well as Cuba and Venezuela, are fleeing economic hardship, political repression, or the drug cartels' violence. Other migrants come from Africa and Asia with similar issues.

AMLO's government initially offered migrants humanitarian visas to work or study in Mexico, but then abandoned the program. Under pressure from Trump, who threatened to raise tariffs on Mexican products, AMLO agreed to stop the migrants from crossing Mexico. He sent 25,000

National Guard troops to the Guatemalan border who used tear gas against families with children.

Migrants were not permitted to leave Mexico's southernmost state of Chiapas. Carlos Heredia, an academic, rights advocate, and former PRD representative in the legislature, told the press, "We have sold our souls and become the wall."

At a migrant camp in Ciudad Juárez this past April, a fire killed 39 Central and South American migrants held in a prison-like facility as the staff ran away. AMLO blamed the victims saying they had set their mattresses on fires.

Activists in Juárez protested. "The police, be they municipal or state level, can put [a migrant] in jail just for being in the street or for getting on a bus, that's been the policy since López Obrador took office," said Graciela Delgado Ramírez, a Juárez activist.

"Here there's a wall, but it's not like Trump's wall. Here the wall is made up of people, where the National Guard, the police, and the bus stations won't let anyone through." [9]

Under President Biden's most recent policy, migrants must wait in Mexico for an appointment made by app, to make their appeal for asylum at the U.S. border. So thousands of migrants are still being held in squalid camps along the U.S.-Mexico border in dangerous cities and towns many overrun by the cartels where they wait for their asylum hearings.

The whole holding camp system is in violation of both U.S. and international law, which says people can seek asylum at the border. Yet AMLO permits the holding camps on Mexican soil.

Economic Development

Early on, AMLO's government published a National Economic Development Plan for 2019-24 full of idealistic language about participatory democracy, promises of wonderful social programs, and development based on increased investment. Though he criticized his neoliberal predecessors for having privatized over 250 state-owned companies, he did not propose to reverse the problem. [10]

As I wrote in 2018, "López Obrador promised once again, as he had so often in his campaign, that the investments of Mexican and foreign stockholders would not only be safe in Mexico, but would make decent profits under his honest administration." [11]

He met regularly with bankers and told them that the financial sector should be self-regulated, like the press. [12] He appointed eight businessmen, two of them heads of the major TV networks, to his council of economic advisors.

As a candidate he had opposed the construction of Mexico's US\$13 billion New International Airport at Texcoco which, he argued, was over budget, riddled with corruption, and a danger to the environment. By the time he became president, the airport was 20% completed and contracts had been signed for most of the rest.

Still, AMLO wanted the project stopped. With no legal power to do so, he organized a completely unconstitutional referendum on the airport's future. Only about one million people participated, just 1.2% of voters, with most polling places in the president's strongholds. Some 69% voted to reject the Texcoco airport.

When the referendum was challenged because of its illegality, AMLO used his executive authority and the claim of national security to quash the Texcoco airport. The new "Felipe Ángeles" airport in Santa Lucía has been built on an air force base — militarization again.



AMLO looked for inspiration to the past era of President Lázaro Cárdenas, who in 1938 had nationalized the British and American oil companies, putting oil at the center of Mexican economic plans. Oil had been the past; it would be the future. AMLO invested US\$8 billion in a refinery in Tabasco, his home state.

But Mexico is no longer one of the top oil producing nations in the world. Production is declining, and the refinery does not improve that, since foreign oil is still cheaper. [13] And with concerns about fossil fuels contributing to climate change, a Mexican Green New Deal would have been a better call.

The economic framework remained unchanged. In AMLO's first year and a half in office, the Mexican economy continued to be situated in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that was negotiated in 1993. Beginning on January 1, 2020, it was replaced by the U.S.-Mexico-Canada-Agreement (USMC), a treaty negotiated by AMLO's predecessor.

Most economists believe the general impact of the new treaty is negligible, but the USMC Annex 23-A required Mexico to improve collective bargaining and Annex 31-A created The Rapid Response Labor Mechanism. These provisions, which gave workers and independent unions a tool, would have an important impact as we will see below.

AMLO went to Washington, DC in January 2021 to celebrate the new trade agreement and to make nice with President Donald Trump who had called Mexican immigrants "criminals, drug dealers, and rapists." Trump thanked AMLO for his help in reducing immigration from Central America. When asked about their relationship, AMLO said, "We are friends, and we're going to keep being friends."

The treaty in general, however, was a ratification of the role of U.S. and Canadian corporate investment in Mexico —accepting and reaffirming foreign economic imperialism.

The pride of AMLO's economic development program is the Maya Train, about 950 miles long and connecting the southeastern states of Quintana Roo, Chiapas, Tabasco, Campeche and Yucatán. The plan was to connect the major cities and archeological sites, increase production, commerce and tourism, and thus generate employment and raise incomes in the country's poorest region.

The train would be built in the state of Hidalgo and would create over one million jobs, AMLO promised and be done by Christmas of this year. All along the route, the president promised, there would be schools and housing built.

Indigenous groups, environmentalists and archeologists have criticized the project, arguing that it will destroy the rainforests and lead to damage to the ancient Mayan cities and temples, and they warn that it threatens the Great Maya Aquifer that supplies drinking water to millions.

The president calls his critics "the pseudo-environmentalists financed by the United States government." He said that "not one tree will be removed," but of course, to build a train through the jungle, thousands have been.

One critic, Gerardo Ceballos, an ecology professor at the National Autonomous University of Mexico as well as a member of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, told the press, "Anyone who knows the area, scientifically speaking, is concerned about where the train will pass: over one of the largest caves and underwater systems on the planet. And the train will collapse."

The project, originally priced at about US\$6 billion, is now projected by the president to be over UD\$20 billion, while plans to connect Merida, the region's largest city, and the small state of Campeche have been scrapped.

Meanwhile around the project there is tremendous land speculation, with pressure on local people, exerted by Mexico's tourist agency and the army, to sell their land. The military is helping to build and will run the train, which is called a national security project. [14]

Clearly the Tren Maya is disorganizing, disrupting and permanently alerting the Mayan communities, which have had no role in decisions about the project. Whether it will bring the benefits to the Mexican economy that AMLO claims remains an open question.

Recently AMLO paid US\$6 billion to nationalize six Spanish-owned power plants. This gives the Federal Electric Company 56% of total Mexican electric energy production.

The United States and Canada opposed nationalization, no doubt seeing it as a dangerous example. AMLO proclaimed, "Mexico is an independent and free country, not a colony or a protectorate of the United States. Cooperation? Yes. Submission? No. Long live the oil expropriation."

Yet this act does not fundamentally alter Mexico's relationship to the United States and Canada, and does not represent an important part of an economic development program.

"The Poor First"

AMLO, sounding like the theology of liberation in the Catholic Church, stated that as president he would put "the poor first." His government abolished many previous government poverty programs and gave cash payments to certain vulnerable groups, particularly the elderly and students under 15 years of age. Money for the poor is distributed through 13,000 banks run by the military.

Such targeted social welfare programs are characteristic of the very neoliberal policies that AMLO claims to oppose. Many on the left would argue that universal programs such as free or subsidized housing, education and health care for all are far superior to those that target specific poor groups.

A large part of the poor labor in the informal economy of businesses or are self-employed [the table above indicates the percentage of total Mexican employment in the informal economy], in both cases untaxed, unregulated, and not participating in the government's social security institutions that provide workers with healthcare and pensions.

These are men and women who work as street vendors, employees of small shops, or delivery workers directed by apps, and many others. Wages are generally low but hard to measure. The informal sector represents 29% of the total economy, while informal employment represents 59% of total employment.

AMLO's administration allocated billions to help the poor, but didn't always spend all of it. Records of what was spent for social programs were not transparent, making it difficult to really understand their impact. Some fear that such targeted programs contributed to corruption, though the evidence for that was not clear either.

Some programs simply failed. Youth Constructing the Future signed up a million young people to get jobs but found work for only 15,000. Máximo Ernesto Jaramillo-Molina in an article titled "More for the Rich, Less for the Poor" argues that government data shows that — while more funds than ever are going to social welfare programs — significantly more of that money is going to the rich and less to the poor. [15]

In 2020 Oxfam reported that 60% of Mexico's poor were ineligible for three of the main social welfare programs. At the same time, military spending increased and often exceeded what had been budgeted. [16]



Finally, during Covid, unlike the United States and countries in Europe, AMLO declined to create significant special programs during the pandemic. Consequently, despite AMLO's vaunted social programs, little has actually been done to improve the lives of the poor.

Julio Boltvinik, who writes the "Moral Economy" column for La Jornada, a paper that has supported AMLO, demonstrates that today there are 98 million poor people in Mexico, just as there were when AMLO took office. (August 7, 2023) Mexico como vamos reports that "Mexico's GDP per capita remains at 2015 levels, indicating eight years of lag and regression."

Taxes are a related issue. AMLO has refused to carry out a fiscal reform that would provide more money for social programs and government projects. Mexico has among the lowest taxes in Latin America, and the OECD reports that tax evasion in Mexico has been estimated to be around 3% of GDP or 27% of the total revenue of the main taxes. AMLO has not raised taxes on the rich nor done much to end tax cheating, both of which would be good governance if not structural reform.

The formal working class — people with regular jobs with legally registered employers — has done better. As AMLO was taking office, the Mexican government increased the national minimum wage from around US\$4.40 per day to approximately US\$5. In the border region, closer to the United States where things are more expensive, the minimum wage was set at US\$9 per day.

Seeing that such things were possible, in January 2019 in Matamoros tens of thousands of workers in the maquiladoras, half of them women, struck dozens of plants. Using social media to organize, they demanded a 20% wage increase. The strike affected Ford and GM plants in the United States.

When such strikes occurred under the former PRI and PAN governments, the president, the Secretary of the Interior and Secretary of Labor would support the companies and labor boards would declare the strikes illegal. With the tacit approval of government officials, corporate managers, and union officials the strike leaders would be fired and force would be used to break up workers' rallies and disperse picket lines. The strike would be crushed.

But this time, AMLO's government took a position of benevolent neutrality, letting the corporations and the workers fight it out without state coercion — and the workers won. Since then, throughout Mexico there have been a series of victories by unions of miners, auto workers and auto glass workers, among others.

These organizing efforts and strikes have been led by independent unions and coalitions such as La Liga which is organizing manufacturing plants in several cities. Still the old corporatist unions, those historically controlled by the state and protecting the bosses, remain dominant and it will take a national organization with international connections to transform the Mexican labor movement. [17]

### **Marching against femicides.**

Other sectors of society are also in movement. The feminist movement in Mexico, with tens of thousands marching with purple banners on March 8, International Women's Day, remains a force.

In the past few years, women won a victory for abortion rights. Mexico's Supreme Court decriminalized abortion in September of 2021 and several states also legalized abortion, yet some have not. In some states abortion is still considered homicide and as many as 200 women remain in prison convicted of abortion. Women are both challenging abortion laws and providing information and abortion pills to women who need them. [18]

Today violence against women, LGBTQ and trans people is at the top of the feminist agenda. AMLO has attempted to coopt the women's movement and has called the independent feminists "middle class conservatives" who oppose his Fourth Transformation. [19]

## **Politics, the Left, and the Future**

Ramón I. Centeno calls the AMLO government a "fake left" administration that produced "a failed post-neoliberal economic transition. [20] Even worse, it sets the stage, if not now in the near future, for a backlash from the right. And there is no genuine left party.

There are today seven parties with a national registration. We have mentioned the PRI, PAN, PRD and Morena. The left-nationalist PRD, once progressive, evolved into a corrupt party like the PRI from whose loins it had sprung. There are also the small social democratic Citizens Movement, the Green Ecologist Party, and the Labor Party.

The Greens are an opportunistic party previously allied with the PRI and now supporting Morena. The Labor Party (PT), a Stalinist party that supports North Korea, was previously allied with the PRD and now supports Morena.

There is no significant far left in Mexico today. From the 1960s to the 1980s, Mexico like other countries in Latin America, Europe and the United States, experienced a rapid growth of leftist groups — Mexican nationalists, Guevarists, Maoists and Trotskyists, as well as the pro-Soviet Communist Party of Mexico (CPM), which joined with some of the new left and became the Unified Socialist Party of Mexico (PSUM).

The left was a small but significant social and political force. [21] The new left of that period furnished activists for the peasant, labor, and community movements, created parties that tried to give expression to the needs and desires of working people.

All that is gone now. The Communists (PSUM) died by euthanasia, entering the PRD. The Trotskyist parties lost support and their legal status. The Maoists' national organizations disappeared, leaving groups of local activists.

The unfortunate lack of a far left in Mexico deprives the social movements of individuals and groups with a critical anti-capitalist analysis, strategic ideas about organizing for social change, a vision of socialism, and a commitment to immerse themselves in the movements. It also means there is no electoral alternative to the fundamentally conservative major parties.

The constitution permits a president to serve only one six-year term. AMLO, with the tacit approval of Morena, will choose his successor. The leading candidates are Mexico City mayor Claudia Sheinbaum, foreign secretary Marcelo Ebrard and interior minister Adán Augusto López.

Sheinbaum appears to be AMLO's personal favorite, but whether the country can nominate and elect a first woman president who is also Jewish remains to be seen. Former president Vicente Fox of the PAN recently referred to her contemptuously as the "Bulgarian Jew." In any case, while AMLO still has 60% support in the country, charisma is not transferable.

As the election approaches, AMLO is taking no chances. He has seen to it that the National Electoral Institute, which oversees elections, has had its budget cut and its personnel reduced.

He has attacked Xochitl Gálvez, an Indigenous woman, engineer and would-be PAN candidate. She

says that her origins are humbler than AMLO's. He called her part of the corrupt elite, a millionaire, an attack that has only made her more popular.

AMLO is almost done and there has been no Fourth Transformation. AMLO failed to deal with Covid, to stop the drug violence, and to really lift up the poor, at the same time that he's undermined democracy and militarized society. His fake left has sown confusion and will over time generate disillusionment and cynicism.

A new Mexican left will have to be built from the bottom up. by workers and farmers, by women and indigenous people, by society's discontents. It's necessary to begin again.

**DAN LA BOTZ**

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**P.S.**

- Against the Current No. 226, September/October 2023:  
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