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## **Lopez Obrador Follows Through with Threat to Form Parallel Government**

*by LADB Staff*

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Having failed in his efforts to overturn the results of the 2006 presidential election, center-left candidate Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador and his supporters have moved toward creating a parallel government. The decision to set up an alternative to the administration of President-elect Felipe Calderon came at a gathering of more than 150,000 Lopez Obrador supporters in Mexico City's massive central square (Zocalo) on Sept. 16, Mexican Independence Day.

Organizers dubbed the huge gathering the Convencion Nacional Democratica (CND). Calderon, a member of the conservative Partido Accion Nacional (PAN), defeated Lopez Obrador by less than 250,000 votes (see SourceMex, 2006-07-12).

Lopez Obrador and his center-left Coalicion por el Bien de Todos pushed for a full recount on the premise that the election was stolen, but they were rebuffed by the electoral court (Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federacion, TEPJF), which instead ordered a partial recount (see SourceMex, 2006-08-09). The recount narrowed Calderon's lead over Lopez Obrador by only about 4,000 votes (see SourceMex, 2006-08-30).

The CND culminated seven weeks of protests, during which Lopez Obrador and tens of thousands of supporters set up camp along Paseo de la Reforma, one of Mexico City's busiest boulevards, to demand a recount. Protesters also organized demonstrations in front of several important buildings in the Mexican capital, including the TEPJF and the Mexican stock exchange (Bolsa Mexicana de Valores, BMV).

Partly at the request of the Mexico City government, which is in the hands of Lopez Obrador's Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD), protesters agreed to end their blockade of Paseo de la Reforma and nearby streets in time for the traditional Independence Day parades. However, the protesters forced President Vicente Fox to move the annual Independence Day commemoration known as El Grito from the Zocalo. Fox moved the ceremony to Dolores Hidalgo in Guanajuato state, which is where Mexican hero Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla issued the call for independence from Spain in 1810.

Lopez Obrador and his supporters, having gained control of the Zocalo for the CND, held their own "grito" in the Mexico City central square, with outgoing Mexico City Mayor Alejandro Encinas leading the reenactment.

### ***"Inauguration" scheduled for Nov. 20***

A day later, at the CND, delegates voted to declare Lopez Obrador Mexico's "legitimate president," with an installation ceremony scheduled for Nov. 20, the anniversary of the start of the Mexican

Revolution to overthrow dictator Porfirio Diaz in the early 1900s. Diaz held power from 1876 to 1911, except for a four-year period when his handpicked successor governed the country.

Lopez Obrador's ceremony is also scheduled almost two weeks before Calderon's swearing-in ceremony on Dec. 1, which Lopez Obrador's supporters have vowed to disrupt. The delegates said the parallel government would work toward creating a new republic with new institutions and a new constitution. "I accept the responsibility of being president because I reject the imposition of their candidate and the rupture of the constitutional order," Lopez Obrador told delegates in his acceptance speech. "They can keep their pirated institutions and their phony president, but they cannot keep our homeland and our national dignity."

Lopez Obrador, who will base his government in Mexico City, said he would name his own cabinet but did not say what role his ministers would have. He also did not say how his parallel government would be financed. At the very least, said supporters, the movement led by Lopez Obrador will act as a deterrent to any efforts of Calderon's government to privatize Mexico's energy, health, and education sectors.

### *Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, other PRD members criticize move*

Despite the strong support Lopez Obrador received at the CND, there were some dissenting voices on the left. The most prominent of these was PRD founder Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, often referred to as the moral leader of the party.

In a couple of newspaper interviews during a visit to Spain in mid-September, Cardenas said Lopez Obrador may have made a "serious mistake" by declaring himself the "legitimate president" because this could cause the PRD and the left to lose support among the Mexican public. "[This act] could have a very high cost for the PRD and the democratic movement," Cardenas told the Barcelona-based newspaper Vanguardia. "You have to respect democratic institutions."

Cardenas' comments elicited mixed reactions from Lopez Obrador's supporters, some of whom called him a traitor. Former party president Porfirio Munoz Ledo chided Cardenas for his weak response to the 1988 election, which was allegedly stolen by Carlos Salinas de Gortari, of the then governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), who won the race with the help of a "computer malfunction." Munoz Ledo said Lopez Obrador has shown much more conviction and honesty than Cuauhtemoc did in 1988. "If Cuauhtemoc had responded in even a small way [to the alleged PRI fraud], we would have saved ourselves 20 years of neoliberal governments," said Munoz Ledo, referring to the administrations of former Presidents Salinas and Ernesto Zedillo and President Vicente Fox.

Still, some longtime PRD members came to Cardenas' defense. Sen. Ricardo Monreal, a PRD leader in the upper house, said Cardenas has earned his place in history as an advocate of democracy. "It is not right to confront him in this manner," said Monreal, who also served as governor of Zacatecas for six years. "On the contrary, we should give him the space to express his opinions."

Outgoing Mexico City mayor Encinas also refrained from criticizing Cardenas, instead calling for a debate within the PRD on what direction the party should take. Some members of the PRD

delegation in Congress and a couple of governors also disagreed with Lopez Obrador's decision to proclaim himself Mexico's president. During a session of Congress, PRD deputies Francisco Javier Santos Arreola, Juan Manuel San Martin, and Jose Antonio Saavedra carried signs saying, "Cardenas, I think the same way you do, even though I supported Lopez Obrador."

Santos said 40 to 50 members of the PRD in the Chamber of Deputies opposed Lopez Obrador's move but have remained silent because of fear of reprisals from the leadership. The PRD and its coalition allies, the Partido del Trabajo (PT) and the Partido Convergencia por la Convergencia (PCD), control 157 seats (see SourceMex, 2006-07-12). Among PRD governors, Zeferino Torreblanca of Guerrero was the only one to openly oppose Lopez Obrador's decision to declare himself president, with Amalia Garcia of Zacatecas adopting a more cautious stance. Michoacan Gov. Lazaro Cardenas Batel, son of Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, has not directly criticized the move but has said he would work closely with Calderon's administration.

### *PAN says Felipe Calderon is only legitimate president*

Calderon made no immediate comments regarding Lopez Obrador's declaration, instead working behind the scenes to try to engage the PRD and its coalition partners in a dialogue. Those overtures have thus far been rejected. Other PAN officials, however, have dismissed the center-left candidate's move. "The only legal and legitimate president of Mexico is Felipe Calderon," said Interior Secretary Carlos Abascal Carranza. "Mexico has decided that the presidency...is won at the polls. That is the democratic tradition."

The PRI has also come out in opposition to Lopez Obrador's self-proclamation. "We view these types of proclamations with great concern," said party spokesman Carlos Flores Rico. "While every Mexican has a right to dissent, there are institutional mechanisms to do so." (Sources: Bloomberg news service, 09/15/06; The Dallas Morning News, Los Angeles Times, 09/15/06, 09/17/06; The New York Times, Associated Press, 09/17/06; Agencia de noticias Proceso, 09/14/06, 09/18/06; Spanish news service EFE, 09/17/06, 09/18/06; Copley New Service, The Chicago Tribune, The Christian Science Monitor, 09/18/06; Notimex, 09/19/06; Excelsior, 09/12/06, 09/18-20/06; Reuters, 09/15/06, 09/16/06, 09/20/06; El Financiero, 09/15/06, 09/18/06, 09/20/06; La Crisis, The Herald-Mexico City, 09/15/06, 09/19/06, 09/20/06; La Cronica de Hoy, La Jornada, Reforma, El Economista, El Universal, Milenio Diario, 09/15/06, 09/18-20/06)

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