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Mexican president used spy agency to monitor immigrant caravans

Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (known as “AMLO”) utilized Mexico’s spy agency to monitor migrant caravans traveling from Central America to the United States, according to his September 1 state of the union report to Congress.

According to the report, between December 2018 and June 2019, AMLO used the National Intelligence Agency, the Armed Forces and Central American officials to carry out “surveillance” against thousands of refugees coming from from El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala. The report specifies neither the scope of such activities—potentially including tracking, infiltrations, and other provocations—nor whether such operations remain active.

This mass surveillance was a response to the groups of thousands of men, women and children that marched through Mexico in caravans, taking on the character of mass political demonstrations.

Under pressure to please the fascistic US President Trump, such caravans have since been deliberately targeted by Mexico’s National Guard, to dissolve the groups into smaller units that are easier to round up and deport.

The revelation is yet another indication of AMLO’s political role in disarming the working class. While posturing as an enemy of the Center for Investigation and National Security (CISEN) and claiming that immigrants’ “human rights” would be protected, AMLO has in fact escalated the country’s militarization and attacks on democratic rights.

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During his election campaign, AMLO repeatedly claimed that “there would be no more spying” under his administration. The population’s deep hostility to such operations intensified after Citizen Lab and the *New York Times* revealed in 2017 that CISEN had **purchased software** to spy on journalists and political opponents. The malware, known as Pegasus, was used to monitor lawyers working on the case of the 43 missing Ayotzinapa students, the leadership of rival political parties, and critical journalists.

Along with every major element of his campaign platform, the claim that CISEN would “disappear” was a lie. AMLO did not put an end to the surveillance of individuals and organizations. Rather, the “leftist” government carried out a cosmetic rebranding of CISEN—now called the National Intelligence Agency— better positioning it to carry out its previous antidemocratic functions, while leaving its duties and leading figures undisturbed.

In January, AMLO announced, to much fanfare, that his administration would open declassified files kept by the former CISEN. But, while files would be opened, no investigations would be initiated by the federal government. “One thing is to classify documents, and another to get involved in investigations,” said AMLO. This includes safeguarding those responsible for carrying out the Pegasus operation.

AMLO’s accommodation to the military-intelligence apparatus extends beyond using its services. He provides political protection for these operations, downplaying the danger of the far-reaching control of the military and the dire threat this poses to democratic freedoms.

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On August 29, AMLO noted during a morning briefing that he found a hidden camera that was recording his private meetings in the National Palace. “Some days ago, in one of the offices we found a sophisticated camera, one of those little ones, where they were recording here in the [National] Palace,” said AMLO.

Despite this extraordinary breach of presidential security, he made it clear that he had no intention of launching a serious investigation to find and prosecute those responsible. “Why get involved in this?” he said. “I don’t have time to take care of this, just remove it and we will move forward to something else.”

Thus, under AMLO those who illegally spy on the head of state are to be protected, while immigrants fleeing gang violence and exploitation will be monitored, persecuted and held in concentration camps indefinitely by the National Guard.

The fact that AMLO is neither willing nor able to take a stand against the military-intelligence apparatus cannot be explained by individual character traits. His subservience reflects, above all, his role as a defender of capitalist property relations and the nation-state system.

The ruling elite's growing reliance on the military and police is part of an international process that has common roots. In country after country, the working class is beginning to fight back after decades of the suppression of the class struggle.

Under conditions of a globally integrated economy, where strikes and mass demonstrations have international economic and political consequences, such a development threatens to disrupt the flow of profits to a thin layer at the top. To defend its massive wealth and privileges, the ruling class has responded by shoring up its military and security forces in preparation for massive upheavals.

To guarantee their social and democratic rights, the working class must decisively break with AMLO and all of the parties of the ruling class, reject the lie that immigrant workers and youth are responsible for society's ills, and take up the struggle for the international unity of the working class in the fight for socialism.

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