



Mexico City's zócalo, Saturday 18th March 2023

Speech by President Andrés Manuel López Obrador on the 85th Anniversary of the Oil Expropriation

Friends:

This is an act of commemoration of the Oil Expropriation and it is a national act, here the inhabitants of Aguascalientes, Baja California, Baja California Sur, Campeche, Chiapas, Chihuahua, Mexico City, Coahuila, Colima, Durango, State of Mexico, Guanajuato, Guerrero, Hidalgo, Jalisco, Michoacán, Morelos, Nayarit, Nuevo León, Oaxaca, Puebla, Querétaro, Quintana Roo, San Luis Potosí, Sinaloa, Sonora, Tabasco, Tamaulipas, Tlaxcala, Veracruz, Yucatán, Zacatecas. Long live Mexico.

Unlike Francisco I. Madero, who in order to consummate his beautiful democratic ideal could not or did not consider it essential to strengthen his ties with the people, especially with the Zapatista peasants, General Lázaro Cárdenas did not hesitate to lean on those below to make reality his transformation. The general's strategy can be summed up in three important and consecutive actions: first, he handed over the land to the peasants and helped the workers; Later, he promoted his organization and, finally, with that social base, he was able to carry out the expropriation of the oil and other assets of the nation that Porfirio Díaz had given to individuals, mainly foreigners.

In Cardenista's strategy, the first thing was attention to the economic and social demands of peasants and workers. The president knew that the only way to count on the people was to act decisively in favour of their causes. Consequently, from the beginning of his government the agrarian distribution was put into operation. The peasants mobilized throughout the country, requesting that they be endowed with land through the expropriation of large estates or through the titling of national lands.

In a short time, the delivery of the land to the peasants transformed the existing agrarian structure. The revolutionary significance of the Cardenista agrarian distribution can be measured with a relevant piece of data: in the first three years of his government, 9 million 764 thousand hectares were delivered to 565 thousand 216 peasants, which far exceeded the amount of land distributed since the Revolution. At the end of the six-year term, 10,651 ejidos had been established with a total of 18,52,000 hectares for the benefit of more than one million indigenous families, laborers and day laborers in rural areas.

There is no doubt that the peasants saw in Cárdenas a faithful representative of the revolutionary cause. The agrarian reform ensured the fidelity of many people to the Cardenista government and, since then, the alliance between the peasants and the State was concluded. On the other hand, during Cardenismo, the workers felt their labour rights were guaranteed. With strict adherence to the law, Cárdenas respected the economic struggle of workers for better wages and better working conditions. His action in this field consisted of making the letter of article 123 of the Constitution a reality. From the beginning of his government, the labour movement began to display an intense activity aimed at conquering their demands, it was even possible to exercise the right to strike with full freedom.

By the middle of the six-year term, peasants and workers identified Cárdenas as the defender of their interests. The first part of the cardenista strategy had been favourable: the rapprochement and solidarity of the president with the most vulnerable social groups produced the support, the adherence of the majorities to government policy. The political organization of workers and peasants, as the second link in Cardenista's strategy, was also developed with intensity and enthusiasm. First, most of the national unions joined; the Confederation of Workers of Mexico, the CTM, was established on February 24, 1936; Although the declaration of principles of the organization established, I quote, that "the proletariat of Mexico will fundamentally fight for the total abolition of the capitalist regime", its leaders accepted the president's proposal and agreed on the need to first achieve political and economic liberation from the country. Under these principles, the labour movement decidedly supported the government in its struggle for national sovereignty.

For his part, on July 9, 1935, President Cárdenas recommended starting the organization of the peasants of Mexico.

With this purpose, the leagues of agrarian communities were created in all the states of the country and their integration with the unions of rural wage earners resulted in the constitution of the National Peasant Confederation, the CNC.

The organization and political mobilization of the masses made it possible to advance in the purpose of asserting the economic independence of our country; And so, it was that with the expropriation of the oil companies, they began to return national assets and resources that had been in the hands of foreigners since the Porfiriato.

This strategy could not have been successful without the exceptional qualities of a noble and just man like General Lázaro Cárdenas del Río. Politics, let it be heard well, let it be internalized, let it be heard far away, politics is not only rationality; Also, like other activities in life, it needs mysticism and convictions. Political processes are more complex

than what rationalist intellectuals suppose, in political processes factors such as luck, the genius of the leaders and the feelings of the people intervene. General Cárdenas, unlike careerist or elite politicians, professed a sincere and deep love for the people. Just as there is no one with Madero's democratic vocation, neither has there been a president in Mexico as close to the humble as General Cárdenas or so convinced of the cause of social justice.

For example, when he was already president, already in power in 1935, he wrote the following in his notes: "to put an end to the miseries that people suffer is above all interests... [and he maintained] living alongside the needs and anguish of the people, the way to remedy them will be easily found...". Although he also confessed with wise and sad words that he had "... been able to know the true moral background of many public servants, observing in their faces the disgust caused by the demand for help or justice from poor people. Then I think more, [he lamented] on the endless tragedy of our own people."

For young people who want to dedicate themselves to the noble profession of politics, the main thing is love for the people.

In addition to being a true humanist and possessing other virtues, General Cárdenas knew how to accurately manage time, politics, among other things, is time management, an issue that is usually essential and defining. A few days before announcing the Oil Expropriation, he noted in his notes that on the highway, in the vicinity of Cuernavaca, he walked and talked for more than an hour with his teacher, friend, companion, and countryman, General Francisco J. Múgica. I quote General Cárdenas, he says:

We made considerations of the circumstances that could arise if governments like those of England and the United States, interested in supporting the oil companies, pressured the Mexican government with violent measures; but we also take into account that the threat of a new world war is already present with the provocations developed by Nazi-fascist imperialism, and that this would stop them from attacking Mexico, in the case of decreeing the expropriation.

Among other reasons and taking advantage of this circumstance, on March 18, 1938, the Oil Expropriation was carried out. That day, at 8:00 p.m., General Cárdenas communicated to his cabinet about this historic decision, and two hours later, he announced to the entire nation on the radio the step taken by the government in defence of its sovereignty, reintegrating his dominance the oil wealth that, as the general himself writes, "imperialist capital has been taking advantage of to keep the country in a humiliating situation."

The expropriation decree establishes in four articles that the machinery, installations and other furniture and real estate of foreign oil companies become part of the national patrimony, to which compensation would be paid in accordance with article 27 of the Constitution and of the law on the matter.

The oil expropriation was supported by the majority of the people. In the photos of the time, the majority presence of humble people can be seen: indigenous men and women, peasants, workers, teachers, employees and members of the lower middle class. It was the common people who supported and cooperated with the government to pay compensation to foreign oil companies. How can we forget that so many poor women donated goats and turkeys for this purpose and got rid of even the humble jewels they possessed.

In those days, from the city of Oakland, California, the migrant worker Cástulo Prado composed the lyrics and music of the "Corrido del petroleum" and sent it to the president with the instruction that the government allocate the possible royalties of the work to the payment of compensation. One of its stanzas goes like this:

Lazaro Cardenas says,
serene and carefree
"In the course of ten years
everything will be paid.
I have a Mexican town
that I have no doubt;
from the youngest to the oldest,

They all offer me their help.
in the Mexican woman
there is patriotism and pride;
she gets rid of her jewellery
to offer them to the mint".

In addition to this massive and forceful popular support, the Cárdenas government had another favourable circumstance. At that time, the United States was governed by Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a great statesman, one of the best presidents that country has had in its entire history. Let us remember that when Roosevelt arrived at the White House, on March 4, 1933, the United States suffered one of the worst crises in its history and that as president, Roosevelt knew how to face that crisis successfully and very soon restored hope to his people, which made him one of the greatest politicians of the 20th century.

As for his foreign policy, let us remember that, in a memorable speech, which is the antecedent of the principles of the UN, on January 6, 1941, he exposed to the world four fundamental freedoms: the right to freedom of speech; the right to religious freedom; the right to live free from misery; and the right to live free from fear.

The Roosevelt presidency applied the "good neighbour" policy with the countries of the American continent. At that time, the principles of economic and political cooperation were defined; the sovereignty of Cuba and Panama was recognized; and the US military withdrawal from Nicaragua and Haiti was ordered. It is no coincidence that the great poet Pablo Neruda called him "a titan of struggles, of freedoms, a gigantic president."

The authenticity of his good neighbour policy had its best example in respect for the sovereignty of our country. During Roosevelt's three presidential terms, relations between Mexico and the United States were exceptionally good. In the days after the Oil Expropriation, in a letter, General Cárdenas acknowledges him:

My government –wrote the general– considers that the attitude assumed by the United States of North America, in the case of the expropriation of the oil companies, comes to affirm once again the sovereignty of the peoples of this continent, who with so much effort has been supported by the statesman of the most powerful country in America, His Excellency Mr. President Roosevelt.

Cástulo Prado, the poet we have already mentioned, a popular poet, also left testimony of the rectitude, height and respect with which the president of the neighbouring country behaved. The verses of Cástulo said:

The millionaires asked
that was the intervention.

To the United States
they went to make their complaint

It rings a bell, it rings a bell, it rings a bell...

To the United States
they went to make their complaint
so that they came from there
to protect their companies.

Roosevelt tells them: "Gentlemen,
I can't do anything here;
the Mexican government
He has done his duty."

The United States ambassador to Mexico, Josephus Daniels, who acted with wisdom and skill in the most difficult years of relations between the two countries, had a lot to do with the good results of this policy.

His position on the oil conflict is summed up when he maintains that President Cárdenas was right in promoting the wealth of the subsoil to become part of the Mexican economy and that the oil crisis was due to the systematic refusal of foreign companies to change their vision. because "They consider [Daniels pointed out] that Mexicans were born to enrich foreigners, and that God placed important natural resources in the subsoil of Mexico to increase the fortunes found in the coffers of the exploiters and concessionaires."

But the companies were not as conscientious or respectful as the American politicians. Nationalization had to break through against boycotts, pressures, and acts of sabotage promoted and financed by foreign oil companies. In our country, the Oil Expropriation caused, among a minority, deep discomfort, especially among the rich of the time, in sectors of the middle class and in most of the media.

It is interesting, and this is a lesson, to highlight that historically the right always regroupes when trying to carry out a democratic change and becomes flatly intolerant and even violent when it comes to social demands in favour of the people and the domination of the nation.

Let us remember that the overthrow of President Madero, our apostle of democracy, had the intervention of the US ambassador, but it was carried out by internal right-wing groups that had previously promoted a hate and smear campaign consisting of ridiculing the president, President Madero, in the newspapers, to the point of treating him as crazy and spiritualist.

The same thing happened when the expropriation that, although it did not directly affect national private interests, served to bring together all the discontent of the conservative groups opposed to the agrarian, labour and educational policies of General Cárdenas. In this environment, on September 17, 1939, the National Action Party was founded, which was born criticizing the Oil Expropriation; I say this here in the Zócalo because I am not lying, I am speaking the truth. In 1940 all this reaction manifested itself with great force in the presidential election. Such was the opposition from the right that General Cárdenas had to act cautiously and possibly this influenced him to support the candidacy of Manuel Ávila Camacho and not that of General Francisco J. Múgica, with whom he had more ideological affinity and who represented a greater certainty of continuity and deepen the social and nationalist policy.

There has always been talk that the general did not opt for Múgica given the risk of foreign intervention. However, as we have seen, at that time Roosevelt ruled, who had demonstrated his respect for national sovereignty and that World War II was about to break out, a situation that helped to dissipate the threat of US intervention. From my point of view, what most influenced the decision was the internal political circumstance; that is, the belligerence of right-wing groups. Remember that even opting for the candidacy of Manuel Ávila Camacho who supported moderate positions, in any case, the presidential election was complicated and violent.

The opposition candidate, Juan Andreu Almazán, had the support of important right-wing groups and a sector of the army; even the PAN, which did not present a candidate for the presidency, openly supported it. At the end of the day, 30 dead and 127 wounded were reported. However, shortly after, Almazán gave in and his supporters, businessmen and right-wing politicians, came to an understanding and agreed to concessions and perks with the new government of Ávila Camacho.

From then on, the authentic revolutionary ideal and actions for the benefit of the people began to be abandoned, although it must be admitted that this alliance between political power and economic power perhaps prevented civil war and maintained social peace. If with Porfirio Díaz the peace of the graves prevailed; After the government of President Cárdenas, the peace of compromises and corruption was established.

In this short story there are major teachings; The main one is that only with the people, only with the support of the majority, can a popular transformation be carried out to assert justice and confront the reactionaries who are opposed to losing privileges. For this reason, today we once again manifest, we exclaim to the four winds: no zigzagging, let us continue anchored in our principles, let us reaffirm the decision and the course we have taken since the government began. No to half measures. We will never accept that a minority prevails in Mexico at the cost of the humiliation and impoverishment of the majorities.

That is why in our mandate corruption is fought, there is an austere government, without luxuries, and everything saved is used to finance welfare programs such as pensions for the elderly, support for people with disabilities, single mothers, to peasants and fishermen, scholarships to students from poor families, Internet for All, housing improvement and construction programs, word loans, fertilizers and guaranteed prices for small producers in the country, the Welfare Bank.

The promotion of education and public health, universal and free. This year more than 25 million people will receive direct support totalling 600 billion pesos; In other words, of the 35 million households in the country, 71 percent already receive at least one of the Well-being Programs.

With this policy of attention to the most needy, vulnerable and, especially, to young people, we have also been able to reduce federal crimes by 33 percent; homicide, at 10 percent; vehicle theft, at 38 percent; theft in general, 20 percent; the *huachicol*, in 92 percent; femicide, in 28 percent and kidnapping, in 76 percent.

Likewise, the savings from not allowing corruption or budget waste have allowed us to avoid more debt, we have not requested additional debt since we are in government and at the same time without increasing the public debt in real terms, they have not increased, they have not taxes have increased, the price of gasoline, diesel, gas and electricity has not increased, there has even been a decrease in the price of these energy sources; Public investment has also increased as it has not happened in many years. This year more than a trillion pesos will be spent on works, that is, we are going to continue building roads, bridges, trains, airports, hospitals, universities, markets, sports units, boardwalks, natural, recreational and ecological parks, and we are carrying out something very important, extensive recovery and restoration work on historical and archaeological sites of our ancient and splendid cultures and civilizations.

The public Treasury is strong, the national economy is growing, booming; last year the economy in Mexico grew even more than the economy in China and the United States; there is an unprecedented number of 21 million 747 thousand workers enrolled in Social Security, this figure of 21 million 747 thousand workers in the formal economy had never been reached; an average salary of 525 pesos a day for these workers in the formal economy had also never been achieved. The unemployment rate last January was 2.9 percent, the lowest since 2005; We are doing works, right here the line that broke the subway is being rehabilitated, of course they are building the Toluca-Mexico City trains, the Mayan Train, the Trans-Isthmic, many works, many. What's going on? That we achieved after many years that the United States offered temporary work visas, Canada already did, and the United States did not accept, now with the change of President Biden it was achieved, but they are taking qualified workers, iron workers, they are taking welders, which we need here in the works, we are already going to make a small modification because first it is Mexico and then abroad, but this shows how there is a demand for jobs in the country. In the time that we have been in government, the minimum wage has increased by 90 percent in real terms and on the border more than doubled, do you remember what the lying technocrats said, that if they increased the salary there would be inflation, pure I'm telling, that's not true, of course we must improve wages responsibly to strengthen the internal market as we are doing and thus achieve well-being for our people; the Stock Market and the profits of companies and banks register good gains; the reserves of the Bank of Mexico have increased by 15 percent, 200 billion dollars of reserves of the Bank of Mexico; foreign investment has escalated to figures not seen before; The same has happened with the remittances from our migrant compatriots, thank you very much, compatriots, compatriots, last year those remittances almost reached 60 billion dollars, this year we are going to exceed 60 million dollars, this is very important because that Money reaches down, even to the most remote communities, to 10 million families that benefit and that also with that money reactivates the regional

economy, commerce and other economic activities. It is also important to underline it, the peso is the currency that has appreciated the most in the world in relation to the dollar, this has not happened for more than 50 years.

We have also directed our resources and efforts to achieve food self-sufficiency and energy self-sufficiency, in the latter, as reported here by the Secretary of Energy and the director of Pemex, we can ensure that oil sovereignty is being guaranteed, next year we will not buy gasoline or diesel, or other oil products abroad, we are going to process all our raw materials; The CFE, a public company in charge of managing the electricity industry, was strengthened and lithium, a strategic mineral used in the construction of batteries for electric cars and a storage system for clean energy, was recently nationalized.

It fills me with pride to be able to remember, well, I make a parenthesis to say that I apologize for being late, but I'm almost done. It fills me with pride to be able to recall, today, March 18, that despite the surrender that prevailed before we came to government, we were able to remove from the Free Trade Agreement a broad chapter that compromised our oil in that agreement, and put in its place a small paragraph that I am going to read to you, says:

...The United States and Canada recognize that:

Mexico reserves its sovereign right to reform its Constitution and its internal legislation;
and

Mexico has direct control and inalienable and imprescriptible ownership of all hydrocarbons in the subsoil of the national territory (...).

Friends:

I am convinced that we will continue to count on the support of the people to consolidate the first stage in the transformation of our country. I am also convinced that any of the applicants who wins the poll to elect our movement's candidate will apply the same policy in favour of the people and in favour of the nation.

Continuity with change is assured. There is nothing to fear. Of course, we have to stay together, always looking towards the future and the happiness of our fellow men; working from below and with the people and without neglecting the strategy that we aptly call the revolution of consciences to continue advancing in the change of mentality, to continue politicizing our people and in this way with an increasingly conscious people and that we have advanced a lot, Mexico is one of the countries with the least political illiteracy in the world; With this collective conscience we are going to continue to counteract the dirty war, the smear campaigns and the manipulation attempts that will continue to be carried out, because our adversaries and their information media sold, rented or in the hands of members of the conservative and corrupt bloc. But at the same time, we must have faith in the wisdom and loyalty of the people. The people do not betray. Let us remember that the triumph of reaction, as Juárez said, is morally impossible. We are verifying that the idea and practice of exalting Mexican humanism is electric and is reaching the conscience of millions of people; That is what I base my optimism on, and even though in politics it is more dangerous to underestimate the strength of your adversaries than to overestimate it, I

maintain that whatever they do, the oligarchs will not return to power, an authentic and true democracy will continue to prevail in our beloved Mexico.

Friends:

I cannot fail to mention that in recent days some legislators from the United States, accustomed to seeing "the mote in the other's eye and not the beam in their own", in a propaganda plan, we would say here in colloquial language "with a grid" and with Electoral and political purposes, they maintained that if we did not stop the fentanyl traffic to the northern border, they were going to propose to their country's congress that they occupy North American soldiers in our territory to confront organized crime.

First, I want to make it clear that it is no longer the time of Calderón or García Luna, that it is no longer the time of the shady links between the Mexican government and the United States government agencies; Now there is no simulation, organized and white-collar crime is really being fought because there is no corruption, there is no impunity and there are no complicity relationships with anyone; but the most important thing is that from here, from this Zócalo, the political and cultural heart of Mexico, we remind those hypocritical and irresponsible politicians that Mexico is an independent and free country, not a colony or a protectorate of the United States, and that They can threaten us with committing any outrage, but we will never, ever allow them to violate our sovereignty and trample on the dignity of our homeland.

Cooperation yes, submission no!

Interventionism, no!

Oligarchy, no!

Corruption, no!

Classism, no!

Racism, no!

Freedom, yes!

Democracy yes!

Honesty yes!

Social justice, yes!

Equality yes!

Sovereignty, yes!

Long live the Oil Expropriation!

Long live the workers and technicians, before and now, of the national oil industry!

Long live General Lázaro Cárdenas del Río!

Long live Mexico!

Long live Mexico!

Long live Mexico!

Zócalo of Mexico City, March 18, 2023



The zócalo was not enough. It is estimated that half a million gathered.