

# Tens of thousands protest privatization of energy industry in Mexico

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On Sunday, tens of thousands rallied in Mexico City's Solidarity Plaza to protest the government's plan to partially privatize the nationalized energy industry (PEMEX). The demonstrators also denounced the government's attacks on workers' living standards.

The organizers of the protest, the National Regeneration Movement (MORENA), led by former presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador, estimated that some 70,000 people attended the rally.

Represented at the protest were workers, high school and university students, retired workers and sections of the middle class. Many carried signs denouncing the "reforms" associated with the current regime, including attacks on education and an increase in the value added tax.

Other signs and banners repudiated the "Pact for México" between the three main parties that is making these attacks possible. "El petróleo no se vende" ("Our oil is not for sale") was hand-written on banners, hats and gloves. "El petróleo es de todos" ("Oil belongs to all of us") was printed on banners distributed by the organizers of the protest.

Included in the protest was a contingent from the Electrician's Union and teachers belonging to the National Coordinator of Education Workers (CNTE). Both of these sections of the working class are directly affected by the "reform" policies of the government. The teachers later marched past the Palace of Fine Arts and rallied at the Angel of Independence monument in central México City.

Obrador, the two-time presidential candidate of the PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution) and current leader of MORENA, announced last month that he intended to organize protests exceeding in size those of 2006 in the wake of his electoral defeat by a very narrow margin. Hundreds of thousands at that time

protested what was widely seen as the theft of the election by the PAN (National Action Party) and PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party).

Obrador, a left-talking bourgeois nationalist politician, denounced claims that the energy reform being advanced by the administration of President Enrique Peña-Nieto (PRI) was needed to "modernize" the energy sector. He suggested it represented a return to the period prior to the 1910 Mexican Revolution.

The privatization of the energy sector and the attacks on public education represent a third wave of privatizations. The first two took place under the PRI regimes of Miguel de la Madrid (1982-84) and Carlos Salinas (1988-1994).

It was during the Salinas presidency that the North American Free Trade treaty was signed and important sectors of national industry were sold to private investors. In many cases, these industries, such as steel and sugar, were operating at a loss and their sale was accompanied with subsidies to the buyers.

The same process of liquidations and fire sales took place across Latin America, provoking mass protests led by "left" bourgeois leaders. Tens of thousands of jobs were lost in rail, steel and other industries. Workers were forced to either abandon their plants and seek work elsewhere or accept wage cuts and speedups.

On Sunday, Obrador suggested that PEMEX could be shored up by imposing austerity on the working class and diverting funds from social services. "Investment funds can be generated through a program of austerity and by combating corruption," he declared.



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