

Mexican government prepares crackdown against striking teachers

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In the wake of threats of repression from President Enrique Peña Nieto and other top Mexican officials, federal security forces have been sent into the impoverished southern state of Chiapas, one of the centers of the three-and-a-half-month-old teachers' strike that has seen the blockading of highways and government buildings in protest over the government's reactionary education reform and the withholding of salaries.

Teachers in the state, members of the National Committee of Education Workers (CNTE), declared themselves on a state of alert after reports were confirmed of a caravan of buses and trucks carrying hundreds of members of the Federal Police into the state. Aircraft were used to fly additional forces into the state's international airport.

The deployment of the repressive forces to Chiapas follows a warning Monday by the Secretary of the Interior Osorio Chong that the Mexican state was prepared to act to "preserve the rule of law," justifying the use of force in the name of schoolchildren in Chiapas and the neighboring state of Oaxaca who have not returned to their classrooms because of the strike.

He also reaffirmed that changes to the education reform are not on the table in the government's negotiations with the CNTE leadership. In addition, Chong announced that any further meetings with CNTE officials are to be held publicly, claiming that this was in the interests of "transparency," and "so that Mexicans are aware that we are not negotiating the law." When federal security forces are sent in to forcibly suppress the blockades and encampments of demonstrators, Chong added, they will be accompanied by observers from the government's human rights commission to ensure that the repression unfolds with "full respect for human rights."

Chong's statements echoed similarly thuggish remarks by President Peña Nieto, who threatened in an interview with Televisa a week earlier that should its half-hearted "dialogue" with teachers prove insufficient, "the government of the Republic will have no qualms whatsoever, no reservations whatsoever, in resorting to the use of force to restore order and above all to make good on the rule of law."

In pursuit of "the rule of law" federal police shot dead a dozen protesting teachers in the Oaxacan town of Nochixtlán on June 19. A number of CNTE leaders remain in prison, and striking teachers now face a range of punitive actions from the

government for defending their social interests.

The Secretariat of Public Education has announced that 44,486 workers will face disciplinary action, including wage garnishment and layoffs for supposed breach of contract. The secretariat is already overseeing the layoffs of hundreds of teachers as a direct result of their role in the protests and blockades and for skipping more than four days of school since classes resumed on August 22. This includes 1,239 in Oaxaca, 570 in Chiapas, 80 in Michoacán, and 16 in Guerrero.

Amid the continuing mass demonstrations of teachers, the CNTE has entered into negotiations with the legislative fraction of the PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution) with the stated goal of producing a citizens' initiative that can then be presented directly to either chamber of the legislature to curb aspects of the government's education reform.

From the outset, the PRD played a key role in ramming through the raft of right-wing counter-reforms collectively known as the Pact for Mexico. As it relates to education, this includes the implementation of a regime of onerous teacher evaluations and a shift towards privatization of education along with increased standardized testing. All of it has been introduced under the guise of "professionalization" and "teacher accountability," along similar lines as the attacks carried out on education under the Bush and Obama administrations in the United States.

Now the PRD claims it is planning to "reform the reforms" beginning with the opening up of the new legislative session on September 1.

As the principal "left" bourgeois parties in Mexican politics, the PRD and Morena occupy an important place in the defense of the existing political and economic set-up. They act to confer legitimacy to an increasingly reviled social order—a survey conducted by the newspaper *Reforma* found Peña Nieto's approval ratings currently stand at an abysmal 23 percent. Those surveyed indicated overwhelming concerns over violence, poverty, corruption and a worsening economic situation.

The PRD and Morena, under the leadership of Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (the former presidential candidate of the first party and current leader of the second), cynically appeal to this rising opposition to the generalized deterioration

of social conditions the better to dissipate and safely channel it in anticipation to the 2018 elections.

The PRD and Morena express the interests not of the working class, but of a section of the capitalist class opting for a more nationalist course based on renegotiating the terms of subordination to Washington, particularly in relation to the Pact for Mexico.

Cesar Camacho, head of the ruling PRI legislative fraction, spoke on the possibility of minor modifications to the reform, stating that “no theme is prohibited, everything can be submitted to discussion.” He continued, “We don’t see legal changes to the education reform happening; the law proper is sufficiently broad in areas such as [teacher] evaluation that don’t require a change to the law.”

It is no coincidence that the CNTE and PRD enter into negotiations in the run-up to the opening of the legislative session and the beginning of classes. The move is calculated to shunt the teachers’ struggle into a parliamentary blind alley by continuing to sow illusions in bourgeois parties such as PRD and Morena, who all bear political responsibility for the Pact for Mexico.

All the while, the union bureaucracy has deliberately isolated striking teachers, ensuring eventual demoralization and exhaustion. The CNTE continues to plan for further demonstrations, but so long as teachers remain within the straitjacket of the corporatist CNTE teachers union and the “dissident” CNTE and isolated from broader layers of the working class, the preconditions for betrayal and defeat are fulfilled.

The intransigence of the government is above all directed against the Mexican working class. For the CNTE bureaucrats, the PRD and Morena, a seat at the table can be negotiated. Narrow tactical differences aside, the ruling elite’s class instinct detects in these leaderships a basic social affinity, a shared fear of any independent movement of the working class.

If the government has demonstrated its intransigence and the thousands of teachers who remain on strike have met it valiantly, the same cannot be said of the CNTE leadership. The demands of striking Mexican teachers are unambiguous: rejection of the framework of the education “reform” and its attendant secondary laws. In contrast, the basic aim of the CNTE since the initial mobilization of teachers in 2013 has been to put sufficient pressure on the government to establish a “dialogue” and secure a role in for itself in implementing state policy.

The CNTE knows that the government will yield on nothing they weren’t already prepared to cede, but continue to foster false hopes in the possibility of a reversal of the attack of the working class signified by the Pact for Mexico within a capitalist framework.

There is no constituency within any section of the political establishment for a defense of education, and the PRD’s stated approach of “reforming the reforms” addresses none of the

fundamental issues facing teachers and the working class generally.

The whole of the Mexican pseudo-left has offered uncritical support to the CNTE. By and large, they maintain a guarded silence on the CNTE’s preparations for a betrayal by collusion with the PRD and Morena.

In recent decades, it has been the stock in trade of the pseudo-left to explain the continual pattern of sell-outs and concessions authored by the trade unions as merely a question of “conservative leadership.” But if it is merely a question of individual weaknesses, what accounts for the increasingly universal character of conservatism and continual acquiescence to management? No serious account of the objective basis for the phenomenon of the universal betrayal by the trade union bureaucrats is ever developed by these outfits.

Just as seriously, no attempt is made to make sense of the class character of Morena, which coalesced in 2014 out of AMLO’s exit from the bourgeois PRD. In truth, Morena and what passes for the “socialist left” in Mexico are hostile to any prospect of workers acting independently. The political content of their perspective, shorn of its “left” or even “Marxist” trappings, comes out to little more than a return to a version of the “left”- *priismo* of the mid-20th century. In other words: the same basic perspective that animated various left-nationalist and ex-Stalinist currents through a series of splits and fusions that culminated in the formation of the now-discredited PRD in 1989, which included founding member of the CNTE Teodoro Palomino.

The CNTE has moved a great distance rightwards from its professed “independence from the bourgeoisie and the state.” Just last week, Section 22 of CNTE held a roundtable titled “Towards a Fourth Republic: Morena together with the teachers” alongside an assortment of “left” political commentators and Morena officials.

Mexican teachers must reject Morena and CNTE’s empty bluster, including their demagogic calls for “a fourth republic.” Opportunistically adopting the language of a revolutionary break with the past, this party’s agenda is based on the rather staid goals of “alternation” and an “orderly transition.” A potential Morena government in 2018 will take electoral advantage of growing anger and militancy within the working class only to immediately acquiesce to the dictates of capital, little different from the course of Syriza in Greece or Podemos in Spain.



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