

Mexican teachers union ends “indefinite strike” of 80,000 teachers on the eve of national elections

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On June 20, the National Committee of Education Workers (CNTE), a dissident faction of the SNTE, the state-affiliated national teachers union, called off a two-week strike by tens of thousands of teachers in the poorer southern Mexican states of Oaxaca, Michoacán, Guerrero and Chiapas.

The strike was launched to press once again for the teachers’ five-year-old demand for the repeal of President Enrique Peña Nieto’s national education “reform.”

Despite the claims that it would improve school resources, the 2013 legislation failed to address the abysmal levels of poverty and lack of infrastructure in schools. Its thrust instead was to grant finance capital access to the lucrative education market, by starving schools of funds, firing teachers and setting the stage for the opening of new private schools.

The legislation imposed a requirement that those seeking employment or promotions undergo a written test about teaching methods and academic subject matter. It granted the government control over the hiring and promotion of teachers, matters which were previously decided by the unions.

The striking teachers demanded the reinstatement of the more than 500 educators who were fired for refusing to take the new exams, the release of union funds that are currently frozen by the government and justice for the 43 disappeared Ayotzinapa teaching students, as well as for the families of the Oaxaca demonstrators killed in confrontations with police in 2016.

The strike this month affected over 1 million students. Union officials claim that in the state of Oaxaca alone, the strike closed 10,700 buildings, or 80

percent of the state’s schools.

About 12,000 teachers set up camp in the state’s capital, taking over the central square and several surrounding streets.

About 1,000 of the striking teachers traveled to Mexico City, erecting encampments for a large-scale sit-in at the Secretariat of the Interior. Teachers and their supporters held rallies in front of the Supreme Court, and blocked sections of major avenues in Mexico City, causing hours-long gridlock.

As with previous militant actions, the teachers were met with state repression in the course of their struggle. Buses full of teachers on their way to Mexico City were stopped and harassed by police on at least two occasions. On June 7, educators were physically assaulted by police in front of mass media company Televisa, leaving more than 60 demonstrators injured.

Over 60 percent of youth fall below the poverty rate in Mexico’s southern states, and only half of the students who enroll in primary school graduate. Mexican teachers earn half the average salary reported by other members of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

According to government figures, some 150,000 teachers have left their jobs or asked for early retirement in the aftermath of the “reforms,” out of fear of losing their jobs and pensions. In the state of Oaxaca alone, privatization efforts have led to the opening of 181 new private schools over the past five years—a 19 percent increase—and the dropping of 14,000 students from public school rolls.

Despite these explosive conditions and a continuing will to fight for public education on the part of the majority of educators, over the course of five years the

CNTE has repeatedly called for “indefinite” mobilizations, only to call them off once the union deemed that the teachers had let off enough steam.

Despite these past betrayals, this month teachers in great numbers once again displayed their militancy and determination to continue fighting. In response, the CNTE once again called off what it had previously said would be an “indefinite” strike, acknowledging that its calls for the government to “negotiate” over the legislation had fallen on deaf ears.

In voting to end the strike on June 18, the National Assembly of the CNTE approved a resolution for a “national struggle in the context of the election of a new federal government.” This can only be understood as an appeal to vote for the supposedly “left” presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) of the National Regeneration Movement (Morena), who polls show is overwhelmingly likely to win the presidential election.

López Obrador is a supposed “friend” of the teachers, who has said he will dismantle Peña Nieto’s education legislation.

However, he remains a firm defender of the capitalist system. The paltry social programs he proposes would scarcely make a dent in the country’s grinding poverty. AMLO blames “corruption” for social inequality, so he can promise not to raise taxes on the rich, nationalize industries or take any action that would otherwise offend big business.

López Obrador’s increasing orientation to the financial oligarchy is laid bare by the composition of his proposed cabinet and inner circle. His selection for secretary of education, Esteban Moctezuma, has long been affiliated with Peña Nieto’s ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI).

Moctezuma was secretary of the interior and secretary of social development under former PRI president Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000). Since 2002, he has been the CEO of Fundación Azteca, an NGO of Grupo Salinas, one of the largest conglomerates in the country.

Moctezuma’s selection signals the financial oligarchy that AMLO’s talk of “repeal” is for public consumption only. López Obrador’s advisers have already said that he will not undo the Peña Nieto administration’s oil privatization. Assurances may soon follow that any changes to the education legislation will

be largely cosmetic.

The fight to end poverty and provide quality education for all cannot be based on appeals to the munificence of the financial elite, or by workers ceding control of their struggles to government-controlled unions such as the SNTE, or even to “dissident” unions like the CNTE.

Rather this requires building a unified movement of the entire working class in Mexico, and throughout the Americas, independent of all bourgeois parties—including López Obrador’s Morena—in order to fight for socialism and a workers government.



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