

# Mexico's López Obrador attacks teachers through right-wing education reform

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Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (popularly known as “AMLO”) has proposed education legislation that preserves the framework of compulsory teachers’ evaluations and school privatizations introduced under the previous right-wing government of Enrique Peña Nieto.

During last year’s presidential campaign, AMLO explicitly campaigned on the promise of repealing the 2013 education legislation. These “reforms” attempt to scapegoat teachers for the lack of basic school infrastructure and students’ social and economic conditions that make it challenging—and sometimes nearly impossible—to teach in a classroom.

The proposal by AMLO’s party, the Movement for National Regeneration (Morena), retains the main features of the previous legislation. Teachers will still be subject to standardized testing that will determine whether they are hired or promoted. Meanwhile, the country’s crumbling schools and the entrenched poverty that plagues half of the population will remain intact. While teachers will supposedly no longer be fired for low test scores, this can be reversed either by AMLO or by future administrations.

Right-wing politicians and commentators have celebrated Morena’s proposal because it facilitates mass layoffs, weakens job security for teachers and opens the door of the lucrative education “market” to private investors.

Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) representative Cynthia López Castro, a member of the Chamber of Deputies education committee, boasted that Morena’s legislation is “80 percent the same” as the reform passed by former PRI president Peña Nieto. Mexico’s main business paper, *El Financiero*, wrote, “Morena had to swallow all their words and bluster about the ‘badly called structural reform, punitive, privatizing,

passed by the mafia in power to perpetuate their domination’, etc. Their own deputies, in the committees, voted in favor of the legislation, except for three that belong to the [teachers’ union] CNTE.”

During the past five years, teachers have been at the forefront of the class struggle in Mexico. In opposition to the right-wing “Pact for Mexico” reforms, teachers have organized numerous strikes and demonstrations, including a national march by 100,000 teachers last June, railroad blockages in January over unpaid salaries and benefits, and a highway blockade in Nochixtlán, Oaxaca that was violently assaulted by federal police in 2016.

For the past two weeks, teachers have blocked access to the lower house of Congress in Mexico City, effectively preventing deputies from discussing the legislation. Concerned that an open confrontation with the teachers would irreparably damage the party’s “left” facade, the leader of Morena in the House has postponed discussion on the education bill. These capitalist politicians, with the assistance of the unions, hope to bide their time and work behind the backs of teachers to present the same proposal with a few superficial changes.

AMLO has repudiated all of his major campaign promises after just four months in office. Even before his inauguration, he had backtracked his vows to undo Mexican oil privatizations and withdraw the military from domestic security operations.

Instead, his administration has scrambled to end the *maquiladora* strikes in Matamoros, created a new 60,000-member National Guard and enforced Trump’s assault against immigrants. AMLO has slandered striking teachers who are fighting for public education as “conservative,” claiming that their actions have “nothing to do with left-wing politics.”

After more than six years of struggle, teachers must draw a balance sheet of their own experiences and the role played by the CNTE, which has worked to tie teachers to futile appeals to the political establishment that only serve to demoralize and isolate them.

On the eve of last July's presidential elections, the CNTE called off an indefinite strike and urged teachers to direct their actions towards the election of AMLO, whom the union painted as a friend of the workers. This political trap has now been exposed through Morena's adoption of the very legislation that teachers have fought against tooth and nail for years. The CNTE's support for AMLO has only served to politically disarm broad sections of workers, who are now being fed the lie that their class enemy can be "pressured" to act on their behalf.

For all its "radicalism," the CNTE bases itself on the capitalist system and opposes a united struggle by the working class to take political power. They scramble from one intervention to the next, without a perspective of the broader forces that are the source of the attacks against public education. Their semi-anarchistic methods take the militancy and anger of teachers and channel them into dead ends.

The CNTE is not fighting for the fundamental right of every child in Mexico to a free, high quality education. Instead, the CNTE leadership has stated that their main opposition to the reform is based on who controls school resources and the appointment of teachers, the union or the government.

The CNTE's perspective is a gift to the ruling class. It allows the politicians and the media to paint the legislation as a "progressive" way to free schools from the "entitled" and "corrupt" teachers. Meanwhile, none of the fundamental political issues are discussed, least of all by the CNTE.

The allies of the more than two million teachers in Mexico are not AMLO and Morena, but their fellow educators internationally. On every continent, educators have been engaged in a global struggle against government austerity and levels of social inequality not seen since the 1920s. In every country, teachers confront the same problems and the same enemies: attacks against their living and working conditions, claims that there is "no money" for social services, and a union apparatus that works to tie them to one or another section of the ruling elite. The greatest source

of strength for teachers is to unite internationally, on the basis of an uncompromising anti-capitalist perspective, to fight to guarantee the social rights of all workers and their families.



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