

Mexico's teachers march against wage and pension cuts as tens of millions are doled out on FIFA World Cup

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Mexico's National Coordinator of Education Workers (CNTE), the union representing the nation's education workers, has been on strike since May 15 of this year, as called for by its National Representative Assembly.

Teachers seek the cancellation of the education reform they call "Peña-AMLO," referring to the two previous presidents, Enrique Peña Nieto of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), and current President Claudia Sheinbaum's predecessor, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), of their supposedly "progressive" Morena Party.

Their main demand has been to reverse the government's repeal of the 2007 Law on the Institute for Security and Social Services for State Workers (the ISSSTE).

The ISSSTE provides assistance in cases of disability, old age, early retirement, death and health care in regard to federal workers. The CNTE is seeking "meaningful" pensions for all, a gradual reduction of the retirement age and a return to the pre-2007 public operation of their pension, since managed by private administrators.

Education workers seek a 100 percent salary increase, better working conditions and the resumption of direct dialogue with President Sheinbaum, who refused to meet with the strikers in May after teachers blocked Mexico City's main international airport. In response, Sheinbaum deployed the military and police with anti-riot gear.

Despite the populist guise of Morena, Sheinbaum has cited "budgetary constraints," insisting that funds are not available to satisfy the striking teachers' demands or make up for the shortfalls in their pay in the past, prioritizing financial elites over workers.

This was stated as tens of millions were pumped out to host the FIFA World Cup, to stuff the pockets of the notoriously corrupt FIFA honchos and Mexico's business elite, drooling to cash in.

The most government negotiators have offered in the past have been a meager 9 percent wage increase—falling far short of inflation—a one-week vacation and other scraps.

As the Mexico City Thursday, June 11 opening of the FIFA World Cup approached, CNTE ranks flooded the capital to raise this and other demands. Upwards of 15,000 union members blocked major streets and ultimately planned to block Azteca stadium, the venue of the opening game. Encampments were set up in the City's Zócalo Square, facing the National Palace and Sheinbaum's office, causing millions in losses for surrounding businesses.

The teachers did not march alone. As the capital hosted the opening match, tens of thousands in total took to the streets, as broader layers of the working class converged on the city. Collectives of relatives searching for Mexico's tens of thousands of disappeared were joined by transportation workers, indigenous activists and peasant and farmer organizations.

Vendors with disabilities who earn their living in Mexico City's metro stations were among those who turned out, after city authorities expelled them from the stations to improve their appearance for arriving tourists. Young people, whose surveys show deep alienation from the tournament, joined in numbers that signal a generation unwilling to celebrate while the social fabric unravels around them.

Teachers were met with heavily armed lines of police and blockades made with metal barriers, concrete blocks, cranes, trucks, fire extinguisher gas and the like. Some protestors were seriously injured.

On Wednesday June 10, the CNTE's leadership—more than 50 members of the Single National Negotiation Commission (CNUN)—held a meeting for seven hours with Mexico's Ministries of the Interior, Public Education and the ISSSTE.

In a five-minute press conference after the meeting, Secretary of the Interior Rosa Icela Rodríguez, accompanied by the Minister of Public Education, Mario Delgado, and the general director of the ISSSTE, Martí Batres, reported that the government had proposed to the teachers the installation

of a “permanent commission” that legally and technically lays out the proposals that the federal government has made, seeking to also incorporate the “counterproposals” of the teachers.

Rodríguez “hoped that there would be a positive response from the teachers.” She added, “Here at this table, dialogue is open, but it is necessary to move to a new stage” —in other words, not to look back to prior, more favorable treatment of teachers.

Harping on Sheinbaum’s invocation of budgetary constraints, Rodríguez stressed that with the repeal of the 2007 Law on the Institute of Security and Social Services for State Workers as the main demand of the teachers, “we have to be very responsible for all our resolutions; we cannot go beyond the possibilities set out in the budget.” But of course, the budget is malleable, and it depends entirely on its priorities.

According to the union’s negotiating team, although there were “offers” from the federal government in response to union demands, the answers were not “clear.” The members of the national leadership of the CNTE would “analyze with their rank and file whether to accept the offers of the authorities.”

Sheinbaum’s “Social World Cup”

As the match kicked off, Sheinbaum touted her “Social World Cup program.” She boasted that through the program, all of 500 tickets for the 87,523 seats in Azteca Stadium—the largest stadium in Latin America and the eighth-largest association football stadium in the world—were distributed exclusively to “ordinary citizens,” not to public officials. What noblesse oblige!

At bottom, Morena’s “left populist” administration is focused on not impinging on the profit interests of private pension firms, raising taxes on the rich (which she campaigned against) or diverting funds from the vulture capitalists on Wall Street and in Mexico City that hold Mexico’s public debt.

The class tensions that have erupted in Mexico are not isolated to the host country. Across the United States, thousands of hospitality, stadium and hotel workers moved to the brink of strikes ahead of the tournament to demand better pay, affordable healthcare and protection from federal immigration enforcement. A large share of these workers are immigrants, and their insistence on protections against workplace immigration raids directly indicts the Trump administration’s transformation of the tournament into a

surveillance and enforcement operation.

The Sheinbaum administration has offered no resistance whatsoever to the subordination of the World Cup to the Trump administration and the US oligarchy. It has raised no official protest or hesitation at co-hosting a global sporting event with a fascist president conducting an illegal war against Iran, supplying the bombs for a genocide in Gaza, maintaining a criminal stranglehold on Cuba and carrying out daily aggressions against the peoples of Latin America and Mexico itself.

The Sheinbaum government’s posture toward the racist and anti-immigrant abuses carried out by the Trump administration and FIFA ahead of the World Cup has been one of accommodation dressed up as diplomatic neutrality. Where Sheinbaum has spoken at all, it has been in the language of logistics. When Washington barred Iran’s team from staying overnight on US soil, Sheinbaum obligingly offered Mexico as a substitute base camp. When pressed on ICE enforcement at stadiums, she issued mild procedural appeals for “due process” and “the rule of law.”

Beyond these minimal gestures, Sheinbaum has said nothing. She has not uttered a word about the expulsion of Somali referee Omar Abdulkadir Artan—detained for eleven hours at Miami International Airport despite holding a diplomatic passport and a valid visa, then removed from the tournament entirely. She has said nothing about FIFA’s demand that Haiti—making its first World Cup appearance in 52 years—strip from its kits the image of the Battle of Vertières, fought on November 18, 1803, the decisive battle of the Haitian Revolution that secured Haiti’s independence.

The pattern is consistent and revealing: Every racist abuse by the Trump administration and FIFA has been met by the Morena administration with accommodation. This is not an oversight. It is the policy of a government whose class allegiances tie it to the financial elites and Wall Street creditors that Trump represents, and who has chosen to protect those ties at the cost of all democratic principles.



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