

Mexico: The Neoliberal Education Reform on Shaky Ground

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The beginning of negotiations between the administration of Enrique Peña Nieto and the National Educational Workers' Coordinating Committee (CNTE) is a clear signal that the gigantic defamatory campaign, the selective murder of movement activists, the mass firings, the jailing of a dozen of the movement's leaders and the government threat that it had "lost patience" were not enough to intimidate the heroic teachers' mobilization. Quite the opposite: it managed to break down the intransigence of a government that had said "it would never be willing to negotiate the law."

The CNTE strike began last May 15 in the states of Michoacán, Guerrero, Oaxaca, Chiapas, and many other regions of the country. It was the only alternative left to this sector of the teachers' union for defending their right to job security, free education, and the secular, social, and nationalist educational content at risk today from the individualistic criteria dictated by the great international economic powers.

The strike was initiated by the almost 300,000-member CNTE, the democratic current inside the corrupt, bureaucratized National Educational Workers' Union (SNTE), Latin America's biggest union with almost 1.3 million members; the union apparatus is completely subservient to the dictates of the federal government currently in office. The strike has been gaining the active support of parents and other democratic unions, and which has spread to new sectors still under the yoke of corporatist/Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) control known as "charrismo."

In addition to the work stoppage, the CNTE teachers, women and men, have used all kinds of different forms of mobilizations to make their movement strong and visible. The most forceful of these has been to put up blockades on major highways and train tracks to stop the transport of big national and multinational companies' goods. These actions have bitten into the profits of these companies' owners and affected the functioning of key sectors of the economy, like the car industry and the wholesale and retail trades. In one town in the state of Oaxaca, Nochixtlán, militarized police massacred a dozen people who were supporting one of the blockades by indigenous teachers and community members. This unmasked the criminal nature of an increasingly unpopular government, radicalizing and strengthening the movement.

This situation showed the government that for the moment it could not beat the CNTE without negatively impact the prospects for the governing Institutional Revolutionary Party in next year's local elections, and that the possibility of a broad social explosion was real. They needed to sit down to negotiate, whether to "manage the conflict" or to come to some sort of agreement that would momentarily cool down a movement that threatens to boil over.

The beginning of negotiations came as a complete shock to a ruling class accustomed to imposing its neoliberal reforms without major obstacles. The bourgeoisie expressed its fury in statements like that of the Business Coordinating Council that cynically demanded "respect for the rule of law" and that all political parties must assume "the political cost of greater repression," or that of the Confederation of Industrial Chambers threatening to "stop investment and job creation."

Mexico's bourgeoisie knows very well that behind the CNTE and many other sectors in movement today there is sufficient potential to begin a process of strengthening the working class and the possibility of bringing down its neoliberal "reforms." Regardless of whether the CNTE decides to continue its mobilizations until it brings down the educational reform or it accepts a transitory agreement while continuing to demand the reform's repeal, the freedom of its political prisoners, reinstatement of fired workers, and the cancelation of the punitive nature of the testing imposed by the reform, while strengthening itself inside the SNTE union as a whole, we must continue to surround this magnificent movement with solidarity.

It is in the heat of great struggles like the one led by the CNTE today that unions need to discuss and propose strategic objectives to change the relationship of forces in society. The most important thing is to take on board the fact that no union organization, no matter how large and powerful, has enough power to change the course of the country. What is needed is the broadest, most disciplined class unity and a political proposal of the class itself to be able to do that. That is the reason that dozens of unions and cooperatives are building a New Workers Confederation.

Long Live the CNTE Struggle!

Down with the Neoliberal Educational Reform!

Freedom for All Political Prisoners!

Out with Enrique Peña Nieto!

The Revolutionary Socialist Coordinating Committee of Mexico

Mexico City August 11, 2016

P.S.

* <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article4660>