

Mexican teachers fight to defend public education

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On November 22, education workers across Mexico launched a day of protest against the government's so-called Alliance for Educational Quality (ACE). The actions involved a one-day strike, marches, building occupations and setting barricades across main streets and highways.

ACE, launched by President Felipe Calderón in 2007, is an attack on teachers and part of a global offensive to subordinate education to corporate interests.

The National Union of Education Workers (SNTE) union, which is allied with Calderón, is backing the anti-teacher measure. The National Coordinating Committee of Education Workers (CNTE)—a self-proclaimed “dissident” group of SNTE—has led the protests and is calling for the resignation of SNTE leader Elba Esther Gordillo.

Teachers in 14 Mexican states joined the action, with major participation in the CNTE strongholds of the southwestern states of Michoacán, Oaxaca, Guerrero and Chiapas. In Morelia, Michoacán’s capital, tens of thousands of teachers marched on and rallied in front of the state government house while others occupied the Education Ministry.

In Oaxaca, Gabriel López Chiñas, leader of Section 22 of the SNTE reported that 14,000 schools had shut down and that 48,000 teachers had joined the strike. The educators blocked downtown Oaxaca and took over the municipal and judicial buildings. Some of the protesters took over the tollbooth along the Oaxaca-Puebla highway. In some areas educators organized meetings with parents to enlist their support.

In Guerrero, 500 demonstrators blocked the highways from the city of Tlapa de Comonfort into Chilpancingo, Puebla, Metlatónoc, and Marquelia; educators at language and Native schools joined the strike.

Angry educators in Chiapas also joined the strike and blocked roads leading to Mayan tourist sites and into Guatemala. Thousands marched on the capital city of Tuxtla Gutiérrez from across the state. Many carried signs demanding an end to the privatization of electricity and water services, an end to price increases of gasoline, tortillas and other basic necessities, and an end to the sacking of teachers and public employees.

Teacher demonstrations also took place in northern and central states such San Luis Potosí, Sinaloa, Durango and Sonora; in addition to government buildings and highways, the teachers also occupied commercial shopping malls. Baja California teachers rallied at border crossings. In Zacatecas, teachers also organized a march.

Tlaxcala and Puebla teachers organized motorized caravans into Mexico City, where a demonstration also took place. On November 24, 17,000 teachers in Quintana Roo State also walked off their jobs, this time over wages.

Teachers charge that the ACE program has already resulted in fewer students graduating from elementary and middle schools. Out of 310,000 middle school graduates, only 146,000 went on to high school this year. The rest were added to the 19 million young people between the ages of 25 and 29 who only have an elementary education and no prospects of furthering their education.

Like its US counterparts—Obama’s “Race to the Top” and the previous “No Child Left Behind” schemes—ACE attacks the rights of teachers, paves the way to the privatization of education, and pushes aside the right to culture for most Mexicans, replacing it with skills suited directly to the needs of big business.

ACE also threatens working conditions for teachers, who are now expected to work extra hours with no

remuneration, supposedly to increase their professional skills. It also ignores the conditions of poverty that are at the root of many students' educational problems.

CNTE spokesperson Manuel Mendoza accused SNTE leader Elba Esther Gordillo of appointing the *charro* SNTE Section 7 executive board in opposition to the workers' wishes and interests and called for new executive board elections. *Charroism* is the Mexican term for corporatist trade unions that collaborate with the employers and have long been allied to the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which ruled México for over seven decades until its defeat in 2000.

Gordillo was appointed by former PRI President Carlos Salinas de Gortari to head the SNTE in 1988. After the party's electoral defeat, she broke with the PRI and formed a political party (PANAL), which is currently allied with the ruling right-wing National Action Party (PAN). The CNTE, on the other hand, is closely allied with the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), the third capitalist party in Mexico, and its ally, the Party of Labor (PT).

The CNTE is supported by various pseudo-left and middle-class nationalist forces, including of the Guevaraist, Maoist, Zapatista type, which are seeking to direct teachers away from a struggle for socialism and toward the PRD, the PT and the Mexican bourgeoisie.

The CNTE conflict with the SNTE dates from 1979. It was created with the assistance of the Authentic Workers' Front (Frente Auténtico del Trabajo or FAT), originally a Catholic union federation, now associated with the American AFL-CIO and United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America (UE). The US union federation—which has a long and sordid history of subverting the workers' movement in Latin America on behalf of US imperialism—falsely presents FAT as an independent organization, run by its membership.

FAT and the CNTE operate under the slogan of *autogestión de los trabajadores* (workers' self-management). Despite its left pretensions, *Autogestión* for the FAT, CNTE and their 'independent' allies simply means replacing the *charroism* of Gordillo and the PAN, with the political subordination of the working class to the PRD.

The CNTE issued a demagogic statement opposing the attack on public education and saying, "We need to develop a national strike as an instrument of struggle to

stop the offensive of the bosses and of trade union *charroism* and recover the rights being taken away."

In reality, the CNTE wants to renegotiate ACE with Calderón's Ministry of Government, not eliminate it. Like its counterparts in the US, the Mexican unions only want a "seat at the table" in implementing school "reform," i.e., the systematic destruction of public education.



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