

Teachers struggle erupts in Mexican state of Guerrero

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The governor of the Mexican state of Guerrero, Ángel Aguirre Rivero, issued arrest orders on April 24 against two leaders of the Guerrero Teachers Union (*Coordinadora Estatal de Trabajadores de la Educación en Guerrero*, CETEG): Minervino Morán and Gonzalo Juárez.

Both are charged as the intellectual authors of popular upheavals that erupted in connection with the escalating struggle of Guerrero state teachers in defense of their jobs and in opposition to Mexican President's Enrique Peña Nieto call for the reform of education.

The arrest order is the latest in a series of government attacks on the teachers' movement in Guerrero, and throughout Mexico, that have included police repression and provocations. Protests are being criminalized.

"They are vandals; they are delinquents," said Aguirre, also accusing CETEG of being connected to the ERPI guerrilla movement (Insurgent People's Revolutionary Army – *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo Insurgente*) that operates in the state.

The Guerrero public school teachers began their protest strike on February 25 2013. At issue is their opposition to the Education Reform of President Peña Nieto. In March, the Guerrero government appeared to have signed an agreement with the CETEG that included the preservation of free and public education, respect for the existing rights of education workers, and "democratic evaluations" on teacher performance, a measure that would have allowed the union the proverbial seat at the table with school management and the government. The Guerrero government agreed to pay teachers' wages lost during the strike.

Teachers resumed their protests in April when it became evident that the governor was going back on the agreed settlement. On April 5, 3,000 teachers and their supporters—members of the union of public employees (*Sindicato Único de Trabajadores Públicos*, SUSPEG), the United Front of Teaching Schools (*Frente Único de Escuelas Normales*, FUNPEG)—barricaded the highway that connects Guerrero's resort city of Acapulco with México City. They were attacked by a 1,500-member police force,

leaving three teachers wounded and five arrested.

While many chanted *¡Cuidado, Cuidado con Guerrero que es estado guerrillero!* ("Don't mess with Guerrero; it is a state of *guerrilleros!*"), the educators held their ground for about half an hour. Press reports describe the retreating teachers as angry, with many in tears, but undeterred.

Confrontations between teachers and state security forces are not new, or unique to Guerrero. On December 12, 2011, on the same highway, police killed two students from the Ayotzinapa teachers' college, Gabriel Echeverría de Jesús, and Jorge Alexis Herrera Pino. Violent clashes have also taken place in Oaxaca, Michoacán and other states.

The strikes and protests continued with marches, picketing and rallies. The Aguirre administration claimed that 59 schools out of 300 were shut down by the strike. On April 8, the governor threatened to replace strikers who did not return to their posts. Days later, legislators met in Acapulco to discuss modifications to the Guerrero Education Code.

On April 24, the legislature rejected some of the union's demands, including its demand to be part of the evaluation of teachers. "*No se pudo*" (it could not be done), shoulder-shrugged a PRD legislator, claiming that the CETEG demand for a democratic evaluation process for teachers, was "unconstitutional." The legislature did agree to a union proposal to abolish student fees and make public education in the state free for all who attend.

On the same day, a mass demonstration in repudiation of the legislature's decision culminated in an attack on the headquarters of the National Action Party (PAN), the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), and the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and the Citizen's Movement (*Movimiento Ciudadano*, MC), in the city of Chilpancingo, resulting in broken windows and vandalized property.

Inexplicably, police are said to have stood by while the vandalism was taking place, limiting themselves to protecting a nearby municipal building. Face-masked individuals entered the buildings threw furniture out the windows and spray painted the interior with signs denouncing the politicians' betrayal. According to the

Mexico City weekly *Proceso* magazine, the vandals attacked and insulted women reporters and the media.

Government explanations were contradictory. Governor Aguirre was unable to explain why it was that the police did not intervene to stop the attacks and placed the blame for the incident squarely on the CETEG leadership, ordering the arrest of Morán and Juárez, and breaking off talks with CETEG negotiators. The talks have since resumed.

In Chilpancingo, Government Secretary Humberto Salgado Gómez threatened that “there will be no quarter given; those that are responsible will have to bear their guilt.” Salgado explained that provocateurs had initiated the vandalism to invite repression from the authorities. The police did not intervene, he said, because it had information that the attackers had Molotov cocktail type gasoline bombs.

Salgado would not elaborate who the provocateurs could have been or how the police knew about the gasoline bombs; later on he declared that teachers were under investigation.

Peña Nieto’s reform legislation is part of a package of reforms (counter-reforms, really) inspired by the right-wing business group “Mexicans First” (*Mexicanos Primero*, MP), designed to undo many of the populist and nationalist reforms associated with the Mexican Revolution, and to subordinate education to the profit needs of big business.

The Mexican president’s draft education reform is very similar to US President Barack Obama’s “race to the top.” As in the United States, it has the support of all the main bourgeois parties (PAN, PRI, and PRD) through their “Pact for Mexico.”

Governor Aguirre himself belongs to the PRD, a bourgeois party that posed as a “left” breakaway from the PRI, the party that ruled Mexico uninterruptedly for seven decades.

The strategy being followed in Mexico, which includes singling out and slandering educators in the mass media for the supposed failures of public education, shares the script being used by Mexico’s northern neighbor. As in the US, the position of the teachers unions has been not to reject the reactionary plan, but to demand that they be included as partners.

Behind a mask of intransigent radicalism and militancy, the CETEG is no different than its US counterparts. Minervino Morán confirmed yesterday that the violent protest against the parties’ headquarters had been in retaliation for the legislative vote—the demonstrators were “responding to the approval by the local congress of an education reform that ignored our proposals,” he said.

In particular, he cited the union’s demand for a democratic evaluation process—i.e., one in which the CETEG would act as a partner with the Aguirre administration. The union spokesman also charged that state legislators had voted in accordance with instructions from the governor and

President Peña Nieto in violation of separation of powers and of Guerrero’s state’s rights. He described the vandalisms as “radical” tactics that were part of a “popular movement strategy to defend Guerrero’s sovereignty.”

Morán also demanded that Aguirre’s arrest orders be lifted, warning that “otherwise there will be a bigger confrontation.”

In their rejection of the new legislation, the CETEG leaders threatened to extend their movement to the rest of México, and called for a massive mobilization of teachers and their supporters on May 1, International Workers Day.

Behind its militant posturing and Guerrero nationalism, the CETEG is looking to engage in horse trading of a different form. For his part, Governor Aguirre will likely use the lifting of the arrest order as a negotiating card of his own to extract concessions from the CETEG bureaucracy at the expense of the teachers.

Parallel to the struggle of Guerrero education workers, teachers protests have taken place in nearby Oaxaca State, in Michoacán and Chihuahua, across the US-México border.

Defeating the “reform” drive for privatization of education requires the development of a united political offensive by teachers and the entire working class of Mexico, independent of the bureaucratized trade unions. Such a movement, which would find allies among teachers in the US facing the same kind of attacks, must be based on the demand for the material resources necessary for quality public education for all, as part of a revolutionary struggle against the capitalist profit system.



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