

# Teachers' struggles escalate across Mexico

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Across México last week, tens of thousands of teachers mobilized in rejection of the education reforms imposed by President Enrique Peña Nieto. On May Day this Wednesday, teachers and their supporters are planning mass mobilizations in Guerrero, Jalisco, and Mexico City to repudiate the education and labor policies promoted by Peña Nieto's PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) and the other major Mexican political parties as the centerpiece of their "Pact for México."

The education reform law, which was approved by the Mexican Congress and ratified by a majority of state legislatures, is being motivated as a means to improve student performance and weaken the power of the unions, attacks job security in teaching, making educators dependent on what the government calls "universal evaluation" exams. Even veteran teachers would be subject to sackings, depending on their evaluation. In the last few weeks, teachers have escalated their mobilizations in many parts of the country, including Jalisco, Michoacán, and Guerrero.

Peña Nieto's so-called reforms have polarized a teachers union that for years had been divided between the official SNTE (Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de Educación) and the CNTE (Confederación Nacional de Trabajadores de Educación). The SNTE President, Juan Díaz de la Torre, was appointed to lead the union by Peña Nieto after the arrest of its former president Elba Gordillo for allegedly embezzling millions of dollars in union funds. He fully backs the education reform and collaborates closely with Peña Nieto and the PRI.

The CNTE, and other SNTE factions, are organizing and mobilizing teachers across México against the reform.

The government's policy would pave the way for the dismantling of public education and its replacement with religious and private schools.

**Michoacán:** Mexican teachers and *normalistas* (students at Normal (teaching) colleges) escalated their struggles across the state.

On April 27 in Morelia, the state capital, 500 *normalistas* from eight teaching colleges blocked downtown streets and occupied a shopping center. The demonstrators carried signs repudiating the education reform that makes the hiring of teachers contingent on examinations. Instead, they are demanding that the Michoacán government guarantee posts to Normal school graduates. In addition, the students and teachers are demanding the creation of 200,000 more teaching posts. Last month the teachers had petitioned the state government for decent wages and benefits, as well as free supplies, shoes and uniforms for the students.

The Michoacán state government has refused to oppose the Peña Nieto reforms, and argues that there is no money for more jobs, decent wages and benefits, or for supplies, shoes and uniforms.

Michoacan Governor Jesús Reina García vowed to prosecute teaching students and teachers for allegedly stealing state vehicles to block a highway outside of Morelia.

Two days earlier, Michoacán *normalistas* and teachers, members of the SNTE had taken over highway tollbooths, while 14,817 members of the CNTE walked off their jobs at 3,000 schools, affecting 25 percent of the State's students.

**Guerrero:** Following the issuing of an arrest order last week against leaders of the teachers union over a protest that saw the sacking of PRI and other political party offices, Guerrero police announced their intention to set up check points to prevent their escape. Minervino Morán, leader of the Oaxaca union, announced that mobilizations would continue across the state.

Adding to the teachers' anger was the decision to release—supposedly for lack of evidence—Ismael

Matadamas Salinas and Rey David Cortes Flores, two state security officers who had been charged with the murder of Gabriel Echeverría de Jesús and Jorge Alexis Herrera Pino, two *normalistas* from the Ayotzinapa Normal College. Police gunned down Herrera and Echeverría de Jesús during a protest march in 2011.

On Thursday, a group of 1,000 teachers stoned the state attorney's office over the liberation of the arrested police officers. The protesters also stoned the offices of the PRI-affiliated union federation, the SNTE.

A massive protest march is planned in Guerrero for May 1. In addition to the Guerrero teachers, delegations are expected from Michoacán and Chiapas. "This is not over," declared a Guerrero educator to CNN.

In response to the violent protests last week, the federal administration of president Enrique Peña Nieto, announced that it was sending security agents to "intervene, if necessary," against the teachers.

**Jalisco:** The state legislature has provisionally suspended imposing the measures of the education reform law in Jalisco, maintaining relative labor peace with teachers. However, all factions of the SNTE have called for marches on May Day and are inviting parents and members of other unions to join them in the repudiation of the new law.

**Mexico City:** On April 25, over 2,500 teachers and students marched in the nation's capital fighting for the rejection of so-called universal evaluation that the Peña Nieto reform would mandate.

**Baja California:** On April 23, hundreds of protesting teachers invaded the state legislature in Mexicali, protesting the education reform. The protesters, chanting, "Fighting educators are educators that teach," forced the legislature to suspend its session for the day.

**Baja California Sur:** On April 19, teachers belonging to the SNTE and to its dissident faction, the CNTE, fought each other for possession of the union headquarters in the city of La Paz. A CNTE spokesperson accused the SNTE leadership of attempting to "demobilize" teachers, who are rejecting Peña Nieto's reforms across México. Though the Baja California Sur section of SNTE has so far not joined in the protest demonstrations, an SNTE spokesperson denounced the overcrowding that exists in the schools, with 50 or more students in elementary school classrooms, making effective teaching impossible.

**Chiapas:** Ten thousand educators marched in the city

of Tuxla Guerrero on April 20; the Chiapas SNTE, dominated by the CNTE, has called for a teachers' strike, set to begin on May 1. "We will not allow education to be subordinated to corporate interests," declared CNTE leader Alelfo Alejandro Gómez. "We will aggressively defend free, public education."



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