

Teacher protests, barricades continue after massacre in México

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On Wednesday, three days after the Sunday police massacre of protesting teachers and their supporters in Nochixtlán, Oaxaca State, negotiations began in Mexico City between Mexican chief of staff Miguel Angel Osorio Chong and leaders of the National Coordinating Committee of Education Workers (CNTE).

The meeting, following nearly three years of protests and battles between the teachers and the Peña Nieto administration, signals the extreme crisis of the government. Both Osorio Chong and Education Secretary Aurelio Nuño Mayer up until now had refused to meet until the CNTE accepted the education reform legislation as the law of the land.

Now their aim is to use the bloodshed in Oaxaca to draw the CNTE leadership into a “dialogue” that they hope will secure its collaboration in imposing the “reform” on rank-and-file teachers in return for a seat at the table for union officials.

Union leaders entered the secretary of government’s building in Mexico City late Wednesday afternoon, chanting “the education reform is going to fall.”

Before the meeting, they said that they would raise nine points, including the rehiring of over 4,000 fired teachers, the freeing of jailed union leaders and dropping of charges against them, payment of withheld wages, a solution to problems in the education system and the resolution of demands by “social organizations and of peoples in resistance” in Oaxaca.

The secretary of government’s office, for its part, said the talks were aimed at restoring “tranquility” to Oaxaca.

The CNTE represents a dissident movement within the official pro-government and notoriously corrupt national teachers union (SNTE). It operates in Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero, Michoacán and other

states, and claims to have 60,000 members.

The CNTE has politically oriented to Morena, led by the ex-Mayor of Mexico City Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, which has been formed to provide a new “left” face for bourgeois politics in Mexico.

Leaders of the Oaxaca teachers also met on Wednesday to agree on a “plan of action”. Among their demands is the resignation of Oaxaca Governor Gabino Cué Monteagudo, and of Education Secretary Nuño Mayer. Oaxaca teachers also organized a collection among its members for the victims of the massacre and delivered food and other aid to Nochitxlán.

The CNTE meeting also voted to ask the Inter-American Human Rights Commission (IACHR) to launch an independent investigation of the June 19 massacre.

In the southern and central states of Oaxaca, Guerrero, Chiapas, Michoacán, and Tabasco, protests continued on Tuesday in support of the teachers, and barricades were up, blocking vehicular traffic, as education and other workers defied the government massacre in which 11 people were shot dead and more than one hundred were wounded.

There are concerns in the region that Sunday’s massacre may be repeated.

In Nochixtlán, the barricade, broken up by federal police on Sunday, was back up. In Michoacan, teachers and their supporters blockaded highways in at least at seven locations, including in Morelia, the state capital.

Barricades were also put up in the state capital of Chiapas, Tuxtla Gutierrez, where teachers rallied at the federal education offices.

Guerrero teachers protesting in Acapulco barricaded a stretch of coastal highway and took over a shopping mall in the tourist district.

The CNTE leadership moved to disassociate itself

from some of the blockades and protests, including the blocking of the Villahermosa-Ciudad del Carmen federal highway, which was attributed to independent teachers.

Francisco Mendoza, a CNTE leader, told the Mexican media that it had not called the protest, adding that it could “get out of control, and they blame the CNTE, in this respect we disassociate ourselves from it.”

Osorio Chong is considered by many to have ordered the Nochixtlán attack, an escalation of a series of attacks in recent weeks against the teachers, that includes the arrest of CNTE leaders on spurious criminal charges and the accusation that the CNTE is terrorizing teachers into not collaborating with the education reform.

The massacre in Oaxaca is the latest event in an ongoing war between police and security forces and the teachers. In May, protesting teachers camped out in Mexico City’s Santo Domingo Plaza, were rousted in the middle of the night, herded onto buses and transported out of the city in a scene reminiscent of Pinochet’s Chile, or fascist Germany.

While the talks were about to start, remarks by Education Secretary Nuño Mayer signaled that the Peña Nieto administration has no intention of backing down.

He declared categorically that the so-called education reform would “deepen, because it is the transformation that our country needs.” Nuño Mayer also praised SNTE leader Juan Díaz de la Torre for his cooperation with the education law, a not-so veiled message to the CNTE to take the opportunity join in with the corrupt SNTE leader. According to some reports, the SNTE was invited to join the talks Wednesday night between the CNTE and the secretary of government.

The education reform consists of changes in the Mexican Constitution originally approved as part of the Pact for México between the leaders of the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the National Action Party (PAN) and the Party of the Democratic Revolutions (PRD) in 2012. It was supplemented by other laws in 2013.

In the name of competitiveness and greater autonomy, the legislation establishes a system of obligatory and periodic teacher evaluations, that teachers are required to submit to, or be fired. Hundreds have already been sacked.

In the name of autonomy and local control, the

reform also shifts many of the costs of education directly onto students and their families, creating a many-tiered education system that favors the well off. Particularly in poor states, such as Chiapas and Oaxaca, the added costs for books and teaching materials would impose a financial hardship on parents who now send their children to schools in many cases with no desks or blackboards.

The CNTE opposed the education reform, pointing out that teachers were never consulted in the elaboration of this system and raising questions on the undemocratic nature of the Pact for México itself, signed by unelected party leaders. Many teachers point to the diversity of Mexican society, particularly in states like Guerrero and Oaxaca, where more than 20 indigenous languages are spoken, making a one-size-fits-all method of evaluation impractical. What is being evaluated therefore is what serves the interests of big business and the ruling class.

The teachers struggle is being met with increasing support among youth and students, and among other sectors of the working class. A national strike by health workers, medical doctors and nurses is spreading.

On Tuesday, doctors and nurses from the states of Veracruz, Chiapas, Guerrero and Baja California announced that they would join the strike and linked their struggle, for greater resources to an underfunded care system, to the struggle of the teachers.

Mexican media reports that on the social media the teachers struggle has obtained broad support. Many link the massacre in Oaxaca with the disappearance of the 43 teaching students in Iguala in September 2014.

In support of the teachers, student strikes are taking place, including on campuses of the Autonomous Metropolitan University In Mexico City.



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