

Michigan public school teacher messages of solidarity with Mexican teachers

27 June 2016

“I wish more press were talking about this tragedy,” said Kevin, a teacher with the Detroit Public Schools (DPS), addressing the brutal massacre of at least 13 and the wounding of dozens more teachers and their supporters in the Mexican state of Oaxaca.

On June 19, federal police fired automatic weapons into the crowd of 500 striking teachers and their supporters protesting in defense of public education in the impoverished town of Nochixtlán. President Enrique Peña Nieto has imposed a system of “education reform,” beginning in 2013, requiring teacher evaluations as a means to fire teachers and promote privatization, to the increasing anger of educators throughout Mexico.

“We, as teachers, stand in solidarity with them in our hearts,” Kevin continued. “I read with disgust what is happening to my brothers and sisters in Oaxaca. I really want to thank the WSWs for covering this situation in Mexico. We need to get the word out.

“I have family who are teachers in Northern Mexico. We have talked about this ‘education reform’ often. My brother-in-law and sister in Mexico have said testing is a good part of this.

“But regardless of one’s view of the educational reform, the Mexican federal government’s violent strong-hand approach is not the answer. It is 2016, not 1916. History will not judge President Peña Nieto kindly as the world watches and prays for Oaxaca.

“We are outraged by the government violence, the legacy of corruption and the ‘disappeared’ teachers.

“Our fight in Detroit is also motivated by the same type of thinking. Here we are also opposed to many of these evaluations.

“In Detroit and Mexico, the common denominator is the importance of the role of an educator. Society is not valuing our teachers. Here in Detroit, they are willing to experiment on children—and bring in individuals

without formal training to save money. This is craziness; they don’t do that with pilots or doctors, but think it’s okay with teachers.

“The core efforts in both countries are driven by the financial interests of the corporations. In the US, it is both the Democrats and Republicans. I am not a socialist, but I see that the Democrats have been in bed with the charter schools and corporate interests for many years. Look at New Orleans, Louisiana.”

Danita Hollmon, also a DPS teacher, said, “Needless to say, I support the teachers in Mexico and have great empathy for the people hurt by the government. Now they are even trying to cover up what they have done.

“Compare this to here. Just look at what they put in the schools legislation. We can be fined, fired and even lose certification for going on strike. And there in Mexico, where they are trying to turn education into one system for the haves and another for the have-nots, that is exactly what we are dealing with here.

“I have been out trying to do something since November when we first went to Lansing to protest. There have been several meetings and discussions at meetings I attended, where teachers came out—and, of course, the sickouts.

“What about the response from the DFT? On the one end they are trying to say they are outraged, but on the other end they were applauding the fact that the legislation was passed. Even though that legislation was not for us they are portraying it as being for us. What is the difference if it is not as bad as it could have been? It is still not what we should have.

“They quelled our enthusiasm when they abruptly ended the sickout. We were out there in the freezing cold trying to oppose the attack on the school system. But everything just came to a screeching halt.

“Then I really did not understand [DPS Emergency Manager Steven] Rhodes coming out saying teachers

were not going to get paid. We had two days of sickouts in May because they said our pay over the summer was not guaranteed. Then that was abruptly ended.

“I told people that I thought something was up when I saw [Michigan AFT president David] Hecker, [AFT national president Randi] Weingarten, and [DFT interim president] Ivy [Bailey] all together leaving the picket and heading back to the DFT office. They were all together walking in a little group. I thought to myself, ‘I don’t like it. This does not look good.’

“That afternoon we had a meeting and we were told that we were all going back to work, that we could take Rhodes’ word that we would be paid. Why should we listen to his word? Now there are teachers working right now in summer school that are going to have to be paid.

“There are always cover-ups. Just like with what is going on in Mexico. The press is actually covering it up. I actually had not heard of it until I read your newsletter earlier this week.”

West Bloomfield Public Schools teacher Stephan Toy said, “The massacre of protesting teachers in Oaxaca, Mexico last week is tragic. Teachers working to highlight the injustices of the so-called educational reform in Mexico are up against global forces set out to destroy any chance we educators have to provide solid, meaningful educations for our students.

“The proposed changes in Mexico will lead to the continuation of systems in place throughout the world—public schools for the elite and well-connected at the expense of the poor.”



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