Thousands of teachers attacked by riot police in Morocco

A reporter
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Thousands of teachers in Morocco were attacked by government security forces Wednesday as they demonstrated for higher pay and greater job security in the capital city of Rabat. Hundreds were injured after police opened fire with water cannon and waded into crowds swinging their batons.

The demonstration was held as part of a general strike by Moroccan workers to commemorate protests that broke out in the country eight years ago, on February 20, 2011.

The police opened fire with water cannon and charged the protesters when they approached the Royal Palace of King Mohammed VI. Dozens of teachers were taken by ambulance to local hospitals after they had been beaten to the ground in the police charges.

The public school teachers marched through the capital city to protest fixed-term contracts—a form of contract labor—first imposed by the government in 2016. Many wore white robes, the traditional garb of teachers, and carried hand-made signs with both workplace grievances and political slogans. The contract workers receive no health benefits or pensions, and they earn an average of $454 a month (about 400 euros).

Teacher Naima Kalaii told Agence France Presse, “We are doing a peaceful march, but unfortunately, the police are cracking down on us. Teachers are falling to the ground. Teachers are being insulted. Our message is education. Stop the injustice.”

Demonstrators carried banners reading, “No to the dismantling of public schools,” and “I’m a Teacher, I earn 400€ a month,” but they also displayed political signs and chanted slogans against the brutal monarchical regime, including “End the dictatorship,” “Mafia government” and “Freedom for political prisoners.”

Numerous teachers wore orange jumpsuits and carried signs identifying themselves as “teachers of jail cell number 9,” because they are locked into the ninth pay grade and cannot receive any additional salary above the abysmally low maximum. They demanded the right to be promoted to the tenth pay grade with compensation backdated to 2013, when the present system was introduced.

The march was organized by the Moroccan National Coordination of Teachers (CNPCC) and mobilized teachers from many other cities besides Rabat, including Tenghir, Azilal, Taroudant, Agadir, Tiznit and Chishawah. Protest strikes began Monday and were scheduled to take place throughout the week.

Other workers took part in similar protests in Casablanca, Marrakech, Tangier, Al Hoceima, Chefchaouen, Larache, Ksar-el-Kebir, Fez, Guelmim, Tetouan and Sefrou.

The protests are expected to culminate in massive marches on Sunday, February 24.

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