

Thousands of young Moroccan teachers assaulted by anti-riot police

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Moroccan anti-riot police assaulted striking teachers with batons and water cannon in the capital of Rabat over the weekend. An estimated 10,000-15,000 education workers, on strike since March 3, had gathered to press their demands for permanent jobs, pensions, additional salaries and good healthcare.

The teachers and other education workers, mainly in the 20s and 30s, chanted “liberty, dignity, social justice” and held candles or illuminated cell phones. On Saturday night, they decided to camp out in front of the parliament on the main Mohammed V Avenue. They have been holding rallies for the past three weeks to demand permanent jobs, including sit-ins at regional academies across the kingdom.

Some shouted political slogans such as “This is a corrupt country” and “We are ruled by a mafia,” demanding the resignations of Prime Minister Saad Eddine El Othmani and Education Minister Said Amzazi.

The education ministry has threatened mass firings in retaliation for the strike with the pretext that teachers knew the terms of the contracts before signing them. “We are not intimidated by the threats of the education ministry because we came to claim our right to be integrated in the civil service and defend the public school,” Abdelilah Taloua, a young teacher, told Reuters.

Describing themselves as “forcibly contracted educators,” approximately 55,000 of Morocco’s teachers have received only annual renewable contracts since 2016. At that time, the education ministry instituted austerity policies, which removed them officially from the public sector. They are now demanding equal rights across the profession including full pension rights. Presently the teachers receive only 40 percent of their monthly salary after retirement.

Striker Oussama Hamdouch, 27, speaking with *Moroccan World News*, said the Ministry of Education has now proposed to hire teachers through regional academies. This was “unacceptable,” he emphasized, because the regional academies do not have the resources to offer employment to everyone.

“The academies will be able to fire teachers if they don’t have financial resources whenever they want to. School principals will also have a certain authority over us. We want to work with dignity like the other teachers in the public sector,” Hamdouch said.

Explaining that young teachers had no alternative but to sign the substandard contracts, Hamdouch added, “We had no choice. The job market is disappointing.” Teachers are particularly angry over the contract’s stipulation that they cannot take a full-employment position, even if one is offered, for the duration of the agreement.

The new round of protests follow those on February 20, when thousands gathered to press these demands and were met with similar violence by government forces. The February demonstration was called as part of a national general strike commemorating the revolutionary struggles dubbed the “Arab spring” in 2011.

With an escalating national debt, estimated at 82.5 percent of GDP, Prime Minister Saad Eddine El Othmani has continued to press the public sector in order to ensure payments to the state and international banks. Nearly 19 percent of the rural population lives in poverty, and about 15 percent of Moroccans eke out survival on about \$3 a day, according to the World Bank. The official unemployment rate in the kingdom continues at just under 10 percent, but among the urban youth recent statistics show it close to 40 percent.

In June 2004, the United States designated Morocco a

major ally in the “war on terror.” And, yesterday, March 25, the US State Department announced its approval of the sale of 25 F-16 fighter jets and assorted other military equipment to the Moroccan government at a cost of \$3.8 billion. The news release explains that the upgrade will enable Morocco to expand its “ability to undertake [NATO] coalition operations, as it has done in the past in flying sorties against ISIS in Syria and Iraq.”

While attacking teachers, the Kingdom of Morocco, together with Tunisia, has also been the recipient of a special €55 million European Union fund to detain migrants attempting to enter Europe through Spain’s northern African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla and across the Mediterranean.

The protests in Morocco coincide with the popular upheaval in neighboring Algeria. Tens of thousands of teachers joined the general strike earlier this month demanding the end of the figurehead regime of President Abdelaziz and the largest protests in 30 years continue to gain momentum.



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