

Moroccan government, police violently assault protesting teachers

Our reporters
22 March 2021

On Tuesday and Wednesday last week, Moroccan riot police and plainclothes police launched a violent crackdown against a peaceful protest of thousands of teachers in the capital, Rabat.

The teachers were protesting conditions of temporary fixed-term contracts under which tens of thousands have been hired since 2016. Under the terms of these contracts, educators have lower pensions, less job security and are not able to obtain positions at schools in other regions around the country. Prior to 2016, educators were hired as public servants under the national education ministry. Teachers have warned that the aim of these measures is to end the public education system in Morocco.

On Tuesday and Wednesday, thousands of educators joined a protest march in the capital and attempted to hold a peaceful sit-in protest outside the parliament building and the education ministry.

Using the coronavirus pandemic as a pretext, the government claimed that the protests were a danger to public health and ordered police to violently disperse the crowd. Videos shared widely on social media showed riot police charging against the crowd of workers. In other videos, plainclothes police can be seen kicking and assaulting teachers.

Images were shared on social media under the hashtag `#protect_teachers_in_morocco` of teachers bloodied and beaten on the streets. Media reported that police followed teachers returning to hotels and arrested them, on the grounds that they had traveled to the capital to participate in the protests. The education union reported that the government had banned teachers from booking hotel rooms in the leadup to the protest.

While the government claimed that it was opposed to the protest due to concerns of the spread of the virus, it

has violently repressed similar protests that have been held regularly since 2018.

A teacher in Morocco, who spoke to a reporter for this article, described the conditions for educators in the country.

Teachers “remain ‘contractual teachers’ in spite of doing the same work that official teachers do,” he said. “It’s important to indicate that the total number of these teachers has reached more than 102,000 so far. ... We were obliged to be contractual teachers. In fact, there was no other choice. ... Many teachers were forced to sign the contracts without even being given enough time to read the [terms]. Therefore, there were only two choices: contracts or unemployment.

“We do not have the same rights. ... Retirement, for instance, is one great issue that marks the difference between us as contractual teachers and official teachers. It does not matter how long we, contractual teachers, work. Our retirement will be low and can’t go more than 350 € per month, while officials can have up to 1200€.

“We as contractual teachers do not have the right to become university teachers even if we have all the qualifications needed for those jobs. On the contrary, other teachers will face no problem if they want to apply for teaching at university.”

In addition, contract teachers are confined to work in the region where they were hired. “As a consequence, there are a lot of married couples who live in difficult circumstances in which couples are sometimes from different regions of the country.”

He added that the system of contractual teaching aims to, “in the long run, efface the public employment in teaching, which is the ultimate goal of the Moroccan government.”

The education strikes in Morocco coincided with the

mass Hirak protests and strikes that erupted in neighboring Algeria, which were triggered by the announcement of the presidential candidacy of Abdelaziz Bouteflika. The protests forced the removal of Bouteflika, while the regime remains in power.

The violent police crackdown reflects the immense fears in the Moroccan ruling class that a new wave of protests could trigger a broader movement in the entire working class across the region. Conditions of poverty and social inequality in the country that were already explosive have been further exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic.

The official unemployment jumped from 9.2 percent in 2019 to 11.9 percent in the space of a year. The total number of unemployed jumped by 29 percent to 1.429 million, due to large scale layoffs in the agricultural and fishing industries.

The most affected have been the youth. Unemployment has jumped by 6.2 percent to 31.2 percent for those 16 to 24 years of age. The World Bank estimated a 6.3 percent contraction in the Moroccan economy in 2020 due to the pandemic.



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