

The Mexican Teachers' Long Struggle for Education, Workers Rights, and Democracy



The last few years of repeated strikes and demonstrations by the teachers of Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Michoacán, and the government's violent repression of these protests—including forced disappearance of students, massacres of supporters, and assassinations of individual teachers—has led to interest in the background of the teachers' movement. The following article is meant to provide a long historical overview of the Mexican teachers' movement, together with a bibliography for further reading.

The Mexican Teachers Union (el SNTE) has 1.4 million members, while 200,000 or more of them are active in the dissident National Coordinating Committee (la CNTE) which has for four months been engaged in strikes and direct actions that have at times paralyzed the states of Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Michoacán. La CNTE has been leading such massive movement now for 37 years in a struggle to win teachers higher wages, to protect public education, and more recently in its battle against the government's Education Reform Law, it has proposed a new educational model.

How did teachers in Mexico acquire their very central place in the country's social and political history? How did they

become such an organized force both in the government's corporative labor and political system, as well as in the working class and social movement that challenge the government? What is the dissident teachers movement and what does it want?

The Era of the Mexican Revolution – 1910 – 1920

The root of the teachers' role in modern Mexico is to be found in the revolutionary period in which primary secondary educators played the role of political advisors to the peasant movement for agrarian reform.

From the Spanish conquest in the 1520s to the Mexican Revolution of 1910, the Catholic Church had provided what little formal education there was for the Mexican people. While the best Catholic Schools were reserved for the wealthy and the tiny middle class, schools for the workers and the peasantry were few and the quality of education was poor. During the dictatorship of Mexican President Porfirio Díaz (1876-1911) the government had established the first public education system, though it too was very limited and reached very few of the country's young people.[\[1\]](#) It was the Mexican Revolution that brought mass public education to the country.

The Mexican Revolution had several implicit goals and eventual achievements: distribution of land to the peasants, recognition of labor unions, nationalization of the oil industry, and the establishment of a free, secular, public education system for all. When the violent period of 1910-1920 ended, President Álvaro Obregón created the Secretariat of Public Education (SEP) in 1921 and appointed José Vasconcelos, the philosopher and writer, the author of *La raza cósmica* (*The Cosmic Race*), to head it.

Vasconcelos, who had been allied with the revolution's left wing—the Convention of Emiliano Zapata and Francisco “Pancho” Villa—had earlier been appointed to head the National

University of Mexico appointed by president Adolfo de la Huerta. Vasconcelos had created the university's famous motto: "*Por mi raza hablará el espíritu*" ("The spirit will speak through my race.") and to make that idea a reality he promoted popular education that was nationalistic, but also Latin American in character.

As head of the university, Vasconcelos had launched a national literacy campaign with volunteer teachers and as head of the SEP he continued to promote the idea of education as a vehicle for the emancipation of the Mexican people. Vasconcelos compared his teachers to missionaries, evangelists of the revolution. The teacher had a sacred mission: the uplift of the poor, the oppressed, and the uneducated. [\[2\]](#)

The Period of Agrarian reform 1920-1930

The teachers accepted the assignment, sometimes at the risk of their lives. During the revolutionary upheaval of 1910 to 1920 and again during the agrarian reform movement of the 1920s to the 1940s, when peasants rose up to demand the return of ancestral fields from the hacienda landlords, it was the local schoolteacher who often helped the illiterate farmers to formulate their demands. Teachers, we might say, became the union stewards of the peasant movement of the 1910s and 1920s.

The teacher, almost surely the only one in the village who read the newspaper from time to time and very likely the only one had ever read a book, took on the task of phrasing the villagers' demands in the language of the radical agrarian reform movement, which in regions like Michoacán and Veracruz often had a socialist character. In fact, in the early 1920s some of the leaders of the radical peasant movement in those states joined the newly founded Communist Party.

The local village elementary school—few went beyond the sixth grade in those years—became the bastion not only of the agrarian reform movement but also of the Mexican revolution

more generally. Before the revolution, the Catholic Church had provided most of the schooling available and almost none to the rural poor. The Constitution of 1917 ended the Church's role in education and required the state to provide free, lay education for all.

The public school teachers tended to be free-thinkers and often militant atheists who accused the Catholic Church and its clerics of keeping the people in ignorance, filling their heads with superstition, and charging them exorbitant fees for the required sacraments of baptism, marriage, and absolution. The rural teachers, though hampered by their own limited education, strove, on the contrary, to offer a modern, rational, and scientific view of the world.

During the 1920s, the teachers' role as advocates for the peasants, opponents of the Church, and campaigners for continuing and deepening the revolution made them targets for the landlords who sent their *pistoleros* (gunmen) or their *guardias blancas* (white guards) to assassinate the local school teacher, an all too common occurrence in that era. Still rural teachers stepped forward, continuing to put pen to paper to give expression to the peasants' demand for their land. [\[3\]](#)

Lázaro Cárdenas and Socialist Education – 1934 – 1940

The Great Depression of the 1930s had led to the collapse of some agricultural sectors and to the failure of many haciendas, weakening the landlord class. When Lázaro Cárdenas became president in 1934, he provided support both to the agrarian reform movement fighting for the haciendas' land and to the rural schools and their teachers. With his support a stronger movement of both peasant leagues and industrial labor unions developed, and became strong supporters of the president. Cárdenas not only distributed millions of acres of land to indigenous and peasant communities in the form of the collectively-owned *ejidos*, but also in some cases provided

arms to peasant organizations to defend that land from the *guardias blancas*.

At the same time, Cárdenas worked both to strengthen public education but also to radicalize it. Cárdenas, who considered himself a socialist, saw his project as using the government to control economic developments and modern industry to create socialism in an agrarian society. As part of that project, the ruling party that he headed, amended the constitution in 1934 to read "State education will be socialist in character." The Mexican Communist Party (PCM), which provided some staff for the SEP in this period, shared the president's goal of socialist education.

The government's implementation of the new socialist education project—which many quiet correctly interpreted as atheistic education—led immediately to conflict with the Church and with other conservative forces, as well as with the country's pious peasantry. In some areas the locals burned the schools and cut off the teachers' ears, or in some cases they assassinated teachers. Many areas of the country were deeply divided over the issue and some were in virtual rebellion. Many from both the left and the right look back on Cárdenas' decision to improve socialist education as a great error in political judgment, though some historians argue that the struggle around socialist education contributed to the formation of a sense of multi-cultural nationalism.[\[4\]](#)

The Founding of el SNTE – 1940 – 1958

During Cárdenas' tenure (1934-1940), the labor unions had supported him and he had encouraged the unions' organization drives and strikes. At the same time he pressured the unions to centralize, forming national federations, but also divided them into three different federations, one for workers (CTM), one for public employees (OATSE), and one for peasants (CNC). (While teachers in some large cities and in some states had organized, forming various teacher federations, the teachers

did not succeed in forming a single national teachers union during those years.)

Cárdenas brought the new labor federations into the state party, changing its name from the Revolutionary National Praise (PNR) to Party of the Mexican Revolution (PRM) with the slogan "For Socialism." Cárdenas envisioned an agrarian socialism guided and created from above through the state-party. So, ironically, Mexico's most left wing president was also the creator of a corporative system, that is, one where the state-party dominated the unions and workers.

Then Cárdenas chose as successor to the presidency, Manuel Ávila Camacho (1940-46), a leader who was far more conservative. It was Ávila Camacho who in 1943 created the National Union of Education Workers (el SNTE) the merger of the Union of Education Workers (SUNTE), the Mexican Union of Teachers and Education Workers (SMMTE), the Autonomous National Union of Education Workers (SNATE), and the Union of Workers of Mexican Education (STEMRM) and other smaller organizations.

Between 1943 and 1949 el SNTE became the locus of struggle between religious right, the state-party, and leftists. The ruling party succeeded in breaking the power of the clerical conservatives in el SNTE. Then in 1949, under the pressure of the U.S. State Department, the Cold War had come to Mexico, a development welcomed by the leaders of the state-party, opening a second front of struggle in el SNTE. The Cold War led the ruling party—now known as the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)—to drive the Communists out of the Secretary of Education and while the SNTE excluded them from the union.

So, during the 1950s Mexico's educational system came to be controlled by two powerful state bureaucracies: the SEP and the SNTE, the leaders of which collaborated to control the teachers, many of whom were veterans of the social movements

and struggles of the 1920s and 1930s. In Mexico's system, labor bureaucrats were often imposed on the unions by the state-party, sometimes violently. The SEP collaborated with the SNTE to provide funds for an army of union staff and for no-show teaching jobs. State SEP and SNTE officials collaborated with the PRI governors and local officials with the village bosses, the *caciques*

Union officials were expected to insure that the workers *did not* strike for higher wages and that they *did* vote for the ruling PRI, for which the officials were rewarded by also becoming congressmen, senators, and governors, as well as leaders of the PRI itself. The teachers played an important role at the grassroots to insure that the PRI, through fear and favors, won all national elections, held all political offices from city hall, to governor, to the congress, and the presidency. The president controlled the justices of the Supreme Court. It was a very nearly totalitarian system.

The First Dissident Teacher Movement – 1958

This was the era of the “Mexican Miracle,” the rapid growth of the Mexican economy at a rate of 3 to 4 percent with 3 percent inflation rate from 1940-1970. The miracle was based on the nationalist economic model, the substitution of imports, the deployment of the state's nationalized industries that controlled much of the economy, and on keeping workers' wages low. The state-controlled union's job during this period was to keep workers—including teachers—from demanding higher wages. It was this that led to the first dissident teacher movement in Mexico.[\[5\]](#)

The movement was led by Othón Salazar (1924-2008), a teacher who had been born in Guerrero, studied first at the Oaxtepec Normal School, then at the Ayotinzapa Normal School, and finally at the National Teachers College, becoming a teacher in 1951 and a member of a Young Communist Club in 1952. He was soon the recognized leader of the teachers at the Superior

Normal School in Mexico City.[\[6\]](#)

Under Salazar's leadership, Local 9 of the SNTE struck for higher wages in 1956; then in 1957 he and his fellow teachers organized the *Movimiento Revolucionario del Magisterio* (MRM or Revolutionary Teachers Movement) initiating a broader movement among teachers in Mexico City and other parts of the country. In 1958 the MRM began to lead a series of protest demonstrations and marches for higher wages in Mexico City.

The government responded to the protests by breaking up teacher demonstrations and arresting and briefly jailing Salazar, accusing him of being a Communist, and agent of the Soviet Union, and guilty of sedition. The government suppressed the movement, and when Salazar led a second strike at the Normal Superior in 1960, he was fired. He continued to head the MRM from 1956-1977.[\[7\]](#)

The MRM protests took place at the same time that another Communist, Demetrio Vallejo, became leader of the Mexican Railroad Workers Union and led a general strike of the country's railroads.[\[8\]](#) That strike, which paralyzed the country, interpreted by both the Mexican and U.S. governments as a Communist attempt at revolution, was suppressed by the army; a few were killed, hundreds arrested, and the movement absolutely broken.[\[9\]](#) The defeat of the Communist Party led railroad worker and teacher movements put an end to large-scale social movements in Mexico for a decade.

The Democracy Movement and Its Suppression: Tlatelolco 1968 and its Impact

Mexico changed dramatically in the 1950s and 60s. The Revolution of 1910-1940 had given the peasants land, brought schools and health clinics, and the population expanded dramatically. The post-revolutionary governments also built roads and highways that led to the cities. The children and grandchildren of the Revolution moved from the countryside to

urban areas by the millions, leading to an astronomical expansion of urban areas and populations. The PRI's old structure of workers and peasants no longer adequately represented the country's expanded social structure with its various middle class and millions of high school and college students. Young Mexicans had higher aspirations for themselves and their country. Then came the Cuban Revolution of 1959, inspiring movements for radical social change in Mexico.

A new movement for democracy developed at the base of Mexican society, leading in 1968 to massive demonstrations for democracy on the eve of the Mexican Olympics. While students and their teachers had been at the center of the movement, hundreds of thousands throughout the country rallied to it. President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (1964-1970) responded by calling out the police and army, which attacked the movement, killing as many as 300 at Tlatelolco, the Plaza of the Three Cultures. The events of 1968 became a great turning point in Mexican history, leading to a series of democracy movement through the following decades.

The New Left Goes to the People

The PRI's violent repression of the democracy movement led tens of thousands of young Mexicans to turn to the left. The pro-Soviet Mexican Communist Party (PCM) grew some in this period, but it was the far left—followers of Fidel Castro and Ernesto “Che” Guevara, of Mao Tse-Tung, and of Leon Trotsky—which had the greatest impact. The *Fidelistas*, *Maoistas*, *Trotskyistas*, and some neo-*Cardenistas* went to the people: to poor urban neighborhoods, to rural villages, to factories in industrial areas. Soon they had recruited followers among peasants, autoworkers, steel workers, and teachers.

Simultaneous with the new democracy movement, an *insurgencia obrera*, a worker insurgency that lasted from 1968 into the mid-1970s had developed among industrial workers and some

public employees. The *insurgencia* became a laboratory where leftist activists could test out their ideas about organizing a revolution. The left debated strategies for changing Mexico's bureaucratic, corrupt, and violent state-party controlled labor unions. Some left groups opted for creating new independent unions, while others decided that they should struggle within the existing structure, fighting to build movements for democracy that could take control of local unions and eventually of the national union. A group of leftist teachers decided on the latter strategy.

The Founding of the Teachers Coordinating Committee (la CNTE)

Today's dissident teacher movement began in the mid-1960s among mostly women indigenous teachers in the state of Chiapas. These bilingual or multilingual teachers, teaching in Spanish and one or more of the Mayan languages of the region, began to organize to win higher wages. Though women formed a majority of the rank and file, virtually all of the movement's leaders were men.

Several things created the context for the emergence out of their early efforts of an organization among these teachers.

First, President Luis Echeverría (1970-76) ended the old system of "Hispanicization of the Indians" and made the SEP responsible for indigenous education in their own languages and Spanish. The result was the training in the rural normal schools of thousands of indigenous bi-lingual educators who found a new, significant, and dignified role in their communities. These teachers became over time a counter-weight to the PRI's *cacique* and to party's clientelistic system of patronage in the village as well as a challenge to the SEP's bureaucratically controlled union delegates.

Second, while most teachers received their basic teacher education in the rural normal schools, many later went on to study at the National Teachers College and the Superior Normal

School in Mexico City. Their professors in the 1970s, many of them leftists in the new left made up of Maoists and Trotskyists, taught the new teachers the elements of Marxism. Thus a grassroots indigenous movement became connected to national leftist organizations, Maoist *Línea Proletaria* (LP or Proletarian Line) and the Trotskyist *Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores* (PRT or Revolutionary Workers Party).

While the Maoists, the dominant tendency, focused on building local bases in schools and communities, the Trotskyists emphasized the importance of a struggle against the state, a struggle for socialism. Both of these currents would have an important influence on la CNTE, their politics tempered over time by their involvement in the indigenous communities.

The new teachers movement of the 1970s began with a struggle to raise workers' wages but soon became a struggle focused against the SNTE's bureaucracy. But the struggle was a multi-faceted one against the PRI, against the SEP, against the officials of the SNTE, but perhaps most important against the local *cacique*, the political boss at the intersection of those three organizations. The bilingual teachers, a majority of them women, used their biweekly meetings with their students' parents to explain their movement and its goals. They gradually built an alliance with many of the parents and the communities. [\[10\]](#)

Carlos Jonguitud Barrios and the Revolutionary Vanguard

From 1949 to 1972 el SNTE had been dominated by Jesús Robles Martínez, the *eminence grise* of the union, but when it became clear that he was unable to maintain control of the restive teachers, he was ousted and replaced by Carlos Jonguitud Barrios. [\[11\]](#) Jonguitud was an official of Local 9 in Mexico City, the head of the National Vigilance Committee (responsible for union discipline), and the leader of a powerful caucus called Revolutionary Vanguard. He also served as a PRI congressman, senator, and state governor, as well as

head of the Congress of Labor (CT).

With the blessing of President Echeverría, in 1972 Jonguitud and his Revolutionary Vanguard took charge of the union while at the same time the government increased education spending, a development which made available more funds for the SEP and so for el SNTE's patronage machine. Where financial favors failed to win over local leaders, Jonguitud Barrios collaborated with the SEP to fired union leaders, and if necessary he had his opponents threatened, beaten and in a few cases killed.

La CNTE Drives Out Carlos Jonguitud Barrios

Still, the dissidents in Chiapas continued their fight for higher wages and for the democratic control of their local union, and succeeded. In 1979 the teachers from Chiapas and other states created the National Coordinating Committee (la CNTE), a caucus within el SNTE. While neither the Trotskyists nor the Maoists in la CNTE's leadership—nor for that matter the indigenous communities that formed its base—were models of democracy, coming together they engendered a movement that focused on building democratic schools and local unions as well as engaging in campaigns of direct action to pressure the *caciques*, el SNTE, the SEP, and the PRI. The Chiapas activists fought to hold a democratic state union convention and to elect their own union leaders, a task they accomplished in 1981.

Within a few years teachers in Oaxaca had also succeeded in winning control of their local union while at the same time the reform movement was growing in Mexico City, though in all of these areas maintaining the union's autonomy was a constant struggle. La CNTE carried out a number of strikes, some successful and some failures, but continued the fight year after year. In 1989 la CNTE led a national strike, strongest in the South and Southeast, but with tremendous support as well in Mexico City. La CNTE mobilized over 300,000 teachers

in huge demonstrations, demanding the removal of Carlos Jonguitud Barrios and the calling of a democratic national convention of the union.

With Mexico City paralyzed by striking and protesting teachers, in April of 1989 President Carlos Salinas de Gortari of the PRI called Jonguitud to his office and fired him, ending his 18-year dictatorship over the teachers. The teachers, however, did not win the right to hold a democratic national convention, rather Salinas then put Elba Esther Gordillo, also an official from Local 9, into power as the first woman head of el SNTE. She in turn ratified the election victory of the democratic opposition in Local 9 in Mexico City, which succeeded in calming the dissidents.[\[12\]](#)

Gordillo was no reformer. She had been a loyal, hardline member of Jonguitud's Revolutionary Vanguard and that remained her base in the union, though she also worked to win over leaders of la CNTE, and collaborated with the SEP's education reformers. Out of a series of political struggles and negotiations within the union she soon constructed a new bureaucratic machine run from above, though the state of Chiapas and Oaxaca continued to stand in opposition.[\[13\]](#)

Elba Esther Gordillo Turns to the PAN

Gordillo maintained political control over the union in the same fashion as her predecessors, through a combination of rewards for loyalty and punishment for opposition. The education system had grown tremendously with more students going on from grammar to high school and the budget had grown along with it. In the prebendalist corporative system, the SEP continued to provide el SNTE with funds that in addition to the union's dues money, sustaining a vast bureaucracy with many sinecures and no-show jobs. Her administration was also repressive, and she has been accused of responsibility for the murder of teacher Misael Nuñez Acosta[\[14\]](#) in January of 1981. He was, according to la CNTE, only one of 151 teachers

murdered in the preceding decades.[\[15\]](#) Several other teachers have been murdered since then. With the exception of Chiapas and Oaxaca, Gordillo's hold on the union remained secure.

With a firm grip on el SNTE, Gordillo also became a major political figure, attempting to use the union to gain political power. Like other union officials she served as a congressperson and also as a senator, but she also rose through the party ranks to the top echelons, eventually become general secretary of the executive committee of the PRI, the party's top office, in 2002. All of this was traditional and typical, but in 2000 everything suddenly changed with the election to the presidency of Vicente Fox of the National Action Party (PAN). Fox and the PAN did not dismantle the corporative system, as some had hoped, but rather the conservatives used it for their own purposes, forming political relationships with top union leaders. Fox and Gordillo became friends, providing her with influence in the SEP, a continuing source of money and jobs for the union staff.

In part because of her alliance with Fox, in 2005 Gordillo found herself losing a fight with Roberto Madrazo, another PRI leader. She resigned her office as heard of the PRI and in 2005 formed her own New Alliance Party based on el SNTE. At the same time she supported the PAN's candidate Felipe Calderón. Her New Alliance Party won a remarkable 14 percent of vote in 2006, making her a significant force in the congress. That same year she tried to regain her position as head of the PRI, but the PRI leadership expelled her from the organization because she had supported the candidate of another party.

Since the presidency of Carlos Salinas (1988-1994), Mexico had adopted a neoliberal economic model—open markets, foreign investment, cuts in social services, attacks on labor unions—and now the government began to impose that model on education. In 2008, president Calderón and Gordillo reached an

agreement called "The Alliance for Quality Education" or ACE.

ACE required that teachers take an exam before being hired by the SEP and that the union end the sale of teaching positions. While both of those principal provisions might seem reasonable, it was widely understood that the long-term goal was greater government control over the union and the teachers and an end to the nationalist and popular educational model handed down since the Revolution. La CNTE rejected the ACE agreement, arguing that it was an attack on the union and on public education.

The Education Reform Law

The presidencies of Vicente Fox and Felipe Calderón had both proven to be failures from the point of view of the Mexican capitalist class as well as of the nation's working people. Calderón's war on drugs led to the death of 60,000 people and the forced disappearance of another 20,000 as well as the displacement of tens of thousands more. And the economy was stagnant. With the PAN utterly discredited, and the left-of-center Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) denied election victories through fraud, Mexico's citizens returned to the PRI, electing Enrique Peña Nieto president.

In December 2012, Peña Nieto brought the leaders of the PRI, the PAN, and the PRD to Chapultepec Castle where they signed the "Pact for Mexico," an agreement calling for reforms of the tax structure, of the banking system, of energy, of telecommunications, and of education. The Education Reform Law won support from all three major parties, though it was opposed by the Gordillo and el SNTE, and was adopted by congress in December 2012.

At the center of the education reform was the establishment of a national teacher evaluation. Peña Nieto's first Secretary of Public Education, Emilio Chuayffet, explained that the test would be obligatory and that failure to administer or take the

exam would result in “legal consequences.” The new law affected hiring, job security, wages, and opportunities for promotion. It also broke the link between the Normal Schools, by allowing all teaching jobs open to competition from any college graduate. And, teachers would not be able to pass on their jobs to family members or sell them on the market.[\[16\]](#)

Gordillo and el SNTE opposed the reform, saying that the union and teachers had not been consulted in the drafting of it. She would not, however, be allowed to continue to oppose it or to lead a movement against it. On February 26, 2013, the Peña Nieto administration had Gordillo arrested on the charge of embezzling millions of dollars in union funds that she reportedly deposited in banks in Europe and spent on real estate.

Mexican Attorney General Jesús Murillo Karam charged Gordillo with money laundering, saying she had used the union funds to pay for airplanes, pilot training, her plastic surgeries, and purchases of luxury items in the United States.[\[17\]](#) Juan Díaz de la Torre who was a loyal member of her union caucus, became head of the union. While Gordillo was very likely guilty of the embezzlement of which she was accused, such practices are common in the Mexican labor bureaucracy. The motive for jailing her was political: first she had betrayed the PRI, and then she had opposed Peña Nieto. She had to go. Arrested, she was imprisoned awaiting trial, her reputation destroyed and removed from office she had no political power anymore.

La CNTE took the new Education Reform Law as a declaration of war against el SNTE and especially their dissident movement, beginning a mobilization of the union’s rank and file.[\[18\]](#) Just like ACE, la CNTE saw the Education Reform Law as an attack on public education, the union, and themselves as teachers. The teachers began to protest but soon found themselves involved in a broader struggle. When on September 26, 2014 police and gang members in Iguala, Guerrero killed six people, wounded 25, and kidnapped 43 students from the

Ayotzinapa Rural Normal School, la CNTE joined with their protests, which became national in scope.[\[19\]](#)

Challenges Facing la CNTE

Mexico's teachers continue to face the system that has confronted them since the late 1940s: the Institutional Revolutionary Party in power, the powerful Secretary of Education, the bureaucratic SNTE, and the local *caciques*. While the teachers of Chiapas, Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Michoacán—have built powerful movements and won power in their states, the teachers remain in a constant state of mobilization to defend themselves. Despite almost 40 years of struggle, the democratic movement has failed, despite occasional outbursts of activity in some other region, to win power any of the other 28 states.

Constantly criticized in the corporate media, la CNTE struggles to explain its issues to the media and to the public, arguing that it is defending public education, teachers' working conditions, and students' best interests. La CNTE also continues to work to maintain its relationship with parents and students at the local level, a difficult challenge when the union frequently goes on strike for weeks and even months at a time. The dissident teachers work to win the support of the public, a part of which is critical of practices such as passing jobs on to family members or selling jobs. La CNTE has also worked recently to develop its own program for education reform, putting forward its own proposals for pedagogy and curriculum.[\[20\]](#)

La CNTE has from the beginning struggled with the question of electoral politics. Since its founding in 1989, the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) has been most sympathetic to the dissident teachers and been willing to serve as its political vehicle. The PRD's factionalism, corruption, and opportunism made it a less than satisfactory political ally. The fact that the PRD headed both the Guerrero state

government and the Iguala city government at the time of the time of the killing of six people and the disappearance of the 43 Ayotzinapa Rural Normal School students severely damaged the party's reputation among the teachers.

In the June 2015 la CNTE called for a boycott of the elections, but in Oaxaca and Guerrero teachers enforced the boycott by destroying polling places and ballot boxes and burning ballots, leading to some conflicts with local communities. More recently some leaders of la CNTE have collaborated with Andrés Manuel López Obrador of the Movement for National Regeneration Party or MORENA, though many fear that AMLO only uses the union for his own political interests. One can say that so far the dissident teachers have failed to find a political vehicle for their movement.

The epic battle of la CNTE against a series of Mexican governments has taken place during a period in which much of the labor movement has been defeated or demoralized by the Mexican government. Gordillo's ally Felipe Calderón destroyed the Mexican Electrical Workers Union (SME) and drove Napoleón Gómez Urrutia, leader of the Mexican Miners and Metal Workers Union (SNTMMRM) into exile in Vancouver. Political parties, government agencies, private employers, crooked lawyers, and gangsters controlled most labor unions in Mexico.[\[21\]](#) The economy remains stagnant and emigration to the United States has become more difficult and less rewarding since the Great Recession of 2008.

All of this makes la CNTE's struggle even more remarkable. Despite the murder of several of its activists, the arrest of some of its leaders, and the violent attacks by the police on its demonstrations, the struggle continues.

Notes

[1] Alberto Arnaut, *Historia de un profesión: Los maestros de*

educación primaria en México 1887-1994 (Mexico: Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económica, 1996), pp. 19-34.

[2] Claude Fell, *José Vasconcelos: Los años del águila* (Mexico: Universidad Autónoma de México, 1989) is the most complete account of Vasconcelos' work as an educator.

[3] Salvador Sotelo Arévalo, *Historia de mi vida. Autobiografía y memorias de un maestro rural en México, 1904-1965*. (Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Estudios Históricos de la Revolución Mexicana, 1996). This memoir gives us a view of the early era through the life of rank-and-file teacher at the grassroots.

[4] Mary Kay Vaughn, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997), pp. 1-24.

[5] Tamalís Padilla, "Othón Salazar: la dignidad revolucionaria," at: <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/05/15/index.php?section=opinion&article=a04a1cul>

[6] "Othón Salazar Ramírez," at: <http://www.encyclopediagro.org/index.php/indices/indice-de-biografias/1406-salazar-ramirez-othon>

[7] Gerardo Peláez, *Las luchas magisteriales de 1956-1960*. Mexico: Ediciones de Cultura Popular, 1984) and Aurora Loyo Brambila (*El movimiento magisterial de 1958 en México*. Segunda Edición. Mexico: Ediciones Era, 1980), passim. Also: Gerardo Peláez Ramos, "El inicio del movimiento magisterial de 1956-1960," at: <http://www.rebellion.org/noticia.php?id=109285>

[8] Demetrio Vallejo had been a Communist from 1934-1946 when he was expelled. He then joined another Stalinist party, the *Partido Obrero-Campesino Mexicano* (POCM or Mexican Worker-Peasant Party) in 1950.

[9] "Mexican railroad workers strike for wages and union rights, 1958-1959," <http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edumexican-railroad-workers-strike-wages-and-union-rights-1958-1959>

[10] María Lorena Cook, *Organizing Dissent: Union, the State, and the Democratic Teachers' Movement in Mexico* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996) and Susan Street. *Maestros en movimiento: Transformaciones en la burocracia estatal (1978-1982)*. Mexico City: CIESAS, 1992.

[11] Joe Foweraker, *Popular Mobilization in Mexico: The Teachers' Movement, 1977-87*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 49-53.

[12] Juan Luis Campos et al, *De las alas a las calles*. Prólogo de Carlos Monsiváis. (Mexico: Información Obrera, 1990), this collection of essays gives a good picture of the changing of the guard from Jonguitud to Gordillo.

[13] Foweraker, *Popular Mobilization*, pp. 182-85. Homero Campo, "Abril de 1989 cuando Salinas empoderó a Elba Esther," *Proceso*, at: <http://www.proceso.com.mx/334746/abril-de-1989-cuando-salinas-empodero-a-elba-esther>

[14] Luis Hernández Acosta, "Misael Núñez Acosta: una biografía," *La Jornada*, at: <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2002/09/01/016n1pol.php?printver=1>

[15] Laura Poy Solano, "Gordillo no debe seguir impune por la muerte de Misael Núñez: CNTE," at: <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2007/01/28/index.php?section=sociedad&article=036n1soc>

[16] Dan La Botz, "Mexican Congress Approves Education Reform," at: <http://newpol.orgmexican-congress-approves-education-reform>

[17] Dan La Botz, "Mexican Teachers Union Leader Jailed for Stealing Union Funds," at: <http://newpol.orgmexican-teachers-union-leader-jailed-stealing-union-funds>

[18] Dan La Botz, "Mexican Teachers Rebel Against Government's Educational Reform," at: <http://newpol.orgmexican-teachers-rebel-against-governments-educational-reform>

[19] Dan La Botz, "The Mexican Crisis Deepens," at: <http://newpol.orgmexican-crisis-deepens>

[20] For a discussion of the teachers movement today see: Carlos Ornelas y Verónica Luna Hernández, "La Reforma Educativa en México: Los Primeros Libros Ensayo Bibliográfico," *Education Review*, at: [file:///Users/DanLaBotz/Downloads/2110-1943-1-PB%20\(1\).pdf](file:///Users/DanLaBotz/Downloads/2110-1943-1-PB%20(1).pdf)

[21] Dan La Botz, "The Agony of Mexican Labor Today," at: <http://www.dollarsandsense.org/archives/2015/0915labotz.html>

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