

Why Mexico's teachers are fighting: CNTE's program

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An activist/scholar in the Mexican teachers union democratic opposition (CNTE) has asked me to publicize this statement (copied below). It explains the demands the movement is making on the government and fleshes out the short but excellent update on The Real News about the struggle. As this statement shows, CNTE and its supporters are struggling about far more than their jobs. They are risking their lives to demand a democratic, equitable, liberatory system of public education for all of Mexico's people.

Lois Weiner



National Education Workers Coordinator^{1,2}

The National Education Workers Coordinator has always claimed our disposition to an open and frank dialogue for the resolution of our demands. In these hard times for our homeland, it is our conviction to contribute in order to make the government and teachers' conflict, derived from the Education Reform, find ways of solution.

The amendments to the 3rd and 73rd articles, which give contents to the Education Reform, counteract other articles of the Mexican United States' Political Constitution. It is not from stubbornness that the National Education Workers Coordinator rejects this reform -even more needless to say that our political action in the streets is not our way of acting and living.

For over three years, we have shown the pedagogical inconsistencies of the reform and the assessment it promotes, as well as those of the labor conditions attached to this reform.

The amendment to the education articles and the enforcement of the related secondary laws flagrantly violate individual and social guarantees[1]. In order to being able to discuss and solve the causes and consequences of the conflict the reform itself must be stopped. The Federal Government has the mechanisms: the Moratorium or Suspension of the Education Reform. This will allow the modification of the articles that violate the workers' labor rights and the people's social rights.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

- I. The National Education System, SEN, from the very nucleus of the education process, must mobilize on its orbit the most important actors and social forces from the inside and the outside of Public Education; above all teachers, students, parents, communities and neighborhoods.
- II. The transformation of the National Education System must be based on a humanistic and integral education that substitutes the values of the market with the practice of such values as those which the very 3rd constitutional article claims: democracy, use and care of natural resources, comprehension of national issues, scientific work, best of human coexistence, strengthening and growth of culture, the society's general interest, equity, fraternity, solidarity, and respect for diversity and as an integrative part of the Constitution: the right to free speech, to dignity in labor, and all human and labor rights without exclusion.

- III. The National Education System shall be available for all inhabitants of the country, no matter how far or small their community be or how huge the number of appliers to schools and institutions in the cities. And this education -creative and for all- is a responsibility of society that the state assumes through public, free and secular education. Education must be for all, at all levels, and it is necessary as well to recover for the curricula the ancient and modern pedagogical lessons which will allow us to offer children and young men and women an in-depth, broad and high-level education; in consequence, textbooks must be transformed, keeping them free of charge.
- IV. The financial effort of the 12 per cent of the GDP for education, in order to grant the widening of infrastructure, equipment and number of teachers for education at all levels.
- V. The National Education System will turn the students into true conscientious citizens who care for the "general interest of society" (3rd Constitutional article). In this sense, the school must be a community that develops in an environment of freedom, in absence of fear, and regulated by the agreements and principles that, in their respective fields, students and teachers build in the classroom, in the school, and in their relationship to their community. But this cannot be afforded as long as a legal structure prevails which establishes that assessment leads to the layoff or classroom segregation of thousands of teachers, which imposes seven new causes for dismissal and, moreover, which conveys the education authority the faculty to start a process for punishment on the mere suspicion that a teacher has committed an irregularity.
- VI. Truly autonomous education in such a way that our schools have freedom to, in the framework of a national education, suggest and define how the curricula, the contents, and the pedagogical practices inside and outside the classroom should be.
- VII. Substantial improvement of tens of thousands of schools, supply of enough teachers to multilevel and unitary schools, school breakfasts, utensils, uniforms and footwear, as well as scholarships and books for all school levels.
- VIII. In the National Education System assessment is from bottom to top. A horizontal assessment made by teachers and students from the very schools and communities, developed as a dialogic exercise in each zone, region and federal entity. An assessment that, while describing the problems, analyzes the factors that provoke them, the remedies that can suit and that collects on the successful experiences of teachers and schools to improve education. For it to be sincere and really teacher-and-student engaging, this assessment must not be punitive or imply labor or administrative sanctions on the teachers.
- IX. An Assessment Council to be formed in each school elected by the community, which considers various elements as education funding, the government responsibility in the main variables of the working of the education system, the material conditions of the school, education programs, teaching training and practice, administrative workload, students attendance, academic results, the performance of education authorities, sociocultural contexts and the assessment methods themselves. This model must repeat at the state and national levels.
- X. A true education transformation must not lay aside the teacher training institutions. We agree to a re-foundation of normal schools[2] to strengthen their historical mission. The discussion must revolve around three aspects: the ethical, the political and the epistemological, to make the Mexican normalism stronger and the automatic position appointment for every graduate of public normal schools in the country, who were credited by a training institution officially acknowledged and who qualify to the profile and the correspondent right. We do not support teacher-position sales or heritage, which are instruments for political patronage established by the "charro"[3] leaderships of the SNTE.[4]
- XI. The National Education System must advance on the way of strengthening our pluriculturality, on the basis of our multiple identities and of building, from them, a country of diverse potentialities.
- XII. Based on the individual and social guarantees in our Letter Magnus[5], the National Education system will provide stability to the education workers in all three labor, administrative, and

pedagogical fields.

For all hitherto said, we demand from the government:

1. Absolute suspension of the Education Reform and all its implications, insofar as the 3rd and 73rd constitutional articles and the secondary laws are modified, which pose a risk to the free access to education, and which counteract the vision of a humanistic and integral education; as well as anything that threatens our job and labor stability.
2. To start at once a social process for education transformation along with all the actors: education workers, parents and students, researchers, pedagogues, intellectuals, lawyers, writers. It means to develop a broad national debate in forums, lectures, work boards, conferences, etc., the results of which shall compulsorily be a part of the new education model. The whole of this process will happen in the framework of an accurate timing, with a wide dissemination campaign and a wide participation.
3. To resolve the consequences and costs of the Education Reform, as related to victims, political imprisonments, layoffs and layoff processes, arrest warrants, pay suspensions, holding of union dues, etc.
4. To regularize, in its faculty scope, the union life, as regards the bilateral relationship and the freedom of choice for both national and state union representatives.

UNITED AND ORGANIZED, WE SHALL WIN

NATIONAL EDUCATION WORKERS COORDINATOR

[1] In Mexican Law, a "guarantee" is a law which protects the people from violations to their basic rights against powerful agents, e.g. the state. They are a consequence of social struggle since Mexican Revolution times.

[2] "Escuelas Normales" is the name for the system of public schools for basic education teacher training across the country.

[3] A "charro" leader is a government-appointed union boss.

[4] Short for Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (SNTE), a yellow union of which CNTE is an independent and democratic branch.

[5] "Carta Magna" is a common way of naming the country's Political Constitution.