



# Political polarization in the Americas and the role of labor in defending democracy: **The case of Public Education and Teachers Unions**

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# ESCOLA

**SEM** PARTIDO





Promulga el presidente Peña Nieto

# REFORMA EDUCATIVA MEXICANA

El presidente de México, Enrique Peña Nieto, firmó la promulgación de la reforma educativa que modifica los artículos 3 y 73 de la Constitución y establece, entre otras cosas, la creación del Servicio Profesional Docente

**Creación del Servicio Profesional Docente**

- ✓ Sistema de concursos con base en méritos profesionales y laborales para ocupar las plazas de maestros nuevos o las que queden libres
- ✓ Se construirán reglas para obtener una plaza definitiva
- ✓ Establecimiento del concurso de plazas para directores y supervisores

**Creación del "Sistema Nacional de Evaluación Educativa"**

- ✓ A partir de un censo de escuelas, maestros y alumnos (por el INEGI), con datos en una sola plataforma para la operación del sistema educativo.

Fortalecimiento del Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía

PRINCIPALES PUNTOS DE LA REFORMA

## 2012 Education Reforms in Mexico

Are teachers' unions the organizations that are going to defend democracy in our educational institutions?

It depends.

Teachers have an ambivalent relationship to social change. . .

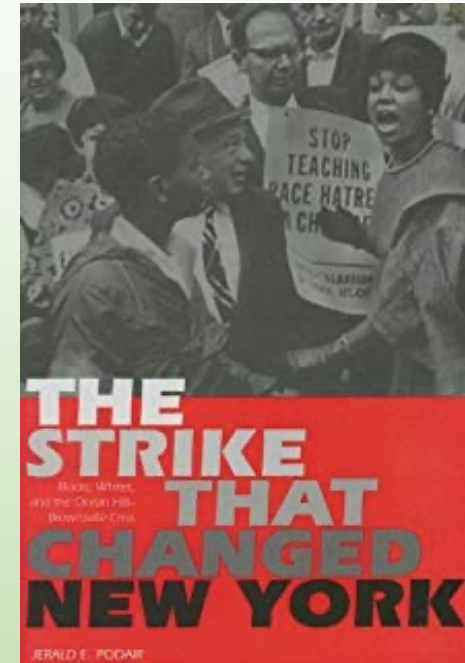
“The relations of teachers to social change is therefore often quite tenuous, and teachers may often find themselves in an ambivalent position. **Their profession and status may make them part of the middle class, yet they possess a stronger potential than other professions to become radical. They are considered professionals, yet they are often thrust into economic circumstances resembling those of blue-collar workers.**”

Maria Cook, p. 21, in *Organizing Dissent: Unions, the State, and the Democratic Teachers' Movement in Mexico*

# United States Teacher Unionism



NYC teacher union leaders in the 1960s were explicitly anti-communist, saw their interests **ALIGNED** with the Democratic Party, and were focused on teachers' pay and benefits.



**Ocean-Hill Brownsville (1968):** Teachers strike against Black Community Control . . . conflict between the right to due process and racial justice.



## Teachers Strikes without Teachers' Unions

*1978:  
Teachers  
Strike and  
Emergence of  
Contemporary  
Teachers  
Union  
Movement*



*São Paulo  
Teachers  
Union  
(APEOESP)  
WAS NOT  
INVOLVED IN  
THE STRIKE*

## National Education Union (SNTE): Created in 1946 to Control Teachers

SNTE was part of the official government party, the Party of the Institutionalized Revolution (PRI), through a system of state corporatism.

*“There were no caciques (community leaders) outside of the PRI . . . any teacher against them was removed. Barbaric repression.”* – Erangelio Mendoza, dissident leader

When do unions become forces for defending democratic institutions?

If they intersect with broader social movements.

## **Brazil's Key Transitional Moment: Oppositional Unionism Emerges under Military Dictatorship and Political Opening**

Teachers were part of a four-part worker alliance: teachers, oil workers, bank workers, and metal workers.

Together these four worker groups led the call for democracy (along with other grassroots movements), **helping to found the Workers' Party (PT) in 1980 and also the Central Union of Workers (CUT) in 1983.**





# Implications for Schools and Society: Teachers Unions as Political Educators

Union leaders are also educators, visiting schools and explaining new educational and political developments, the implications of new laws, serving as a source of information different from the government



## Implications for Schools and Society: Teachers Unions as Social Movement Allies

Union leaders played a key role supporting the 2015-2016 student occupations in São Paulo.

However, the union's own strike actions have had limited success influencing the direction of state education policy.



# **Mexico's Key Transitional Moment:**

## **A Dissident Union Movement Emergence under State Corporatism**

- In 1979, dissident activists created the *National Coordination of Educational Workers (CNTE)*.
- CNTE was NOT tied to a political party, but rather, it rejected parties as a form of social change and embraced the autonomy of teachers.
- The model of a “coordinadora” was already present in other sectors of Mexican society, including in the student movement and urban political movements.
- This coordinadora model emphasized collective leadership, decentralized organization, regional groups with tactical autonomy, and independence from political parties
- **Strong Indigenous Foundations of CNTE**



# Implications for Schools and Society: Teachers Unions as a Parallel Power to the State



**Protest and  
Direct Action**



## Implications for Schools and Society:

Tierra		Autoridad		Trabajo		Fiesta	
Aquí	Allá	Aquí	Allá	Aquí	Allá	Aquí	Allá
Tiempo del cultivo	Clima	Familia Comite y autoridades Agrarias	Sociedad Diversión de Poderes	Cambios de Cultivos Familia Ahorro del terreno	Rotación de cultivos Industria Preparación del terreno	Comida típica Alimentos orgánicos Plazos	Conservas enlatadas Alimentos transgénicos Comercialización
Plantas cultivadas en otros lugares	Relieve	Propietarios Asamblea de Padres Comisariado de bienes comunales	Normas y reglamentos Agrarios Tipos de Autoridad	Mazos yunta Tequila Fiesta Animales burros, caballos bueyes	Jornaleros maquinaria	Quezo y/o trucoque	Act. económico
Suelo	Territorio uso del territorio Propiedades Privadas	Respeto y permiso a la madre Tierra.	Explotación de los recursos naturales	Espiritualidad escantos curandería	Control de plagas Insecticidas	Comportamiento de alimentos dentro del cultivo Cosecha Día de cosecha Día de grano	Día de campo Cosecha Día de grano
Terreno Parcela comunales y ejidales	Estaciones locales						
	Estaciones del año						
	Calendario agrícola oficial						
	Origen del maíz en Occidente						
Origen mítico del maíz (corazón)							



# What is notable about the 2018-2019 wave of strikes?

**Red (Republican-controlled) States:** Strikes led by **movements of teachers** outside of the unions, but who re-energized union infrastructure.

(e.g., Arizona has 20,000 teachers in the union and had 45,000 teachers on strike!)

**Blue (Democrat-controlled) Cities:** Led by **oppositional unionists** who created “social justice caucuses” and took over the leadership of their teachers’ unions.





60 DOLLAR A YEAR  
ON SCHOOL POLICE  
COURT USE OR  
PRISON



SUPPORT  
TEACHERS

RECLAIM OUR SCHOOLS

WE STAND  
WITH  
LA TEACHERS



# Characteristics of U.S. Social Justice Unionism

- Black and Latinx parents and students are leading actions and referring to teachers' contract demands as “our demands”
- Racial Justice issues are front and center
- Strike actions are publicly calling out Democratic party officials
- Strike are being framed as part of a larger community struggle about the future of the public education



**“It was in the city of Chicago that Martin Luther King Jr. organized for justice, dreaming that one day that the civil rights movement and the labor movement would come together. Well, Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. the civil rights movement and the labor movement has finally collided!”**