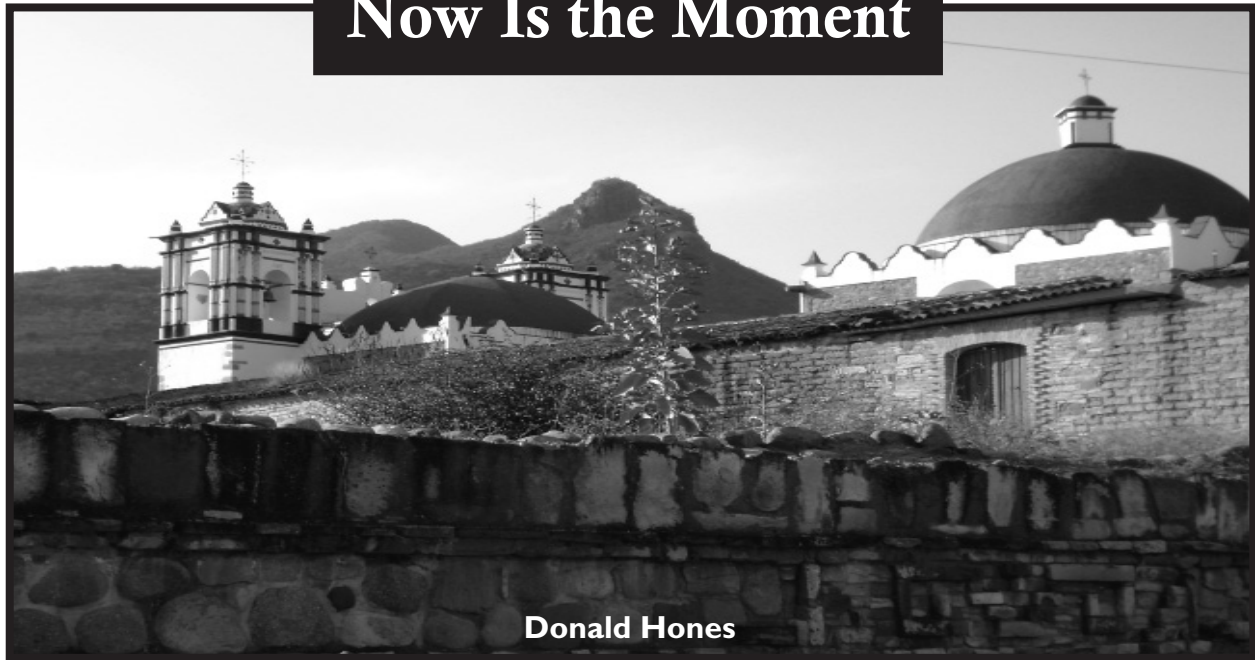


Now Is the Moment



Donald Hones

“Disappeared”

Like many teachers, Carlos arrived at the end of the school day knowing he had done a good day's work. He was a proponent of alternative education for Oaxaca, a state of Mexico that is home to 16 different ethnic indigenous groups and many languages. His was a pedagogy that engaged students culturally and individually, moving beyond the limitations of the state-approved curriculum. Moreover, Carlos went beyond the work in his own classroom to champion the needs of students, teachers and schools through his work with the teachers' union.

For years he had provided leadership as the Oaxaca teacher's union confronted the state with demands for free uniforms and shoes for impoverished students, for school supplies, and for better salaries for teachers who need to work two jobs to survive in Mexico's economy. He advocated for indigenous rights, for the rights of all working people, and for a more just society.

On the evening of March 14, 2011, he telephoned a friend to say he was leaving a meeting and would be home shortly. He never arrived. His car was found two days later, with his cell phone and other personal items inside (Partners in Rights, 2011). Carlos Rene Roman Salazar,

teacher, activist, and leader for educational opportunity and a more just society, had been “disappeared” for his efforts.

Many Parallels

In the Spring of 2011 I had the opportunity to conduct research on immigration and education issues in Mexico and the United States. I spent time in the states of Michoacan and Veracruz, but it was when I journeyed to Oaxaca in March that I realized the many parallels between that state and my own, Wisconsin. Both state governments are actively seeking ways to undermine the power of the teachers' unions. In both states public education is being seriously compromised.

There are important differences, however. Schools in Wisconsin receive far more support for books, technology, and infrastructure, and teachers are neither tortured nor “disappeared.” Yet, perhaps Oaxaca can provide a cautionary tale for teachers and those who believe in public education in the United States and elsewhere. Moreover, the “Arab Spring” of 2011 reminds us that the struggle must carry on in every land for basic human rights, ranging from public assembly to public education.

Lipman (2007), reflecting on the privatization emphasis inherent in the No Child Left Behind legislation, writes:

Public education policy has historically been an important arena of struggle over issues of difference, the rights of oppressed groups, what constitutes culture and his-

tory, how identities are to be represented publicly, and how the common good is defined. Although contentious, debates about language, race, gender, sexual orientation, “disability,” immigration, cultural diversity, school knowledge, sexuality, civic responsibility, connections between schools and communities, and so on, are critical to strengthening democratic civic life. Unlike the private sector, public schools can't avoid these debates. In a world circled ever more tightly by the forces of global capital and facing the catastrophe of unlimited imperial wars, the institution of universal, free public schools needs to be fought for as a democratic public space and fought over ideologically. (Lipman, 2007, 53-4)

I went to Mexico to examine the struggle of a teacher's and people's movement whose intention was to combat the powerful forces of globalization through peaceful, democratic protest; I returned home to Wisconsin to find a Governor demanding an end to collective bargaining and the people occupying the state capitol building. This was the Spring of 2011, the moment when calls for justice and democracy echoed between far-flung nations and peoples. As the sign held by one of my neighbors in front of the Ripon, Wisconsin, City Hall read: “We are All Egyptians.”

Narrative Inquiry

This study draws from narrative research (Benei, 2010; Clandinin, Davies, Huber, Rose, & Whelan, 2001; Elbaz-Luwisch, 2010; Hones, 1998; Polkinghorne, 1995), wherein stories of individuals, groups, and communities are central to

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The State, Public Education, & Communities of Resistance in Oaxaca & Wisconsin

the interpretation. Through a process of interpretive interactionism (Denzin, 1994), I examined the groups and institutions involved in the ongoing conflict between the state and public education in Oaxaca, and then included comparisons and contrasts to the current struggle in Wisconsin. Moreover, the very public nature of the rebellion in Oaxaca and Wisconsin lends itself to the interpretation of these struggles as performance events (Denzin, 2003; Madison, 2010).

This article begins with a discussion of narrative inquiry as a tool to select sites for participant observation and to interview teachers, administrators, and others involved in those sites. Through interviews, participant observation, and library research, I compared teacher preparation as well as current attempts to undermine traditional preparation in both states, Oaxaca and Wisconsin. What follows is a brief history of public education and teacher preparation in Oaxaca and Wisconsin, especially focusing on the polarizing events of 2006, when teachers and their supporters took over the city of Oaxaca and were only driven out by the Mexican army, and events in February and March of 2011 in Wisconsin, when mass resistance developed to the Republican effort to remove collective bargaining rights for state public employees.

Through library and internet research I examined the conflicts between states, teachers, and public schools as they have developed in Oaxaca and Wisconsin, especially in the past five years. I spent the

month of February in Wisconsin, where I participated in protests and talked with teachers, students, and community members in Ripon, the birthplace of the Republican Party, and in Madison, the state capital. I spent late March and April in Oaxaca, mostly in the capital but also in Teotitlan del Valle, a smaller town in Zapotec country. In Oaxaca I was able to interview teachers, union representatives, and community members; in addition, in Teotitlan del Valle I did some participant observation in the local secondary school. Interviews were conducted on the voluntary basis, field notes and tape recordings were made with permission, and pseudonyms are used throughout this work to protect the identity of participants.

School funding is discussed, as well as current attempts to support private education with public funds. Finally, the struggle for better schools and better working conditions is highlighted, along with the importance of building networks of solidarity that cross state and international boundaries.

Narratives of Teachers, Schools and Communities

Oaxaca: Teacher Rebellion in 2006

Oaxaca is one of Mexico's poorest states, and for many years there has traditionally been a strongly organized teachers' union demanding more support for students, schools, and the rights of workers. However, things became much more polarized in the state with the elec-

tion of Ulises Ruiz Ortiz as Governor. In May, 2006, thousands of teachers and administrators in Oaxaca's Section 22 of the National Union of Education Workers went on strike in the capital, camping out in the *zocalo*, blocking highways and access to government buildings. Their demands included school uniforms and shoes for all students and an increased budget for school buildings and equipment.

The Governor's response was to ban public protest and to send in police to destroy the encampments. The teachers successfully resisted, and were joined in their efforts by other residents of the city and state, and in June organized a march of 500,000 demanding the Governor's resignation. Soon thereafter, representatives of the teachers' union, indigenous communities, religious groups, and others joined to form the Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca (APPO) (Gibler, 2006). In November, 2006, federal police and army retook the center of Oaxaca from the protesters, "restoring calm." However, the violence against teachers, indigenous

Photographs

OPPOSITE PAGE: CATHOLIC CHURCH BUILT ON TOP OF REMAINS OF A ZAPOTEC TEMPLE IN TEOTITLAN DEL VALLE. ABOVE: PROTESTORS IN FRONT OF THE LITTLE WHITE SCHOOL HOUSE NATIONAL MONUMENT, BIRTHPLACE OF THE REPUBLICAN PARTY, IN RIPON, WISCONSIN.

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS APPEARING WITH THIS ARTICLE WERE TAKEN BY DONALD HONES.

communities, and others has continued, as has the struggle for justice.

Oaxaca 2011: The Struggle Continues

The city of Oaxaca is a tourist's dream, with cobblestone streets, many crafts markets, and fine restaurants and hotels. But besides the craftsmen and peddlers in the *zocalo* were banners denouncing the brutal police state tactics of the state government, which has tortured, imprisoned, and "disappeared" teachers, union leaders, and others in recent months. I had the chance to talk to Raul Maldonado of CEPOS22, the *Centro de Estudios Politicos y Sindicales 22*. He began by highlighting the current call for the return alive of Carlos Rene Roman Salazar, a teacher who disappeared on March 14. Maldonado and others had hopes for fair treatment for teachers when Gabino Cue won the election last December, 2010 and became the new state Governor.

These hopes were dashed when President Felipe Calderon visited Oaxaca on February 15, 2011. There was no permission given for the many planned protests to coincide with this visit. There was no promised dialogue with teachers, but rather hundreds of riot police who attacked peaceful demonstrators. Calderon came to the state to open a new private school and promote private education, touting a new law in Mexico that absolves parents of private school children from paying school taxes. Thus, their children's education is subsidized by the vast majority of Mexicans who cannot afford private schools, and who see their own schools perennially underfunded (Kearney, 2011; Maldonado, 2011).

Moreover, the Mexican federal government no longer wants to support professional normal school education. Instead, schools, especially in rural areas, are being filled with students from CONAFE, a government program that will give a small stipend to a high school graduate to go and teach for two years in a rural school. Local residents are asked to feed and house the students, who receive no preparation in how to teach. Thus, these poorly-prepared teachers much more readily transmit the government-approved curriculum, using the techniques and strategies current when they went to school. Teachers talk, students listen.

In addition, persons trained in other careers—law, engineering, etc.—are hired to deliver lessons through *Telesecundaria*—televised secondary school—to over 80,000 students in classrooms throughout rural Oaxaca. Once again, these "talking heads" have no preparation as teachers nor are they trained to put their knowledge into concepts that students can grasp (Maldonado, 2011).

Sunday Afternoon in the Zocalo

Oaxaca's central plaza, the *zocalo*, is active on an afternoon in early April, with handicrafts, vendors of ice cream, balloon salesmen, shoe shiners. Many people sit and relax beneath the pleasant shade of the tall trees, and the tourists from the United States are out in force: I waited about 20 seconds for a line of them to pass by. On one side of the *zocalo* a 60-piece orchestra is regaling a mixed crowd of gringos and locals with a jazzy version of *Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head* (Da-

vid & Bacharach, 1969). On the other side of the *zocalo* are the banners of the ongoing struggle against the government for justice in Oaxaca. Thus, a strange soundtrack accompanies the many stories of struggle and resistance.

*Raindrops keep fallin' on my head
But that doesn't mean my eyes
will soon be turning red
Crying's not for me*

I visited with Rogelio Alvarez and his comrade, Jose Luis, who sit beneath a banner reading "Democratic State Convention: For a New Constitution. All Power to the People! Prison for Ulises Ruiz!" I tell them of my visit to Teotitlan del Valle and the "*usos y costumbres*"—uses and traditional customs—apparent in the collective decision-making in that town. Rogelio bristles visibly:

Yes, we have "*usos y costumbres*," but we don't have any money for education! The government doesn't care what happens to these children. There are communities up in the mountains where there are no teachers, where kids walk barefoot and come to school hungry. They are cut off from the rest of society. And guess what? Governor Gabino Cue went up there! To get there votes and make promises. And nothing has changed. (Alvarez, 2011)

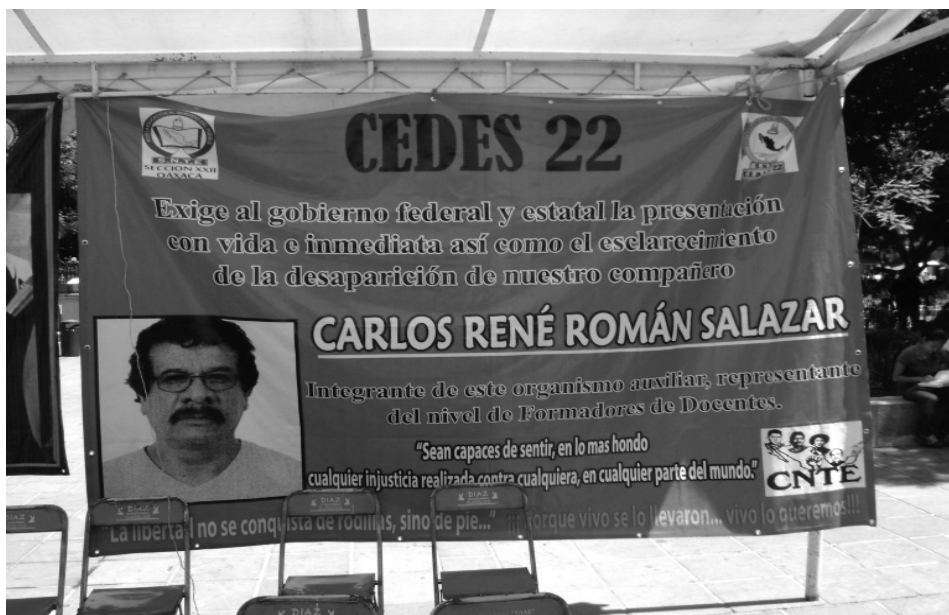
The background music continues:

*I'm never gonna stop the rain
by complaining
So I just did me some talking to the sun
And I said I didn't like the way he
got things done
Sleeping on the job*

I talked to three teachers who were sitting beneath a banner that read, "Professor Carlos Rene Roman Salazar. Disappeared, March 14, 2011. Return Him Alive! Halt the Criminalization of Social Protest! Education in the Service of the People. United and Organized We Will Win!" Each of the teachers works in a different community in the state. Maria, an English teacher, talked passionately about the importance of fair labor practices and the right of protest.

*But I'm never gonna stop the rain
by complaining
Because I'm free
Nothing's worrying me*

I approached the hunger strikers for indigenous rights, and their table below the banner reading "Freedom for Political Prisoners! Abraham Ramirez Vasquez. Committee for the Defense of Indigenous Rights, CODEDI." Behind the table, in the shade at the entrance to the Palace of Government, many of the hunger strikers and their allies are resting. Girardo Enriquez,



BANNER IN OAXACA CITY'S CENTRAL PLAZA CALLING FOR THE RETURN ALIVE OF A "DISAPPEARED" TEACHER AND UNION LEADER

the spokesperson, rises to share the case of Ramirez Vasquez with me:

The government of Ulises Ruiz did not recognize our rights to govern ourselves through “usos y costumbres,” which we have used for hundreds of years. He rejected any autonomy for indigenous people, and instead of responding with dialogue he responded with police, army and repression. Abraham Ramirez Vasquez was a leader and social activist for many years, and the police raided his village, and he was wounded. When Abraham was put in a car and taken to the hospital, the police stopped the car and took him into custody. He has been in prison without trial for more than six years. (Enriquez, 2011)

I walk past the banners of the dispossessed Triqui indigenous group, “Justice and Peace with Dignity: The Autonomous Municipality of San Juan Copala.” This Triqui spiritual and cultural center that declared its autonomy a few years ago, and was besieged by paramilitary forces for two years. The siege gained some international attention in the spring of 2010 with the murder by paramilitary forces of Bety Cariño and Jyri Jaakkola, two volunteers with an international aid caravan bound for the beleaguered town. Many more Triquis have been raped, tortured, killed, and “disappeared”: Children were shot at school, women were shot crossing the street, and three months ago the final 30 families abandoned this sacred site of the Triqui people and sought refuge elsewhere. (Avendaño, 2011).

Several Triqui women and children are currently living behind banners in front of the Palacio de Gobierno in the center of Oaxaca. They watch as the masses of their countrymen and foreign tourists drift past, hearing in the distance the sounds of one of Oaxaca’s orchestra playing a tune from a land where teachers may lose their jobs, but not their lives, and where communities may be neglected, but not driven out of their homes by bullets (although we, too, have our federal incursions into native lands, such as the attacks in Pine Ridge, South Dakota, in the 1970s).

Education, Culture and Community in Teotitlan del Valle

How does local culture and sense of community counteract the challenges of globalization and privatization of education? I explored this theme in Teotitlan del Valle, a small Zapotec town famous for its weaving. Everyone in Teotitlan speaks Zapoteco and Spanish, and Zapoteco is permitted (if not directly taught) in the schools. Children also learn English, and



BANNER IN THE OAXACA CITY CENTER REPRESENTING THE PARAMILITARY TAKEOVER OF A TRIQUI SPIRITUAL CENTER IN SAN JUAN COPALA WHERE DISPLACED TRIQUI WOMEN AND CHILDREN WERE LIVING BEHIND THE BANNER

it is clear the local leaders would like to encourage this even more.

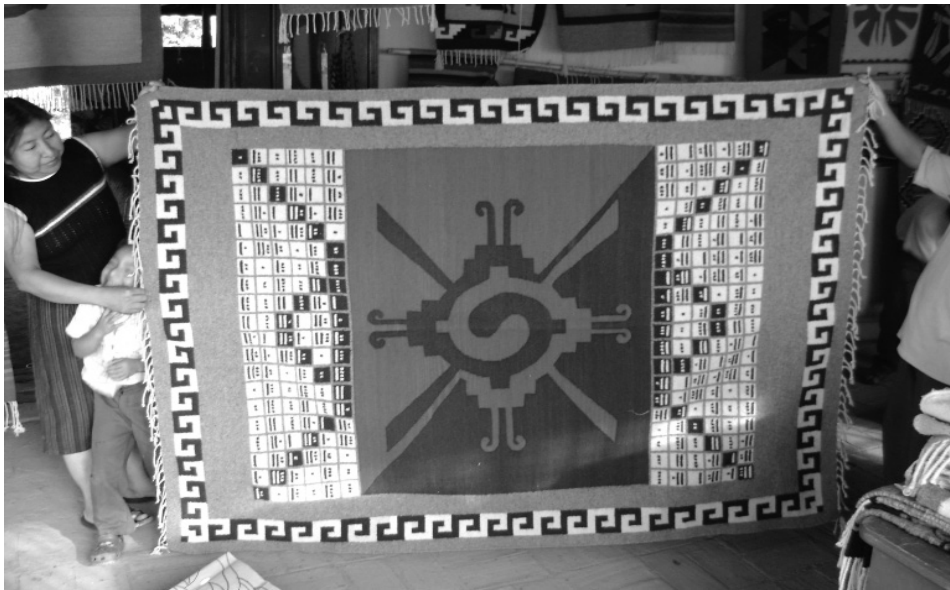
I stayed in the home of Bernardo and his family, who were just recently back from San Jose, California, where they were invited to present their culture through dance, art, and dialogue. We talked about the teachers’ union and the government, and it is clear that Bernardo is not totally sold that the union has got it right. He does, however, come down heavily on the side of creativity and self-determination. Besides weaving, there is a strong musical tradition in the family. Partly rebuilt instruments litter the sitting room. Bernardo goes to the U.S. and brings back

used instruments that can be fixed up and shared with Oaxacan students who can’t afford new instruments. He tells me of a poor community in the mountains where elders have decided to teach young children to read and perform music, which they often are able to do before they can read a book.

At the high school in the morning, while students filtered in through the gates, several members of the parents committee were gathered to talk to the principal about everything from the teachers’ union actions to food and drink availability for the kids. I talked to the principal for a while about my project in Mexico and



THE SECONDARY SCHOOL IN TEOTITLAN DEL VALLE



A WEAVING OF THE MAYAN CALENDAR DISPLAYED AT TEOTITLLAN DEL VALLE

about bilingualism in the Zapotec communities. He inform me that there is some spoken Zapotec in the primary school but it is not taught in the secondary school. One of the problems that he saw was that the language was mostly oral, and not systematized between the various villages and towns. Nor is there much in the way of written Zapotec to foster literacy.

I met the English teacher, Mauricio, also a native Zapotec speaker, who learned English at the age of 39. I spent the morning with his classes, held in a simple, sparse classroom in one of the outbuildings on the extensive grounds of the school. There were about 25 students in each of his classes. Most were able to ask me questions in English with a little bit of prompting: "What is your favorite Mexican food? How old are you? Do you like sports?" When I mentioned that I was a Chivas fan, the room got a little crazy, as each student shouted support for their favorite soccer clubs.

The secondary school includes ages 13-15, with the girls wearing pink, blue, and red uniforms on successive years, and the boys in green uniforms. Almost all of them spoke Zapotec and they were eager to teach me new words. When I asked one of them, "What do you do in your free time?" he responded, "I weave."

In the afternoon I met Mario Ramirez. He is tall for a Zapotec, with strong features, brown skin and black hair, penetrating eyes, a very handsome man. He is very interested in recuperating the Zapotec language and feels the time is very ripe. We moved from a discussion of language to cultural preservation and it was apparent he was very involved in both areas. He talked about the Mayan 2012 prophecy:

That humanity would be allowed a time for reflection, a time to determine which way we would go, down the path of destruction or the path of renewal.

Jesus has started a literature circle with some of the youth of the community, where they read Mexican writers and respond with their thoughts on each book. He hopes to expand their reading, to include writers from Latin America and other places. He talked to me about the community projects in ethnobotany, in reforestation, in health care and education. He talked about being up in the mountains to the north, where much of the forest is protected:

Way up there you really feel that you are part of nature. You listen to the trees, the wind, the animals. It is a paradise. Mother Earth keeps giving to us, even when we have done little to restore her. But human beings threaten this, too, with destruction. So we work with the local communities and visitors to restore the land. We are all in this world together. (Ramirez, 2011)

When I went to pick up my bags from Mauricio's, his wife, Lucia, would not take any money for my stay, saying, "*Gracias, maestro, por su trabajo con los jovenes!* Thank you, teacher, for your work with the youth."

As evening falls the soft light on the hills to the west is stunning. The feeling of community here is as palpable as the warmth of the westering sun. This would be a hard place to leave for the immigrant, although they still leave: A shop on the main street advertises tickets to Tijuana and Los Angeles.

Wisconsin Spring: Public Schools and the State

In February of 2011 I returned from Mexico to find communities across the state of Wisconsin in a political uproar. The new Governor, Scott Walker, was promoting a law to remove collective bargaining rights from public employee unions, including the teachers' union. In Ripon, Wisconsin, birthplace of the Republican Party, high school students joined prison security workers, teachers, and others in a series of daily protests in front of city hall. My son Orion helped organize a sit-in at the high school, and then put in a call to our local Republican State Senator, Joan Balweg. He discussed the reasons for the sit-in with her over the phone, she listened, and then she asked him to go back to class. He replied, "Joan, we are not going back to class."

On the day of the sit-in at Ripon High School I received a phone call from my daughter, Ariana, who exclaimed exuberantly, "Dad, this is awesome!" I drove home early, stopped by the middle school to tell Marcel that his brother and sister were marching in the street, and would he like to join them? He answered in the affirmative, and shortly thereafter we were marching outside city hall with 200 high school students, to chants of "Union busting is disgusting!"

The students there were a mixture of class officers, theater people, Latinos, and a large contingent of academically marginal students. Interestingly, these "low achievers" stayed at the protest until the end. Several of them convinced me to go with them to the alternative school to try and recruit some of their brethren for the protest. We returned accompanied by Darryl, a young man who openly rejects schooling while being well-versed in the history of labor and communism. His comments on the political situation in Wisconsin were sprinkled with quotes from Bakunin, Trotsky and others.

That night I received a phone call from a local leader of the correctional workers, who asked my help in getting more people to demonstrations on the following days. He said, "I thank Scott Walker for one thing: This has caused me to really get to know more of my union brothers and sisters." By the following week my son Orion was spending two days and a night in "the people's house" in Madison. When Republican legislators used a maneuver to pass the legislation without their Democratic counterparts present, Orion was there, waiting for his senator to exit the room. He held a sign reading, "Joan, We are Still Not Going Back to Class."

Teachers in the Struggle

The parallels between Oaxaca and what is happening in my home state of Wisconsin are many. Governor Scott Walker pushed through legislation removing collective bargaining rights and a round-the-clock occupation of the capitol building in Madison, christened “the people’s house,” began, with accompanying street demonstrations that involved thousands of people daily. Up to 100,000 people marched at the Wisconsin state Capitol on March 12, 2011, the day after Governor Walker signed the new law. The Governor claims the law is needed to address budget deficits. Teachers, students, and community members around the state claim it is union-busting (Kelleher, 2011).

Though the response to public protest has been far less brutal in Wisconsin, the heavy-handed practices of its Governor mirror those of the governors of Oaxaca. Just as the governors of Oaxaca can dismiss hundreds of years of “*usos y costumbres*” to push forward the agenda of globalization, the Governor of Wisconsin can dismiss 60 years of collective bargaining for public employees in a state which was the first to approve such a right for its workers (Labor History, 2011).

Teachers in Wisconsin and elsewhere have felt the pressure of top-down policies, budget woes, and the effects these have on their practice and morale. Maura Behan, a bilingual teacher in her eighth year of teaching, describes the impact on the political climate in Wisconsin for the teachers in her district:

My district had a strong contract and teacher’s union until this year. With all the uncertainty around the decision of



PROTEST MARCH IN RIPON, WISCONSIN, IN SUPPORT OF TEACHERS AND OTHER PUBLIC EMPLOYEES

the state and the bill being passed, our district like many others rushed to pass a contract. The difference with our district and others; however, is our contract was stripped of many rights that had been fought for over the years. The school board members along with our Superintendent presented a contract to the teacher’s union in a take it or leave it fashion and no discussion was even allowed. The representatives on the union then explained the changes to its members and the contract was put to a vote. We all felt defeated. It was shocking to hear all the rights that were “suspended.”

I see a huge connection between the challenges to teacher’s rights and the challenges to immigrant worker’s rights. I think that immigration and education are two themes in America that spark strong opinions. In terms of immigration,

it is a topic that at times people seem to polarize their feelings despite not always knowing the facts on both sides of the debate. Education is the same way.

Melissa Bollow Temple (2011) describes the importance of finding a voice in the face of this current attack on teachers’ unions and the right to bargain collectively:

Last month teachers in Wisconsin were feeling beaten down. Policies like Race to the Top, merit pay, and over-testing had made us feel inadequate and robotic. Projected budget shortfalls left us scrambling to make ends meet. Scripted curricula threatened our professionalism, our creativity, and the joy in teaching and learning.

Two weeks ago all this changed, and we have Gov. Walker to thank for it...In Milwaukee, the state’s largest and poorest district, more than 1,000 teachers called in absent and went to Madison to protest on Feb. 18. As teacher Michele Hilbert put it: “I am teaching today. This is what democracy looks like.” Teachers around the state have found a voice for ourselves within the craziness: This isn’t about money, or benefits, or pensions. This is about rights, and how those rights affect the future of our students. (Temple quoted in *Rethinking Schools*, 2011)

Leia Petty, a school counselor, came from New York to witness the growth of a movement in favor of public education and worker’s rights. She describes the physical scene and the mood inside the occupied capitol building in Madison in February of 2011:

Those who have been occupying the building for two weeks have self-organized a fully functioning 24-hour daycare center, medic station, charging station, food



STUDENTS ORGANIZING FOR A PROTEST IN SUPPORT OF THEIR TEACHERS IN RIPON, WISCONSIN

distribution center, lost and found, and “free stores” with donated diapers, sleeping bags, socks, and other basic needs. Town halls are organized both nights I am there.

[Teachers are] told every day by politicians and the media that we’re “the problem with education” in this country. It’s impossible not to internalize this message, even when you know it’s not true. But here in the Capitol, this feeling has completely left me. The protests in Madison have brought more than 100,000 people through, and we have tasted democracy. Everyone who comes to this place, everyone who has invested in this struggle, will never be the same. (Petty quoted in *Rethinking Schools*, 2011)

What is also clear is that Wisconsin and other states in the U.S. are now experiencing the cuts to social services, union-busting, and privatization which used to be the lot of so-called “Third World” countries owing debt to the World Bank—“Austerity measures.” In the face of globalization, many traditional differences between the so-called First and Third World nations are beginning to disappear. The same processes are at work in both. The case is much more grave in places like Oaxaca, but we in the U. S. are now in the same boat, tossed by stormy seas.

Now is the Moment: Protest and Possibility

Wisconsin’s new law eliminating collective bargaining for teachers and Mexico’s encouragement of privatization of schools are only two examples of neoliberal economics being applied to public education. Globalization has brought about these changes in many countries. In her review of a study of globalization and education in Alberta, Canada, Clarke writes:

Public education (is undermined) through privatization and through redefining its purpose to that of a “servant of the economy”: Educational funding was slashed; corporate sponsors were invited into the

schools and universities; charter schools were encouraged; teachers were subjected to increased workplace discipline; the number of school boards was reduced; and administrators came under increased and contradictory pressures to deal with the results. (Clarke, 2001)

The war against public education is being fought from Madison, Wisconsin, to Oaxaca, Mexico, and beyond. Just as neoliberal practices in Mexico mirror those in the United States, resistance by teachers, students and other concerned citizens benefits from knowledge that one is not alone, that the struggle also carries on in other locales.

What we see in Oaxaca and in Wisconsin are large numbers of people being moved to mass organizing and public protest in support of teachers and public education. Although relatively few people in the United States were aware of the takeover of Oaxaca in 2006 by a people’s movement, the protests in Madison, Wisconsin, in 2011 were broadcast to the world. There is an unfairness inherent in this skewed coverage—clearly resistance to attacks on public education in one of the poorest states of Mexico warrants just as much if not more attention from the world, especially as the price that protesters pay there is all too often torture, “disappearance,” and death.

As a researcher with the privilege of traveling freely in and out of Mexico, I feel that sharing the Oaxacan narratives as stories to be performed is an ethical duty as well as a doorway to understanding and change (Madison, 2010). Students, teachers, and community members in places like the United States need to find common ground with those who struggle without media coverage elsewhere. Like a message from Tahrir Square read at the Wisconsin state capitol, a global message has the potential to inspire locally.

For those in Oaxaca, solidarity from teachers and others in the United States has the potential of addressing serious

human rights abuses that cannot be overlooked. Perhaps Mario Ramirez is right: We are at a time of reflection, and potential renewal, where we still have the chance to stand up for each other, for the earth, and for the future.

For all those who would fight for a democratic, just and public education, the following recommendations can be drawn from this research:

1. *Learn and teach labor history in the public schools.* This includes restoring May 1 as a celebration of the struggle of working people in the United States for fair labor practices, specifically the institution of the eight-hour day.
2. *Foster truly democratic dialogue within the classroom.* Public schools cannot claim to be public spaces for democracy without the practice of democracy with students. *Rethinking Schools*, published in Wisconsin, is an excellent source for ideas and strategies for fostering such dialogue on a variety of pressing societal issues.
3. *Stand with other workers whose rights are threatened.* Hundreds of thousands of other workers have stood with teachers in Oaxaca and in Wisconsin. Teachers need to stand with others as well, including teaching about their struggles in the classroom. For example, all school personnel can teach about the attacks against undocumented immigrant workers and the violation of their human rights in the United States. These workers are parents and family members of our students. They can be important allies for democratic educators.
4. *Invite parents into public forums about workers’ rights sponsored by teachers and students.* One of the interesting aspects of the protests in

Recommendations

For all those who would fight for a democratic, just and public education, the following recommendations can be drawn from this research:

1. Learn and teach labor history in the public schools.
2. Foster truly democratic dialogue within the classroom.
3. Stand with other workers whose rights are threatened.
4. Invite parents into public forums about workers’ rights sponsored by teachers and students.
5. Invite public officials to schools to share their perspectives and answer questions from students in free, open debate.
6. Perform the stories of the struggle to promote a democratic, just society.
7. Reach out to students, teachers, and community organizations in other states and nations.

Ripon, Wisconsin, was the leadership of many parents of school children who had voted for the Republican governor, but whose jobs were threatened by the new law. Many were correctional workers. They began to understand the importance of workers' rights when their own livelihoods were threatened. Teachers can help educate all parents and community members to the common concerns and struggle facing all working people, historically and in the present.

5. *Invite public officials to schools to share their perspectives and answer questions from students in free, open debate.* Students and teachers need to be aware that politicians are public servants. They are there to answer to the people. An open exchange of ideas will remind everyone of this fundamental aspect of a democracy.

6. *Perform the stories of the struggle to promote a democratic, just society.* Encourage students to research and perform stories based on the struggles for the rights of workers, indigenous peoples, and others from around the United States and around the world. Invite the public to view these performances and engage in a dialogue afterward.

7. *Reach out to students, teachers, and community organizations in other states and nations.* Utilize technologies of communication to build bridges of solidarity for the future. Where possible, engage in people to people exchanges. Again, we have the advantage in the United States of being able to go to and from many countries freely. Unfortunately, our current immigration laws will prevent many of our Mexican brothers and sisters from doing the same.

Raul Maldonado of the Oaxaca teachers' union invited me to consider a teacher exchange between the embattled states of Wisconsin and Oaxaca, and also asked if I could translate their bulletins to share in English with foreigners who are in Oaxaca, to help them understand that they are touring in a place where teachers and others are imprisoned, tortured, disappeared and killed for speaking up. "Governor Gabino Cue's motto is "A Oaxaca of Peace and Progress," says Raul. "*Pero no hay paz y progreso sin justicia...* There is no peace and progress without justice."

Raul gave me a copy of *Combativo*, which is co-published by the teachers' organizations. Inside I find "No te Rindas/Don't Give Up," a poem by Mario Benedetti. At a time when teachers' livelihoods and very lives are threatened, and when a public, democratic education is being sacrificed for private gain, these words seem relevant to us all:

*Aunque el frio quemé
Aunque el miedo muerda
Aunque el sol se ponga
Y se calle el viento
Aun hay fuego en tu alma
Aun hay vida en tus sueños.
Porque cada día es un comienzo nuevo.
Porque esta es la hora y el mejor momento.
Porque no estas sola.*

Although the cold burns
Although the fear bites
Although the sun sets
And the wind goes quiet
Still there is fire in your soul
Still there is life in your dreams
Because each day is a new beginning
Because now is the hour and the moment
Because you are not alone.
(Benedetti, 2011)

Teachers, students, and community members, know that you do not face the struggle alone. Your brothers and sisters wait to hear from you in Oaxaca, Cairo, Madison, and elsewhere. Public education as a tool for democratic social change is a dream worth fighting for in every state and country. Now is the moment to struggle together.

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