

MEXICAN LABOR OFFICIALS FIGHT TEACHERS' STRIKE

Line Up with Governor Against Unions

By BERTRAM D. WOLFE

PUEBLA, Mexico, May 31.—When the governor of the state of Puebla in March of this year tried to put into effect in his state the national policy of economies at the expense of the workers and employes of the government which Calles has inaugurated with the federal employees, he struck an unexpected obstacle in the teachers of the state. They were suffering already from the non-payment of thirty decennial salaries that is to say, of 300 days of back pay owed since the state went bankrupt during the De la Huerta uprising. The governor proposed to fire many and reduce the pay of the rest and continue to forget the back pay. The teachers, indignant, formed a union and called for the aid of the labor federation of the state affiliated with the Confederacion Regional Obrera Mexicana (C. R. O. M.) which is the principal labor organization of the nation.

Knife Workers Behind Closed Doors

The state labor federation promised aid to the teachers and appealed to the national body. The national federation, of which the real leader is the Secretary of Labor Morones, answered with a declaration to the effect that: (1) the teachers are not

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affiliated with the C. R. O. M.; (2), no organization of the C. R. O. M. can declare a solidarity strike with a non-affiliated organization or with one that has been affiliated less than six months; (3) the C. R. O. M. will not give aid and forbids the state federation of Puebla to do so. The governor of the state had already sent the C. R. O. M. a statement declaring: (1) that he did not recognize the teachers union; (2) that government employes cannot organize; (3) that his plan of economies could give the teachers no grievance since it was the plan of Calles and had nothing to do with the workers; (4) that the teachers were only striking to serve his political enemies which are also the political enemies of the C. R. O. M. The general secretary of the C. R. O. M., far from repudiating the concept that government employes cannot organize or strike, answered with the decree above-mentioned.

General Strike Breaks Out

All thru April the teachers continued negotiating and the workers of Puebla, in spite of the government-controlled C. R. O. M., continued preparing a general strike. On the 22nd, it broke out. The strike was complete. It included light, water, transport, bread, factories—everything. The schools, of course, also closed.

Troops and police patrolled the streets. The first bloodshed occurred on the twenty-fourth, Leonardo Paleta, former secretary of the state federation was killed and various workers wounded. Other encounters followed. Police, to protect scabs, fired on pickets. Several workers were wounded but the police were disarmed by the strikers. One policeman was killed and another wounded.

Send C. R. O. M. Envoy to Break Strike

The strike spread steadily thruout the state and to the neighboring state of Tlaxcala. The C. R. O. M. sent Eulalio Martinez to Puebla to persuade the strikers to betray the teachers and abandon their strike. (Eulalio Martinez was the delegate of the C. R. O. M. to the second congress of the Red Labor International in Moscow, where he accepted the conditions of affiliation which he and his organization repudiated upon his return. He has since attacked Russia repeatedly. He has just been chosen by the government as "labor attache" to the Mexican Legation in Moscow in accord with the decision to send labor attaches to the embassies of various important countries in representation of the Calles "labor" government.)

Martinez accomplished nothing. The strike become more complete, newspapermen, chauffeurs, electricians added to the list of strikers. The government mobilized 8,000 troops near the capital city of the state, the city of Puebla. President Calles issued a statement attacking the strikers and ordering the troops to protect scabs. Eulalio Martinez secured from the governor of Puebla a promise of recognizing the teachers' union but no other concessions. This he wanted the strikers to accept but they rejected it. The C. R. O. M. thru the mouth of its general secretary then declared the strike "illegal" unconstitutional, the work of agitators, etc.

Union's Support Teachers

The textile workers of Atlixco seconded the strike on the 28th first deposing their general secretary who opposed it. The workers of other states, also affiliated with the C. R. O. M. but also engaged in the textile trade (Puebla is an important textile center) voted to strike as well but the leaders of the C. R. O. M. were in general successful in preventing the execution of these decisions. The strike lasted till the first of May but the C. R. O. M. gradually isolated it driving the workers in other states and in other parts of the state of Puebla back to work and leaving the capital of the same name as a strike center. On the first of May the federal government greatly augmented the number of troops there. At the same time, the governor promised to take back all teachers and make no reprisals for the strike. By Monday, May 4 the strike was definitely ended.

As an immediate consequence of the treachery of the leaders of the C. R. O. M., the State Federation of Labor, thru its executive committee, has voted to sever its connections with the parent body. They will probably reaffiliate shortly.

The general strike is interesting in that it exposes the "socialist government" of Calles and in its exposure to the workers of Mexico of the true nature of the leaders of the C. R. O. M. strikebreakers at the service of the federal government and the governors of the states, where these are political friends of the labor party. Moreover, it demonstrates palpably the fact that who plays with large masses of workers plays with revolutionary tinder. The government, thru its paid agents, the leaders of the C. R. O. M., has sought to organize the working masses in conservative organizations. But the Puebla general strike has demonstrated that the control of these leaders over their masses is not as secure as they had hoped.