



# Global Nonviolent Action Database

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## Oaxacan teachers strike against Governor, 2006

May 22,

2006

to: October

2006

**Country:** Mexico

**Location City/State/Province:** Oaxaca City, Oaxaca

### Goals:

Better wages for teachers; more resources for students; resignation of Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz; and the establishment of a peoples' government.

## Methods

### Methods in 1st segment:

- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 037. Singing
- 038. Marches
- 048. Protest meetings
- 097. Protest strike
- 104. Professional strike
- 173. Nonviolent occupation

### Methods in 2nd segment:

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 026. Paint as protest
- 037. Singing
- 048. Protest meetings
- 104. Professional strike
- 173. Nonviolent occupation
- 180. Alternative communication system

### Methods in 3rd segment:

- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 104. Professional strike
- 173. Nonviolent occupation

### Methods in 4th segment:

- 001. Public speeches

- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 038. Marches
- 104. Professional strike
- 173. Nonviolent occupation

**Methods in 5th segment:**

- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 104. Professional strike
- 173. Nonviolent occupation

**Methods in 6th segment:**

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 011. Records, radio, and television
- 037. Singing
- 104. Professional strike
- 172. Nonviolent obstruction
- 173. Nonviolent occupation

## Classifications

**Classification:**

Change

**Cluster:**

Democracy

Economic Justice

Human Rights

**Group characterization:**

- Women
- indigenous peoples
- students
- teachers

## Leaders, partners, allies, elites

**Leaders:**

Section 22 of the National Union of Education Workers (Teachers); Enrique Rueda Pacheco-Section 22 leader; the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO)

**Partners:**

Federation of Democratic Labor Unions and Organizations of Oaxaca (FSODO)

**External allies:**

Friends of Brad Will; Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN); Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), Catholic Church

**Involvement of social elites:**

The Mexican Senate passed a resolution requesting Governor Ruiz to resign, but Ruiz refused.

## Joining/exiting order of social groups

**Groups in 1st Segment:**

**Groups in 2nd Segment:**

- APPO
- Catholic Church in Oaxaca
- Student groups
- indigenous peoples
- professional organizations

**Groups in 3rd Segment:**

**Groups in 4th Segment:**

- FSODO

**Groups in 5th Segment:**

**Groups in 6th Segment:**

- EZLN
- Friends of Brad Will
- IWW
- Mexican Senate

**Segment Length:** *Approximately 27 days*

## Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

**Opponents:**

Oaxacan Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz and the state's ruling party the Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI)

**Nonviolent responses of opponent:**

Not Known

**Campaigner violence:**

Protesters used sticks and stones to beat back the attacking police officers.

**Repressive Violence:**

Police attacked protesters using tear gas on multiple occasions. Paramilitaries also broke up protests and killed several people in October. In the end of October Federal Preventative Police broke up the last of the occupiers.

## Success Outcome

**Success in achieving specific demands/goals:**

0 points out of 6 points

**Survival:**

1 point out of 1 points

**Growth:**

3 points out of 3 points

**Notes on outcomes:**

Though APPO managed to bring the state government to a standstill, they were unsuccessful in completing their goals. The Governor refused to resign and APPO failed to institute a peoples' government. State police demolished the protest

encampment set up in the city center.

While the campaign was unsuccessful in achieving their demands, the teachers and their supporters kept the campaign alive despite police repression, until the teachers organization voted to end the strike.

The teachers' strike began as a campaign of educators, their students, and families, and grew to encompass a significant portion of the Oaxaca population including indigenous peoples, women's groups, university students, and other activists.

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In 2004, Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz became Governor of Oaxaca in a contentious election, rumored to involve fraud. Many civilians and activists were angered over his win and led protest campaigns against him, resulting in the detention, incarceration, and disappearance of hundreds of social leaders throughout Oaxaca. State forces silenced those who attempted to demonstrate even though the Oaxacan constitution permits protest.

Despite the negative governmental response to social activism, school teachers' went on strike every year to protest wage cuts and diminishing resources for their students. While normally these protests ended after a few days or weeks with small wage concessions by the government, the teacher's strike of 2006 lasted for five months and followed a very different action trajectory.

On May 22, the Oaxacan teachers of Section 22 of the National Union of Education Workers began their annual strike. They set up encampments in the Zócalo, the city center of Oaxaca, and urged students and their families to join them in occupying the streets. In order to further their message and document their actions, the teachers created a radio station, Radio Plantón. While the Oaxacan government asked the teachers to remove themselves from the streets and return to work, the strikers refused to do so.

On the morning of June 14, 3,000 Oaxacan police made a surprise attack on the encampment of the teachers and students living in the Zócalo. Helicopters attacked from above with pepper spray and tear gas bombs and police officers shot tear gas canisters directly into the crowds of protesters. That night, police destroyed the building that housed Radio Plantón, disbanding the station.

The attack led many civilians from across the state to travel to the city in support of the striking teachers. Student groups, professional organizations, and indigenous peoples joined the protest. With the involvement of these new groups, the teachers broadened their demands to include those of other "oppressed" peoples. They exchanged their economic goal for that of removing Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz. Some of the striking teachers and other protesters formed the Popular Assembly of Oaxaca (APPO), which was created as an ad hoc organization to bring protesters together to talk about past actions and to organize future demonstrations.

On June 16, 400,000 protesters marched through the city, taking control of 56 blocks surrounding the Zócalo and chanting solidarity songs as they went. The teachers and their supporters occupied city hall buildings across the state of Oaxaca. University students at the Benito Juárez Autonomous University of Oaxaca used their school radio station to broadcast their support of the striking teachers and other protesters.

Because the government-controlled private press, both radio and newspapers, refused to give attention to the protesters, members of APPO graffitied walls in Oaxaca and hung banners from balconies as a means of providing their own written and artistic media.

The Catholic Churches in the city opened their doors to the public, providing medical attention and making meals for the protesters. Doctors and nurses from local hospitals volunteered to treat the wounded.

On August 1, a group of 2,000 women joined together and took over the private news channel, Channel 9. The women renamed the station, Radio Cacerola, Radio Pots and Pans. Fearing retaliation by the authorities, thousands gathered around the station and its radio antennas. On August 22, paramilitaries funded by the government led an attack on the station. The protesters

responded by setting up blockades around the station and across the city. Members of APPO overturned buses and set them on fire in order to block major roads. As a result, traffic stopped and the city virtually closed down.

On September 1, APPO held a 50,000-person march on the Zócalo. At the bandstand, the marchers gathered to listen to various members of the teachers' union, APPO, and the Federation of Democratic Labor Unions and Organizations of Oaxaca (FSODO). The speakers called for the resignation of the governor and demanded that the government recognize the people's movement.

In mid-October, the Mexican Senate passed a resolution with a large majority, asking that Governor Ruiz step down in order to bring stabilization back to the state. Ruiz refused.

As it became clear that civil protest as well as political protest would not move Ruiz from his position, the teachers decided to return to work. On October 26, Section 22 voted to end the strike. While many teachers went back to their schools, some who were members of APPO stayed in the city square and continued to protest.

On October 27, paramilitaries entered the city to break up the APPO members who were still living in the encampment in the Zócalo. They killed three people, including IndyMedia journalist Brad Will from New York.

Two days later on October 29, the President of Mexico, Vicente Fox, ordered 5,000 Federal Preventative Police (PFP) to enter Oaxaca and retake the city.

In New York City on October 30, the action group Friends of Brad Will, formed after the journalist's death, held a protest outside the Mexican embassy in support of those in Oaxaca who continued to fight. They set up a human blockade in front of the building. Those who did not participate in the blockade stood in front of it holding signs and singing solidarity songs.

Despite the international support for APPO, in late November the PFP removed the last remnants of the teachers' and APPO's encampment in the Zócalo.

## Research Notes

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### Additional Notes:

While the teachers' strike began as a campaign for better wages and more resources for students, it transformed into a demand for the resignation of the Governor and the creation of a new democratic constitution. The teachers' campaign became a popular campaign.

Though the teachers claimed that they wanted peace and would not use arms, not all members of APPO were in agreement about the use of violence. Some used sticks and stones to defend themselves from police.

While the campaign failed ultimately, the teachers' union held additional strikes and rallies in the following years. In 2010, during the state elections, Oaxacan's voted Governor Ruiz's administration out of office, including the political party to which he belonged, the Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI).

Edited by M.R. (23/05/2011)

**Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:**

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