



## Tri-National Coalition in Defense of Public Education

**Internationalism: a strategy for struggles to defend education as a social right.**  
**13 th Conference, November 2018**

### The Orizaba Declaration

The one hundred and sixty participants of the 13th Tri-National Conference ratify our conviction that education is a universal right of the peoples and a responsibility of the State. It is also a social right, and an international commitment the governments are obliged to acknowledge, since education and culture are paramount for the humane, critical and scientific development of our peoples.

Teachers and education workers have been the pillar of the educational system to generate and transmit knowledge for the cultural, economic and social development of our countries. Our work has been the basis of the humanistic, critical and scientific development of our peoples.

We reconfirm the democratic principles that the Tri-National Coalition in Defense of Public Education has put into practice during its twenty five years of existence. We also reaffirm our commitment to sustain our international solidary action to defend public, secular, free and universal education as a social right; and to defend the rights of education workers in our countries, while constructing societies with social justice.

#### Current economic and social realities

We are experiencing a radical change in the international juncture. The big financial groups, that dominate our economies and governments, are redefining their strategies to try and find a way out of the economic and political crisis we are living, due to the failure of the neoliberal model. We are witnessing the implementation of a new free trade agreement between Mexico, the United States and Canada (USMCA) that is more aggressive against our peoples. The US government intends to have more concessions for its companies, to avoid competing against China.

In an attempt to hide the exacerbated poverty, the lack of dignified labor and the insulting wealth concentration of our societies, caused by the dispossessing neoliberal model, a xenophobic and racist discourse has been invented to blame migrants for the model's failure. A supremacist narrative is accompanying authoritarian and dictatorial policies- such as the ones implemented by US president Donald Trump- that violate the migrants' human rights, as well as those of African Americans, Women, Indigenous Communities and workers in general.

The hardening of power exercised by the big financial groups at a world-wide level seeks to maintain their hegemony, by restricting democratic freedoms, social and human rights, and the sovereignty of our societies.

Now more than ever, education is in great peril. Not only because of the aggressive privatization and commodification measures, but also because it is a vehicle to install supremacist, xenophobic and racist ideas in our peoples, to promote hate, and a rejection of all things collective, social and public.

Nevertheless, the fact that in Mexico, the fight of educators, students and the people to defend public education, their labor rights and political freedoms continues is encouraging and inspiring. In the United States, we have seen a consolidation of the organization and alternative proposals of the Chicago Teachers' Union, as well as their outreach towards society. Democratic organization of education workers throughout the country has been boosted. Important resistances have emerged from the grassroots of unions in Oklahoma, West Virginia, Kentucky and Arizona. They have risen to defend their labor conditions but also, to stand against the commodifying model that is closing public schools to open charter ones. In Los Angeles and other American cities, the defense of migrants triggered initiatives such as the creation of sanctuary schools and cities. Canada has also sheltered migrants, with the adoption of such sanctuary measures. Meanwhile, Canadian unions have held important fights against budget cuts and to defend collective bargaining agreements. Currently, in order to make the universal right to education advance; as well as the right to a dignified living and the democratization of our communities, a change of the economic model and political regimen is required, for having a society with social justice.

#### The Impact of Neo Liberal Globalization

- It is an ideology that places the market above social rights;
- It produces a budget reduction while diminishing the role of the State in the rendering of public services, and the collection of the taxes necessary for said services;
- It promotes the privatization of all of the natural and social goods and resources, so that the market supplies those services, instead of the public interest and equality;
- It reduces labor rights and collective bargaining. The employers have greater "flexibility" to hire workers under precarious working conditions and without social security.
- It uses the power of governments to regulate in favor of the corporations' interests, instead of having the public interest of social and environmental concerns prevail. It uses State repression against the people who defend their rights.
- It curtails the power of the State to regulate on behalf of the public interest, and social and environmental concerns;
- It creates economic inequality within the countries, while the large financial groups claim an increasingly larger share of the wealth;
- It increases the power of the public sector to finance elections and the corporate means to influence them.

In the educational sector, the common trait in all of our countries is the continuous commodification process, with new forms of privatizing the right to education. This is evident in the educational financing cuts, the erosion of full-time secure jobs, the constant attacks against collective bargaining and the rights of teachers and education workers, and the use of standardized tests to control teaching and changing the curricula in favor of instrumental measures and thus, abandoning the scientific and humanistic nature of education. It is also observed in the privatization and investment of public funds in "subsidized" and private schools, forcing students in the US to acquire a massive debt in exchange for higher education.

An international agency –the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)- is having an increasingly larger influence over education at a world-wide level. Its PISA test is used to create tables that classify countries according to what the OECD considers the most valuable elements of education. The underlying assumption is that certain types of learnings are necessary for a successful economic development in a global competition. But it intentionally ignores the many other valuable elements education

has, aside from those assessed by the test.

Standardized tests –instead of being used as instruments to improve education- are used as weapons against students and educators. The most serious case is found in Mexico, with the “Educational Reform” that has imposed the assessment of teachers as the justification to fire them. It is being used as an instrument to change the purpose of education and to end the role of the teaching profession. Standardized tests are increasingly a controversial issue, since business people and their governments promote them, while teachers and parents question their validity, launching campaigns to object them. Some teachers are even refusing to administer them.

### **Building a fair and democratic future**

For many years, plenty of educators, students and communities have resisted privatization and other elements of neoliberalism.

Even though it is important to defy the elements that harm public education, it is essential to go beyond and develop our own alternative proposals, from a transformational pedagogy perspective. For the sake of humanity’s and Earth’s future, we need to present an alternative vision of what public education must be and can be, along with the strategies to make that possible.

Groups from each one of our countries have taken on the challenge, and have produced alternative pedagogical approaches: for indigenous education, in high schools, at universities, for all educational levels and in different regions and communities.

### **International actions**

After 25 year of its creation, we recognize that the Tri-National Coalition in Defense of Public Education has been a valuable tool to articulate our fights; and to contribute to a fairer and more democratic future. In the current juncture, we decide to move even further in the construction of a common agenda of strategies and ways of operating amongst the different unions and social organizations that defend public education, and labor and social rights. Thus, we come up with the following AGREEMENTS:

Unity in action, through two axes and articulation paths:

1. - Aligning demands, visions and language.

We consider making similar demands in collective bargaining that connect with international solidarity. These demands would oppose budgetary restrictions, violation of labor rights and call for recognition of the rights of the union to represent teachers on education policy matters. Unions in contract negotiations will express mutual solidarity with other unions in negotiations and struggle.

In the next contract negotiations of BCTF and CTU, which will start in January, we will trigger joint mechanisms of solidarity; and we will explore other options with Mexican higher education unions and the democratic sections of CNTE.

We will continue with the experiences developed by our organizations and movements, and we will strengthen them, to tie the fight of teachers to other social and popular movements in general.

2.- Tri-National Campaigns for 2019:

We will fight to increase the financing of education and to stop the use of public resources to strengthen private schools, such as the charter ones.

We stand against the use of standardized tests as tools of exclusion and punishment, and we support the elimination of the PISA test. We demand our countries withdraw from the OECD, since it is an organization that imposes business policies on education.

We defend dignified labor and the revaluing of the teaching profession against the precarization of working conditions in education. We support the professionalization of educators.

We are against the criminalization of social movements, and the teaching profession; while highlighting the contributions of world teacher towards equality and social justice.

### **Communication: The development of a broader website for the Tri- Nation, to revitalize the communication.**

We will make more use of social networks, taking more advantage of Facebook, to share videos and documents. We will explore having a YouTube channel.

Research and Training.

We will create tri-national and/or continental work groups on the subjects of:

Standardized tests and the evaluation of teachers’ performance.

Educational alternatives for the development of a critical pedagogy and a de-colonized educational curriculum, by rescuing the experiences of teachers in our countries, both for elementary as well as higher education.

We will reinforce having workshops and/or seminars on specific subjects, in a format that will allow for two or three brothers and/or sisters to have short stays and carry out activities in different regions of our countries. We will promote feedback from the country of origin.

We will explore creating a “school of teachers’ critical training”.

### **Special Resolutions.**

We will issue a solidarity political declaration towards the fights and movements in defense of public education; as well as labor, social and democratic rights for all workers in our countries.

We demand respect towards migrants, as well as the opening of borders. We support sanctuary schools and cities.

We raise an alarm due to the environmental deterioration and demand the governments take actions to reduce the degradation of nature. We will coordinate simultaneous actions in our countries against the transnational corporations that are operating against public education and our rights.

We express our solidarity towards the demand of education workers in Mexico, grouped under CNTE, for the cancellation and abrogation of the laws that installed the Neoliberal Educational Reform.

We back up the fight of indigenous educators in our countries in their demand of respecting the history and culture of the original peoples, and their right to define their own educational contents.

We support the strikes of: 1) Costa Rican teachers against the fiscal combo, that reduces educational budgets; 2) Students and professors from Colombian universities to defend the public nature of their institutions; and 3) the 35,000 members of UTLA against the austerity program imposed on the LA schools.

We will celebrate the 14th Tri-National Conference in Defense of Public Education in the United States. The delegations from the American unions and social organizations will inform us on the place and the host union for the 2020 meeting.