




reviewjournal.com

 PRINT THIS

 Click to Print

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Tuesday, July 20, 2004
Copyright © Las Vegas Review-Journal

EDITORIAL: Mexican education

South of the border, union has iron grip on a nation's schools

The Washington Post published an interesting report earlier this month on the state of education in Mexico. It provides a warning about the disastrous consequences that can stem from the close identification between a major political party and a unionized government work force.

The story was on the subject of Mexico's National Education Workers Union -- the largest union in Latin America -- which represents 1.3 million Mexican schoolteachers.

"During the 71-year-rule of the Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI," the Post reports, "the union guaranteed the ruling party votes in exchange for a controlling interest in the education system."

And to date, the union's power has been reduced hardly at all by President Vicente Fox's defeat of the PRI in 2000, the Post reports.

The result? The Mexican teachers union has managed to get the school day reduced to four hours. The union "also holds veto power over a curriculum that is handed down from generation to generation. ...

"The trade union ... has created what critics describe as a monstrous system of perks and patronage, including a practice that allows teaching positions to be inherited and sold for cash."

Even though a group of ninth graders wrote a letter to their middle school principal in the Mexican town of Poza Rica, complaining, "Our teacher doesn't show up for class," the school's principal told the Post he was powerless to take action.

The teacher, Carlos Ignacio Loyda, was working another job and missed up to three-quarters of his classes during some months. But Loyda's position was protected by the powerful teachers union, according to

principal Jose Luis Gonzalez.

No-show teachers (even for the brief, four-hour school day) have become such a huge problem that the state education department has taken to printing up posters, reminding teachers -- not students -- that "attendance is essential."

The end result? Illiteracy is endemic in rural Mexico; the average child leaves school at the age of 14. Despite Mexico's considerable wealth in natural resources, a report by the World Economic Forum ranks the quality of education in Mexico 74th out of 102 nations surveyed, just behind Cameroon.

So thoroughly do these failures trap most Mexicans in poverty that, "Success for millions of Mexicans means sneaking into the United States to mow lawns and pick apples," the Post concludes.

The union "is a political force more than anything," explains Leticia Barba Martin, a professor at the National Autonomous University of Mexico who ran a teachers college for 20 years. "It hurts education because it creates inertia and traditions that don't permit necessary changes."

But just because America's teachers unions have become one of the largest and most important constituencies in America's leading leftist-leaning party -- inseparably linked with the tax-and-spend Democrats -- doesn't mean things have gotten that bad *here*, does it?

Not yet. (Though administering a spelling test to any recent public-school graduate can be an eye-opening experience.)

But give them another decade or two.

Find this article at:

http://www.reviewjournal.com/lvrj_home/2004/Jul-20-Tue-2004/opinion/24341475.html

 [Click to Print](#)

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

