

Tens of thousands protest massacre of Mexican student teachers

By Rafael Azul
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On October 8 tens of thousands took to the streets in Mexico City and other Mexican cities to protest the disappearance and assassination of students from a rural teachers college in Ayotzinapa, in the southern state of Guerrero.

Fifty-seven student teachers (*normalistas*) at the college disappeared on September 26 after a confrontation with the police of the city of Iguala. Six others were killed and 25 were injured. Of those that were kidnapped, 43 are still missing. Dozens of charred bodies were discovered in shallow graves near the town last week.

The *normalistas* were part a group of 100 on their way to the city of Iguala for a protest against budget cuts to their school.

The massacre and kidnapping have exposed not only the complicity of the Guerrero government (PRD, Party of the Democratic Revolution) and the narcotics gangs that operate in that state, but similar relationships based on corruption and repression that pervade Mexico nationally. They have also triggered a tidal wave of national anger that threatens the stability of the government of President Enrique Peña Nieto (PRI, Institutional Revolutionary Party).

In Mexico City on Wednesday afternoon, marchers went from the Statue of the Angel of Independence to the city's historic central square. The huge protest march blocked downtown traffic. The march ended in a rally at the city's historic Zocalo Square. As the demonstration marched many joined in. Others voiced their support.

The protesters marched under the slogan “#we are all Ayotzinapa.” Family members of the disappeared students were at the head of the protest. There was also a strong contingent of Ayotzinapa students. Many banners carried pictures of the missing youths; other signs denounced the narcogovernments of Guerrero and Mexico City.

Breaking through the somber atmosphere of the march

was the chant “Why do they kill us if we are the hope of Latin America?” Another chant denounced Guerrero governor Aguirre Hernández and called for him to step down. “Neither PRI, nor PAN, nor PRD” chanted many.

The repudiation of all the political parties that now make up the federal and Guerrero governments, became evident when PRD patriarch Cuauhtemoc Cárdenas attempted to reach the stage at the Zocalo rally, where families of the victims were gathered. He was booed and pelted by the crowd. Cárdenas fled the scene as the crowd broke into a chant of “killer government” and “traitor.”

Both the mayor of Iguala and the governor of Guerrero are members of the PRD, a party that has been backed by large sections of the Mexican pseudo-left, while integrating itself into the government apparatus at every level and collaborating in the imposition of neo-liberal policies under the “pact for Mexico.” In Guerrero, as elsewhere, the PRD was intimately connected to drug cartels.

Mass protests took place across southern Mexico as well:

- In Chilpancingo, Guerrero, over 50,000 teachers joined students and workers in a massive repudiation of the state government, its complicity in the crime and its subsequent cover-up. Marches also took place in Acapulco and other Guerrero cities.

- In Oaxaca, four columns of protesters converged in its main plaza. The Oaxaca teachers announced that on October 15 they will hold a caravan of vehicles into Ayotzinapa, Guerrero, where the teachers' school is located. Two of the wounded *normalistas* and one of the disappeared were from Oaxaca. In addition to the protest march, demonstrators also blocked roads and streets. Teacher pickets forced the closure of a fuel distribution center owned by Pemex, the national oil company, in Santa María El Tule. In Salina Cruz, Oaxaca 5,000 teachers marched and blocked access to an oil refinery

and the port of Salinas Cruz.

- In San Cristobal, Chiapas, 20,000 supporters of the Zapatista National Liberation Army marched in silence.
- In Morelia, Michoacan, over 1,000 teachers and *normalistas* marched in protest blocking roads leading to the port.

Further to the north protests took place in Zacatecas (at the nation's oldest normal school) and Guanajuato, where 2,000 students and their supporters marched on the International Cervantes Festival, demanding justice for the killing and disappearance of the *normalistas*.

Protests also took place in Argentina, England, Germany, Spain and the United States.

The massacre and kidnapping of the *normalistas* was the latest of a long line of incidents against students and educators in Guerrero, Oaxaca and elsewhere. The rural students, who often come from poor peasant families, have been targeted as guerrilla members and terrorists. Days before this event, federal police attacked student demonstrators in the same area, forcing them to retreat. In January, two youth were run over. In May 2013, Guerrero state police attacked Ayotzinapa students collecting funds for a festival. Twenty-six were arrested and severely beaten before they were released.

In December 2011, three Ayotzinapa students were shot down and killed during a demonstration of 150 students demanding to meet with the PRD governor, Ángel Aguirre Rivero. Two students were shot point blank in the head.

In December 2007 federal police attacked Ayotzinapa students who had taken over a highway toll booth and were demanding more funds for the school.

Federal and State police responsible for these and other acts of savagery against Guerrero *normalistas* were never punished in any way. At the time of the 2011 killings, governor Aguirre defended the repression and killing as a means of insuring everybody's rights.

Both Aguirre and Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto are furiously engaged in damage control. On Thursday last week, after doing nothing for six days, the governor suddenly sprang into action and ordered a house-to-house search for the missing students and offered a reward for information about their whereabouts.

On Monday, Aguirre, who has rejected demands for his resignation, arranged for federal police officers to disarm the local Iguala police and replace them while things get sorted out. On Thursday, Mexican president Enrique Peña Nieto, attempting damage control, promised to investigate the disappearance and massacres no matter where the

investigation leads.

Peña Nieto called the repression and crime "inhuman," but he himself has been exposed as connected to the people that ordered and carried out this crime.

Moreover, the federal security forces are themselves implicated in mass killings and other atrocities against the population. Most recently, eight federal army soldiers have been arrested in connection with the massacre of 22 young people last June in the municipality of Tlatlaya, in the state of Mexico. While the army first claimed that the youth were killed in a running battle with a drug gang, it has since emerged from witnesses that they were executed in cold blood after being arrested.

So far, neither of the two officials most directly implicated with the massacre in Guerrero has been arrested. Iguala's mayor, José Luis Abarca, claims to have been at a party at the time of the police attack. Abarca enjoys immunity from prosecution despite his well-documented links to organized crime. Governor Aguirre indicated his intention to ask congress to impeach the mayor, who is now in hiding, as is Felipe Flores, in charge of police operations during the massacre.

Guerrero authorities have 26 police officers in custody and four members of the criminal gang Guerreros Unidos (United Warriors), who have supposedly admitted their role in the killings in complicity with the local police.

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