

Police kill eight striking Mexican teachers in Oaxaca massacre

By Don Knowland
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On Sunday, federal police violently attacked road blockades set up by teachers engaged in a weeks-long strike against the government's imposition of a regressive federal education reform law. Police in the southwestern state of Oaxaca opened fire on 500 teachers and their supporters, precipitating a bloodbath in the impoverished town of Nochixtlán. Eight people were killed and dozens wounded in the massacre.

According to a statement issued by Section 22 of the National Union of Education Teachers (SNTE) in Oaxaca, police shot and killed eight people in Nochixtlán, including a professor of indigenous studies and a teacher's son, and wounded 45 others by gunfire. Twenty-two people have "disappeared" after the attack.

Oaxaca's state governor Gabino Cué and Mexico's federal police chief Enrique Galindo confirmed that six civilians had been killed and 53 injured. Galindo also asserted that 55 federal and state police were injured, including three by gunfire, though he failed to document the latter claim.

The National Security Commission and Galindo initially lied about the attack, claiming that the federal and state police clearing the Nochixtlán blockade were unarmed. Galindo said that after teachers had agreed with police to disband, attackers from outside the blockaded area began to fire on both police and protesters in order to create "chaos and conflict."

After the Associated Press and China's Xinhua news agency released footage of police firing on protesters, Galindo was forced to change his story, conceding that he in fact ordered armed police to go to the scene, but only after police and protesters were fired upon by the supposed outside elements. Galindo's changing of his story effectively shredded his and the government's credibility, as did his claim that only three police officers were hit by gunfire, as opposed to over 50 protesters.

Federal sources then farcically claimed that at least eight organizations were behind the violence, including the Popular Revolutionary Front, the Pancho Villa Popular

Front, the Independent Zapatista Agrarian Movement, the Civil Insurgency Movement, the Committee in Defense of the Rights of the People, the Unification Movement and Triqui Struggle, and the Indigenous Front of Binational Organizations.

Teachers who were present at the scene of the attack have torn the police accounts to shreds. According to teachers, police resorted to violent means to clear the blockade early on and made indiscriminate and repeated use of firearms with live ammunition, rubber bullets, and tear and pepper gas.

In response to the police attack, protesters appealed to the local indigenous Mixtec population for reinforcements. Protesters defended themselves with rocks, sticks and rockets. Later, the Nochixtlán municipal palace was torched. Local resistance kept federal forces from entering the town proper.

Also on Sunday, around 800 federal police forcibly cleared hundreds of teachers and supporters who were blockading the principal access point to Oaxaca's Pacific port of Salina Cruz on the Gulf of Tehuantepec. There is a key Pemex oil refinery at the location. Other police detachments cleared highway blockades in the Oaxacan cities of Zanatepec, Ixtepec, Huitzo, and Hacienda Blanca. Later, teachers reinstated five blockades in the area.

The government's resort to armed force marks an escalation of its attempts to crush the month-long work stoppage, to ram the education reform through and to prevent the strike from developing into a broad movement backed by the working class. The federal secretary of public education, Aurelio Nuño Mayer, who heads up the slanderous campaign against teachers, has instituted administrative proceedings to fire at least 4,300 teachers who missed at least four days of classes, and to deduct from pay of other protesting teachers.

Nuño Mayer has refused to negotiate with teachers until they agree they will not challenge any aspect of the reform law, a law that seeks to privatize education and blames teachers for the failures in grossly underfunded Mexican

schools. He has threatened criminal prosecution against teachers he claims have engaged in “widespread illegal, outrageous and improper pressure” to keep other teachers from showing up to teach students and parents from bringing their children to school.

Sunday’s attacks are in line with a larger turn by the Mexican ruling class, in league with US imperialism, to force through privatizations, budget cuts, and pension cuts, while meeting widespread social discontent with massive force.

In March, a congressional commission voted to approve an amendment to the Mexican Constitution in order to grant the president dictatorial powers to establish a state of emergency and suspend democratic rights in cases of “disturbances to the public peace, or anything else that places society in grave danger or conflict,” that is, widespread strikes or protests. All of the major Mexican political parties, including the ruling PRI, the PAN, the PRD and the Greens voted in favor, leaving the pseudo-left Morena party of Andrés Manuel López Obrador free to vote “no.”

That same month, legislators in the state of Mexico, the country’s most populous state, which surrounds the Mexican capital, enacted the so-called Atenco Law, named after the brutal 2006 attack on protesters against land evictions in Atenco ordered by the current president Enrique Peña Nieto, the state’s then governor. The Atenco Law gives the state government the power to invoke emergency rule.

These measures reflect growing concern within ruling circles that the government’s policies can provoke social upheavals. This is now combined with a definite fear that the violence employed against the teachers will provoke widespread sympathy for the strikers. In the last two days, demonstrations have taken place in Mexico City, Acapulco, and other locations across Mexico in opposition to the violence.

In a communication issued yesterday, the “Democratic Teachers Movement” of Section 7 of the SNTE-CNTE in the southern state of Chiapas, condemned the “brutal repression exercised against the combative Section XXII of Oaxaca and the people of Oaxaca” on Sunday. It said that the “fascist Mexican state headed by the assassin of Atenco Enrique Peña Nieto utilizes arms against the people who protest against structural reforms, specifically against those who defend the education of the country.”

The CNTE, which entered into an official political alliance with the bourgeois Morena party last year, is incapable of carrying forward the teachers’ struggle against the education reform. While calling for “dialogue” with Nuño Mayer, the CNTE leadership wants to participate with the government in conducting federal teacher evaluations, and

to maintain the bureaucracy’s right to fire and hire teachers. The teacher evaluations will be used to impose layoffs and lower teacher pay. As for control of firing and hiring, these are decisions that should be made by teachers themselves, and not by CNTE bureaucrats.

The role of CNTE as an obstacle to the teachers is made most clear in its efforts to direct opposition behind the Morena party, its candidates in the recent gubernatorial elections, and López Obrador’s anticipated 2018 run for president.

The last two years have marked a drastic intensification in social opposition in Mexico, a country devastated by a US-backed militarized police force, widespread impoverishment, and drug gangs who operate in collusion with the highest levels of the Mexican state. The September 2014 disappearance of 43 student teachers and subsequent government cover-up provoked demonstrations of hundreds of thousands of people, and Sunday’s attack will further spur the growth of social opposition.

The attacks against the Mexican working class are part of an international phenomenon, as are the attempts to corral social discontent behind a bourgeois party that poses as “left” or even “socialist.” In Mexico, this role is played by Morena and its supporters, while in Greece and Spain a similar part is played by Syriza and Podemos.

Mexican workers and teachers must dispose of all illusions that their interests can be served by an alliance with any section of the Mexican bourgeoisie. Only a revolutionary struggle of the Mexican working class against the capitalist profit system in Mexico and for socialism, in alliance with its class brothers and sisters in all of the Americas and internationally, provides a way forward.

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