Street battles erupt in Guerrero over disappeared Mexican students

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On Monday October 13, Chilpancingo, the capital of the southern Mexican state of Guerrero, was the scene of violent street battles. Both the state government house and City Hall building were set on fire.

More than 600 students, teachers and family members of the 43 student teachers (*normalistas*) who disappeared on September 26 blocked access to Guerrero's government house in Chilpancingo, preventing anyone from entering or leaving the building. The protesters are demanding justice for the disappeared youth and that they be released alive. Driving the anger of the demonstrators is the suspicion that the investigation into their disappearance, and the massacre of six students, is being stonewalled.

The 43 *normalistas*, all students at the rural teachers college in Ayotzinapa, were on their way back from a rally against budget cuts in the city of Iguala 18 days ago when they were blocked by municipal police who attacked them; six students were gunned down and 25 injured. Forty-three students have been missing; the suspicion is that the police handed the disappeared students over to Guerreros Unidos, a criminal gang engaged in drug trafficking.

The demonstrators used chains to seal the buildings and demanded that Guerrero's governor, Ángel Aguirre, meet with them.

Another group of demonstrators (members of the Guerrero's Education Workers Union—CETEG) occupied the legislature building,

Following a standoff that lasted over four hours, the Aguirre administration sent police against the protesters, including anti-riot units and helicopters. In the ensuing confrontation, the bureaucrats who had been trapped in the building managed to escape, further enraging the demonstrators, who then set fire to the building. The demonstrators set fire to the Chilpancingo City Hall as well.

On Tuesday, members of the Federation of Socialist Rural Students took over three radio stations to press for Aguirre's resignation. Also on Tuesday, four banks and stores were taken over, including convenience stores and fast food chains.

On Tuesday, CETEG leaders broke off negotiations with the governor, who called the demonstrators "savages" for the destruction that took place on Monday. A CETEG spokesperson indicated that it is the state that is guilty of savagery: "It is the state that shoots down students and makes them disappear."

It is now known that on the day of the massacre, there were several attacks on the students by police and criminal elements, who blocked and shot at three busloads of students, shattering windows and wounding and killing students.

Twenty-eight bodies were found last week, mutilated and burned in shallow graves near Iguala. Jesús Murillo Karam, the Mexican attorney general, said in a press conference Tuesday that none of the 28 corpses were those of the *normalistas*. Another four mass gravesites are being investigated, but government officials have yet to announce how many bodies they contain.

CETEG and other worker, student and human rights groups have called a meeting that will take place today, Wednesday, to decide on a plan of national mobilizations. The teachers plan to walk off their jobs across the state on Friday.

Professors at the Autonomous University of Guerrero also planned to march on Tuesday and strike next week, also demanding Aguirre's resignation. In Michoacan State, *normalistas* commandeered more than 20 buses to travel to Guerrero in support of their Guerrero comrades.

So far, Aguirre has ruled out resigning. Everything

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points to a new wave of repression of demonstrators, students and teachers. There are reports that nearly one thousand federal security forces are being sent into the state.

In Mexico City, Carlos Navarrete, leader of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), declared last week that the party's National Executive Committee assumed responsibility for the actions of Iguala's PRD mayor, José Luis Abarca. "We recognize our error, and apologize for it," he said, begging "forgiveness" from the citizens of Iguala and Guerrero. The PRD's error, according to Navarrete, was not having investigated Abarca's ties with organized crime before nominating him as the PRD candidate for mayor of Iguala. Both Abarca and his police chief Felipe Flores have fled.

Navarrete also suggested that the resignation of governor Aguirre, also of the PRD, be put to a popular vote.

The shooting down of protesting students in Iguala is the latest act in a generalized dirty war against working class and peasant youth in Mexico. Almost three months to the day before the Iguala massacre, the army summarily executed 22 youths. These and many other incidents, carried out with impunity, reveal a society at war with its own people. Killings and torture and disappearances take place with impunity.

This impunity extents to Mexican president Enrique Peña Nieto himself. On May 4, 2006, as governor of the State of Mexico, he sent state police in an act of brutal repression against the citizens of San José de Atenco, who were protesting the building of an airport on their land. Two men where killed, ten women were raped by the police, and many others where tortured and injured. At the time, Peña Nieto congratulated himself for the way that the police handled the situation.

Under the pressure of mass popular anger at the Iguala massacre (15,000 people protested in Mexico City on October 8), Peña Nieto is now promising swift justice.

Behind the constant repression of the youth and workers is the crisis of Mexican society. Nearly half of all Mexicans (54 million, out of a population of 120 million) live in poverty. Eleven million barely survive in extreme misery.

In contrast, the number of billionaires continues to rise—22 in 2013 and 27 this year—as does their wealth (170 billion dollars this year). This oligarchy is well connected to all the political forces in Mexican society, including the supposedly "left" PRD. Judges, politicians, the police and the army all do its bidding.

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