

# Mexico's disappeared students

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It is nearly four weeks since police in the town of Iguala in Mexico's impoverished southern state of Guerrero violently attacked a group of some 80 young student teachers, leaving at least six dead, 17 wounded and 43 "disappeared."

The students, from the Ayotzinapa Rural Normal School, had been protesting against state cuts to their college and raising funds for a demonstration in Mexico City marking the anniversary of the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre, which left hundreds of students and civilians dead in one of the worst atrocities of modern Mexican history.

Now the massacre of the *normalistas* (as the youth studying to be rural teachers are known) in Iguala marks a new historic crime, provoking public outrage, angry demonstrations and student strikes across Mexico.

The precise fate of the 43 disappeared students is still uncertain. Some fellow students who managed to escape reported that the police turned them over to a local drug cartel known as *Guerreros Unidos* (United Warriors). Alejandro Solalinde, a Mexican priest active in human rights issues, said this week that witnesses had come forward who testified that the gangsters burned at least some of the students alive.

The horrific episode has exposed how, under the cover of a so-called "war on drugs," state institutions and security forces have been taken over by and integrated with the drug cartels. The process is described by Mexicans with terms like *narcopolitica* and *narcoestado*, in which all of the bourgeois parties, from the right to the so-called "left," are implicated.

The massacre has also underscored the rising inequality and savage violence that have gone hand in hand with Mexico's free market "reforms." This process has steadily deepened over the past three decades, culminating in the "Pact for Mexico" introduced by the current PRI (Institutional

Revolutionary Party) president, Enrique Peña Nieto, with the backing of all the other major parties.

This package includes measures aimed at wiping out some of the last remaining gains from the Mexican Revolution of a century ago in order to make the country more attractive to foreign capitalist investors. Among them are an energy "reform" that opens up the state-owned PEMEX oil monopoly to privatization and foreign ownership, as well as labor "reforms" designed to introduce greater "flexibility" in terms of the exploitation and firing of workers.

The first plank of this reactionary capitalist program to be introduced, however, was an education measure directed at scapegoating and punishing teachers, while ignoring the abysmal infrastructure and deep-going social problems that underlie the crisis in public education. Signed into law last month, it is aimed at subordinating education to the needs of private profit and big business.

The *normalistas*, Mexico's idealistic future teachers, were among the most militant opponents of this kind of capitalist "reform." It is hardly a coincidence that they were targeted for unspeakable violence.

The massacre in Iguala is not an isolated incident. Since the so-called drug war was launched in 2006 under Peña Nieto's predecessor, President Felipe Calderón, an estimated 130,000 Mexicans have lost their lives, while, according to the government's own figures, 22,322 "disappeared" remain missing.

Just last June, in the town Tlatlaya, Mexican troops summarily executed 21 unarmed civilians, including a 15-year-old girl, a massacre that the government unsuccessfully attempted to cover up.

These methods are clearly not just a matter of a war on drugs, but grow inevitably out of a society characterized by unsustainable levels of inequality. Mexico is the most unequal of the 34 member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and

Development (OECD), with the richest 10 percent of the population having an average income almost 30 times as high as the bottom 10 percent. While Mexico is home to the world's second richest man, Carlos Slim, and at least 15 other billionaires, approximately half of its population lives in poverty. The country's minimum wage has not been increased since 1976, losing 77 percent of its purchasing power in the meantime.

Official politics is entirely subordinated to the interests of a new oligarchy and the privileged sections of the upper-middle class closest to it. All of the parties are implicated in the bloody events in Guerrero, most immediately the supposedly left bourgeois parties around which various pseudo-socialist organizations have gravitated.

Members of the PRD (Democratic Revolutionary Party), founded by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, held both the governorship of Guerrero and the mayor's office in Iguala. The PRD mayor, Jose Luis Abarca, has since gone into hiding with his wife, who is the sister of one of the main leaders of the United Warriors drug gang.

Meanwhile, MORENA (Movement for National Renovation), the party founded by Andrés Manuel López Obrador, is also deeply implicated. López Obrador, the former Mexico City mayor and PRD presidential candidate, founded MORENA after leaving the PRD on what he said were "the best of terms." He backed Abarca's candidacy for mayor of Iguala on the advice of the latter's close friend, Lázaro Mazón Alonso, the former Iguala mayor who was dismissed recently from his post as Guerrero secretary of health. Mazón, a MORENA candidate for governor of the state, declared recently that he could "not answer for his friends."

Notably silent on the Iguala massacre is the Obama administration in Washington. US imperialism has major interests in Mexico, which is the United States' third-largest trading partner. Mexico provides US corporations with a huge army of cheap labor employed in the *maquiladora* assembly plants, auto production and other industries directed to the US market. US finance and oil corporations are eagerly awaiting the privatization of the Mexican oil industry and the profit opportunities this will open up.

Washington is also deeply implicated in the bloody repression in Mexico, supplying some \$2 billion in

arms aid to the country under the so-called Merida Initiative, while training security forces and sending US "advisors" across the border. It is entirely possible that the cops involved in the Iguala massacre were trained and armed by the US, and by no means excluded that the aid found its way into the hands of the United Warriors gang as well.

In the weeks since the massacre, the only official statements from Washington have been to warn American tourists to stay away from protests over the disappeared *normalistas*. This silence is a clear expression of direct complicity in the violent suppression of the struggles of the Mexican working class.

For workers, students and youth in the US, the Iguala massacre must be taken as a serious warning. The same murderous methods will be employed against mass struggles north of the Rio Grande as well.

Joined in a common process of production that takes place across the militarized US-Mexican border, and with millions of Mexican workers employed in the US itself, there is a powerful objective basis for the unification of the US and Mexican working class in a united struggle against a common class enemy. What is required is the building of a new revolutionary leadership based on the socialist and internationalist program of Trotskyism, embodied in the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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