

More than 100,000 march in Mexico City over disappeared students

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A mass protest march of more than 100,000 students, teachers, education workers and ordinary citizens took place in Mexico City on Wednesday, November 5, in solidarity with the 43 missing teaching students, *normalistas*, of the Ayotzinapa Normal School, who have been missing for over 40 days.

This was the third mass demonstration and by far the largest and angriest. Many of the participants directed their anger at President Enrique Peña Nieto, demanding that he resign. One protest sign denounced him “for corruption, betraying the nation, ineptitude,” calling him a “repressor and assassin.”

Others carried signs that said, “It was the State.” Leading the march were students from Mexico City’s National Autonomous Metropolitan University (UNAM), the Polytechnic Institute, rural teaching colleges, and Iberian-American University, who all had joined a massive nationwide 72-hour student strike.

At Mexico City’s Constitution Square (the Zócalo), many thousands greeted the protesters as they arrived after the two-and-a-half-hour march from the president’s mansion (Los Pinos). At the mass rally, family members of the 43 disappeared students spoke to the demonstrators. None of the major political parties (the governing PRI, the PAN, the PRD, the Greens) were involved in the protest.

The day before the demonstration, a special police detachment arrested the mayor of Iguala (Jose Luis Abarca) and his wife (Maria Pineda), reportedly the intellectual authors of the September 26 massacre of the Ayotzinapa *normalistas* (6 were killed, 25 were wounded, 43 were kidnapped by the police and turned over to the *Guerreros Unidos* narcotics gang). The couple had been holed up in Iztapalapa, a crowded Mexico City neighborhood of auto parts businesses, body shops, and small factories. Iztapalapa itself is a PRD stronghold, governed by Jesus Valencia, who is close to former Mexico City mayor Marcelo Ebrard.

According to the Mexico City ~~Proceso~~ weekly they had a suitcase full of money with them. There is as yet no sign of Iguala police chief Felipe Flores, who had also fled with Abarca.

Proceso also placed a question mark on the role of PRD leader Jesús Zambrano in the affair. Abarca had met in Mexico City with Zambrano three days after the massacre, as it was already making national headlines. Abarca had been involved in the deaths of leaders of striking miners in 2013 and had been accused of assassinating PRD rivals in Guerrero. It is not credible that Zambrano did not know this. Zambrano claims that at the meeting he asked Abarca to turn himself in.

Also on Tuesday, UNAM students, no doubt in reaction to these developments, expelled PRD leader Jesús Zambrano from the Law Department of that University, calling him an “assassin, traitor,” and demanding that the PRD take responsibility for the Ayotzinapa massacre.

The arrest of the couple did nothing to soothe the anger of the marchers, who are demanding an end to Mexico’s system of crony capitalism, in which corruption, impunity, bribery have been institutionalized.

In the coastal city of Acapulco (Guerrero’s largest city) and in Chilpancingo (Guerrero’s capital), *normalistas* and teachers, members of the dissident teachers union CETEG, have occupied federal and state court buildings. Also in Chilpancingo, thousands of students blocked the main connecting highway into Acapulco.

The case of the missing *normalistas* has become an issue of international significance. On Wednesday, scores of demonstrators marched in front of the Mexican Consulate in New York City with their hands painted blood red. Other demonstrations took place in Argentina, Chile, Netherlands, the United Kingdom and France. At the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) in Río Piedras, students and professors rallied in solidarity with Mexico City’s day of protest.

The Peña Nieto administration is faced with a severe social and political crisis. The president himself was slow to respond to the September 26 massacre and more concerned with the neo-liberal pro-business reforms that he and his partners in the “Mexico Pact”—his own ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the right-wing National Action Party (PAN) and the PRD—have been pushing through. Taken by surprise by the uprising of students and education workers, the president is now proposing a second “pact” within the political establishment, supposedly to attend to the security needs of the country.

This so called “security pact,” promoted by Peña Nieto, had been proposed by CEOs Claudio Gonzalez, of Kimberley Clark Mexico and Sergio Argüelles of papermaker FINSA Mexico, as well as others at the 12th annual Mexico Business Summit last month in Querétaro, Mexico. According to Gonzalez, the fallout from the Guerrero massacre has to be seen as “a great opportunity” to confront “decisively” the problem of corruption and impunity. At the same time, the Kimberly Clark executive cautioned that whatever is done will take a long time, since this problem (corruption impunity) derives from the sale and consumption of drugs.

That the purpose of the new pact is to give greater powers to the federal police and military was made explicit by the governor of Aguascalientes State, who called for a centralized command and an efficient justice system.

Wednesday’s march in México City was dominated by both outrage over the vicious attack on the *normalistas* and demands of protesters for a transformation of Mexican society. “Another country is possible and we are here to build it!” said one banner; many other signs denounced the “state.” This struggle can find a way forward only through a turn to the working class on the basis of a socialist program.



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