

# The disappeared students and Mexico's deepening political crisis

Don Knowland  
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Even before the September 26 kidnapping and apparent gruesome massacre of 43 young *normalistas* (teaching students) from a rural college in Ayotzinapa, Guerrero, discontent with the three major political parties in Mexico—the ruling centrist PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party), the right-wing PAN (Authentic National Party) and the center-fake-left PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution)—was already widespread.

All three parties joined in President Enrique Peña Nieto's unpopular “Pact for Mexico,” which has sought to fundamentally overhaul energy, telecommunications, educational and labor laws in order to eviscerate decades of gains won by workers, and open up the Mexican economy to unrestricted penetration by foreign capital.

What had been widely depicted as “Mexico's moment” in the international financial press was viewed as anything-but by all except the oligarchy that now controls the levers of power in Mexico. As for Peña Nieto himself, his approval numbers in polling likewise have been dismally low since early in the year.

With the revelation of state responsibility for the disappearance of the *normalistas*, at the hands of the police, acting in concert with members of the *Guerreros Unidos* gang, a tidal wave of revulsion with the entire political setup has burst forth. All three major parties are currently viewed as partners in the crimes and economic oppression emanating from the Mexican state.

Adding fuel to this fire, a corruption scandal erupted in the last week underscoring the intense social inequality that pervades every aspect of Mexican society. It involved Peña Nieto's award to one of his closest corporate supporters of a multibillion contract to construct a high-speed “bullet” train without competitive bidding. Investigative reporters revealed that the company had financed the purchase of Peña Nieto's posh \$7 million private mansion in Mexico City, which had not been listed on his annual report of assets.

The criminality, however, does not stop with Peña Nieto and his ruling PRI. The mayor of Iguala, José Luis Abarca, who on September 26 ordered local police to detain the *normalistas*, was a PRD member, and through his wife had family ties to the *Guerreros Unidos*. The initial inept investigation by state authorities led to the forced resignation of the Guerrero state

governor, Ángel Aguirre, also a PRD member. Accusations that Aguirre's campaign for governor had been financed by members of the notorious Beltrán Leyva drug cartel surfaced in the wake of the Iguala incident.

Public security in Guerrero has been under federal control for years, for the last two under Peña Nieto's PRI administration. A battalion of federal troops stationed right outside of Iguala did nothing to rein in the *Guerreros Unidos*. They reportedly looked the other way when local police, at Abarca's command, detained the *normalistas*.

Last year, federal authorities, including Mexican attorney general Jesús Murillo Karam, took no action in the face of testimony that Abarca had personally participated in the murder of agrarian activists, including a rival PRD leader. The national head of the PRD likewise ignored those revelations. Abarca stayed in power, until forced to flee over the disappearance of the *normalistas*.

The federal government also failed to seriously investigate the December 2011 murder of other Ayotzinapa students. The military executed 22 youth in June 2014 in Tlatlaya in nearby Mexico state, and then tried to cover up its crime.

The federal investigation of the Iguala disappearances has been fumbling, at best. Belief is widespread that the government's real aim is to sweep the incident under the rug as soon as possible.

Attorney General Murillo's lament at the end of last Friday's press conference that he was tired of answering questions about the *normalistas* unleashed an avalanche of postings on social media sites in which Mexicans declared how tired the people were of state and drug violence and the close ties between them, and the corruption, impunity and lies of politicians. Masses of Mexicans reflexively disbelieve anything the authorities say.

Militant demonstrations, some of the largest and most broad-based seen in Mexico in decades, have demanded that the government produce the *normalistas*. Marchers have called for the prosecution of all those responsible for their disappearance, and the removal of all responsible politicians, up to and including the president of the Mexican republic. Demonstrators have blocked highways and government and political party buildings, and torched others.

In response to these developments, first the PAN, which oversaw a militarized “war on drugs” under ex-President Felipe Calderón that cost over 100,000 lives, and then Peña Nieto himself called for a new Pact for Mexico to address the violence against the Mexican people and the insecurity plaguing the country. The government would issue a call to meet with civil groups in order to design a structure to remedy these ills. The proposal was forgotten almost as soon as it was put forth, given that almost everyone viewed it as a transparent attempt to defuse the political crisis, or as a public relations ploy geared to placating increasingly skittish foreign investors.

On Sunday, a “National Popular Assembly” (ANP) formed by the militant Guerrero education workers union (CETEG) and more than 100 civil organizations, including the society of the Ayotzinapa Rural Normal School, met at the school. The assembly resolved to intensify the demonstrations and “radicalize” their actions.

The assembly announced that on December 1 a caravan headed by the parents of the missing students would leave from the school for the state government building in the state capital Chilpancingo, and then head for Mexico City, where a permanent demonstration post (a *plantón*) would be maintained. A similar group, the Guerrero Popular Movement, also assembled on Friday to discuss further action along the same lines.

On Tuesday, some 1,000 people led by students and CETEG marched in Chilpancingo, throwing rocks and firebombs in confrontations with riot police. Marchers reportedly torched the PRI’s Guerrero state headquarters, and briefly took a police commander prisoner.

According to John Ackerman, a widely read columnist and law professor at Mexico’s National Autonomous University, an “explosive synthesis” of three previous, unresolved social movements is emerging—that of victims of the drug war; of the *yo soy 132* (I am 132) student protest movement that emerged to confront Peña Nieto and the election setup during the 2012 election (sparked by his defense of the violent suppression of a local protest when he was governor of Mexico state in 2006); and of opponents of his education and energy reforms. Ackerman called it a “true bottom-up affair” that could “lead to long term social and political change.”

But such movements have repeatedly led to a political dead end, rather than presenting any serious challenge to the ruling setup. For example, militant demonstrations by the radical wing of the national teachers union and maintenance of a protest post in downtown Mexico City accomplished nothing in terms of impeding Peña Nieto’s attack on teachers’ rights. Similarly, much like Occupy Wall Street, *yo so 132* fizzled out, becoming a tepid middle class movement that made little more than vague calls for increased democracy.

In the last few years, such protest movements have gravitated around support for ex-PRD presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who left the party two years ago and

has now obtained electoral registration for his Movement for National Regeneration (MORENA) party.

In his usual demagogic fashion, López Obrador on Friday denounced Peña Nieto, as “the representative of the mafia in power.” He demanded that the president step down by the first of December and call for new elections through which the government could be “democratically renewed,” creating a “new form of politics that permits the rebirth of Mexico.”

But the present Mexican economic and political crises are not simply a result of the Mexican political traditions of authoritarianism and corruption; rather they are a concentrated expression of an intensifying class struggle arising from the world capitalist crisis. López Obrador’s lofty phrases in reality disguise a bankrupt nationalist program that cannot provide a way forward for the Mexican masses. The grab bag that constitutes the politics of MORENA ultimately serves sections of Mexican capital that struggle under the grip of the billionaire overlords.

López Obrador and his MORENA party are, in any case, implicated in the monstrous crime against the *normalistas*. He backed Abarca’s candidacy for mayor of Iguala on the advice of the latter’s political patron, Lázaro Mazón, whom López Obrador was grooming as the MORENA candidate for governor of the state.

In the final analysis, MORENA is there to serve as a bulwark for the Mexican ruling class against the development of rapidly growing social opposition into a conscious, revolutionary political movement against capitalism.

The burning need of the Mexican working class is a workers’ party independent of all sections of the bourgeoisie, and armed with a revolutionary program based on uniting the working classes of North, Central and South America in a common struggle for the overthrow of capitalism. Only a Mexican section of the International Committee of the Fourth International will be up to this historic task.



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