

Los Angeles: One thousand protest Mexican student massacre and disappearances

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22 November 2014

Several columns of protesters marched in Los Angeles on Thursday to protest the disappearance of 43 students at a rural teacher's college in Ayotzinapa, Guerrero, Mexico, nearly two months ago.

The protesters, numbering over one thousand, came together at McArthur Park, west of downtown, and across the street from the Mexican consulate. The protesters represented a cross section of this city's Latino working class and youth. Many carried handmade signs in English and Spanish. "It was the State," I indicated one sign. Others made reference to Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata. Many of the marchers wore black. Photographs of the disappeared students were displayed and many held candles in their honor.

There was a mixture of sadness and defiance among those attending the rally. Juan, a 28-year-old worker at a machine screw plant in Long Beach who approached the Socialist Equality Party literature table, nearly broke down in tears trying to describe what has brought him to the demonstration—"anger and pain that this is happening, and also a feeling of impotence." Juan cut the interview short, "I have no words, only pain and a desire to cry."

Anger, not sadness, dominated the sentiments of Santiago, a retired forklift operator at the Los Angeles airport, who made clear his opposition to the demand that Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto resign. "He needs to be arrested," he said. "People need to find out what he knows. After that he should be hung at the Columbus Rotunda in Mexico City."

Santiago is from the city of Altamajalcingo in Guerrero, in the highlands above Iguala, where the *normalistas* were massacred and abducted. He described how when he retired, six years ago, he and his family moved back to their native city only to find

that the local criminal elements ran a protection racket, in cahoots with the city authorities. They saw Santiago as a candidate for extortion. "I had no one to turn to, so we came back to Los Angeles," he declared. "I truly feared for my life and for my family; it was a miracle that we made it back."

"Peña Nieto knows very well what is going on," he said. "The criminal gangs are there to do the dirty work of those that really rule, they are the muscle (*los pesados*). Any time that someone has to be gotten out of the way, they are the ones assigned to do it. Now they accuse the wife of Iguala's mayor of ordering the kidnappings, but I am sure she herself was following orders from people higher up."

"The US president Obama is also part of all this," said Santiago. "Whenever he flies to Mexico City he meets in secret with Peña Nieto. If they had nothing to hide, their meetings would be out in the open."

Rafael, an auto parts worker, originally from El Salvador, echoed Santiago's remarks. "We came from El Salvador 32 years ago, after death squads killed my brother. Now I learn about Mexico and I say to myself 'this is how it begins.'"

"I remember people fighting for better education and for jobs. At night death squads would swoop down and disappear them. In today's El Salvador, the equivalent of the drug gangs are known as *cholos*. They live off protection money (they call it *cuotas* there).

"Behind the *cholos* is the government really, not the other way around like they sometimes try to make us believe. We really need many changes, in El Salvador, in Central America and in México. This has to stop."

"The solution is a second Mexican revolution," said Edgar, a restaurant worker, originally from northern Mexico. "The presence of narcotics gangs is a problem everywhere. They are in the PRI government of Peña

Nieto. They were in the PAN government of [Felipe] Calderón.

“Personally, I found out about this rally from a web site that listed all the protests that were taking place. I wanted to express my disgust with the disappearance of the 43 *normalistas* and that they have not been found.

“The political establishment is totally corrupt, nobody is interested in good government, or in what benefits the people, but on how to line their pockets, from Peña Nieto on down. The criminal gangs play a role in this. They complement the political class. One finds connections everywhere you go, even here in the United States.”

Maribel, a receptionist born in Mexico and living in the US for the last 18 years, articulated her anger with regard to the disappearance of the 43 *normalistas* and added that this development is only the latest in a long nefarious series of *desaparecidos*, not just in Mexico, but also in Latin America, especially Chile, Argentina and Brazil.

“Change is not an option, but a must, and it has to start from the root of the problem,” she said. Asked if she thought removing Peña Nieto would resolve the problem, she said, “It’s not a question of this politician or the other. All of them are responsible for the current state of affairs.”

“The PRI is not the only party with blood on their hands,” Maribel said. “They are all involved. During election time you hear their promises, which they systematically never maintain,” she emphasized, insisting that none of the politicians can be trusted. “Politicians should be public servants, as such they should not be paid. Instead, today politics is all about money and that seeds corruption.”

Maribel went on to speak about the bourgeois revolutionary tradition of Mexico: “Zapatistas have been revolutionaries for a century.” When asked what social force is capable of transforming society today, however, she pointed to workers: “I think only the working class today is in the position to lead a revolution. Look at all the people at this rally: they are all workers.”

Aura, 21 years old and born in the US, recently graduated from the University of California in Santa Cruz in sociology and creative writing. She writes poetry.

She recently acquired a copy of Leon Trotsky’s

“Literature and Art” and came over to the SEP literature table to find out more about Trotsky. She came to the protest rally with her mother, also an artist, and her boyfriend. “What confronts Mexican students is part of something much bigger,” she said, “and includes what is going on in Ukraine, and even in the United States. Mexico is a capitalist country, and because of that finds it impossible to deal with drug dealers that are integrated into the capitalist system.”

Aura also added her mistrust in the media as well as academic circles: “The media won’t tell the truth: their business is to manipulate information. Behind them are governments, which falsify and exploit that information to push through their agenda.”



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