

Six months since the disappearance of the 43 Mexican students

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2 April 2015

On March 26, thousands rallied at Mexico City's iconic Angel of Independence statue to mark six months since the kidnapping of 43 students from the Ayotzinapa rural normal school. The demonstration included students, teachers, workers and members of the middle class. Many carried signs demanding the ouster of Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto and charging the federal government with the students' disappearance.

Six months have passed since 43 *normalistas*, as the rural teaching college students are known in Mexico, were kidnapped in the city of Iguala in the southern state of Guerrero, after suffering a savage armed assault. To this day, the students are still missing, and many questions remain about the role of the government, the armed forces and the police.

The bare facts are that uniformed police, accompanied by at least three gangsters, attacked five buses transporting students from the Ayotzinapa teaching college, killing six people, wounding more than 20 and disappearing 43. The Iguala police took the 43 students to the nearby city of Cocula, handed them over to its police, who in turn allegedly delivered them into the hands of a local narcotics gang, *Guerreros Unidos*.

Out of those facts, the government of president Enrique Peña Nieto has constructed a self-serving narrative of damage control. According to his version of events, the police acted under orders from Iguala's corrupt mayor and his wife, who has family connections with *Guerreros Unidos*—end of story.

Federal authorities continue to insist that the case involves a criminal act, like many others, and reject that this crime against humanity involves anyone else—the federal police or the military. They deny that the massacre occurred as part of a war against the rural education system and the Mexican working class.

However, an investigation by the Mexico City newsweekly *Proceso*, with the support of UC Berkeley's

Investigative Reporting Program, exposed the role of the federal police and the military in the abduction and massacre of the students. Documentation has been uncovered that the *normalistas* were being watched by federal and state police from the time they left Ayotzinapa at 6:00 pm on the day of the massacre. The federal police command in Guerrero's capital city, Chilpancingo, was kept fully informed, including about the news that a massacre was taking place.

The one-sided and murderous attack took place less than three kilometers (1.8 miles) from an army base—within earshot. The soldiers of the 27th infantry regiment stationed there are charged with combating organized crime; yet they did not intervene until two hours after the massacre. The armed forces so far refuse to release information or reports of their activity that night.

The crime and the kidnapping of the students led to a frantic search by relatives and volunteers. This soon turned to anger, as the magnitude of the crime became evident. Since then, the massacre in Iguala and the disappearance of the 43 *normalistas* have acquired global significance, triggering angry mass demonstrations month after month in Mexico, as well as protests throughout the world.

It took 10 days for the government of President Enrique Peña Nieto to abandon its attitude of studied indifference to the killings and become involved in the investigation, which it now claims is one of the most exhaustive in Mexican history. Hundreds are in custody, including police officers, drug gang members and Iguala's former mayor and his wife.

It would take another two months before the authorities came to the conclusion that the students had been executed, then incinerated and dumped in a river. The government based its findings on testimony from some of those arrested. The Guerrero Unidos killers allegedly confessed to forming a human pyre in a ravine next to a

Colula garbage dump and setting the bodies on fire at a very high temperature for over 12 hours in an attempt to hide any evidence of their crime. The killers then chopped up the remains and dumped them in garbage bags in the San Juan River.

Relatives of the disappeared *normalistas* reject this official version of events.

Meanwhile, hundreds of federal police plus local forces and volunteers searched for the missing. Unmarked graves were found in the region containing dozens of bodies, presumed victims of the narcotics gangs and their police associates. Most of those found have yet to be identified.

The remains fished out of the river have left no forensic evidence of any value other than part of a finger and a molar, which a DNA test proved belonged to one of the disappeared youth. Despite that, forensic experts have declared that there is no good evidence linking the finger and molar with the Colula ravine.

In Guerrero last week, a group of parents of the missing called on the National Electoral Institute (that regulates the electoral process) to cancel upcoming state elections in protest and on the grounds that all the potential candidates have links to the drug gangs and cover up for the waves of killings that have taken place. Despite intervention by the Peña Nieto administration and the federal police, killings and drug terror has not stopped, neither in Guerrero, nor in neighboring Michoacán, Oaxaca or in the State of Mexico. An atmosphere of impunity protects the police and armed forces.

Despite government protestations that the investigation into the disappearance of the student youths has been exhaustive and that many of those involved are in custody, neither the students nor their remains have been found. Relatives and supporters believe that there is no justice for them, as the government increasingly loses legitimacy.

In particular, many questions have been raised about the role of the Mexican Army. The 27th infantry regiment stationed in Iguala was fully aware of the police attack on the students as it was occurring, and may have helped with their abduction. There have been demonstrations and clashes with the military at the army base by parents demanding that their children be returned.

Defense Secretary General Salvador Cienfuegos has arrogantly refused to divulge to the public or to the legislature information in his possession on the Ayotzinapa massacre or on the execution-style killing last June, by the army's 102nd regiment, of 22 people who

had already surrendered in Tlatlaya, in the State of Mexico. The National Defense Secretariat (SEDENA) only "speaks to the President," said Cienfuegos.

Relatives of the missing point out that when the army did arrive at the scene of the Iguala massacre, in the early hours of September 27, Omar García, one of the wounded students, was told by one of the arriving soldiers, "you guys asked for it; this is what you get for doing what you do." García also recounted that as the assault began that night, students tried to contact the media and were told that they had been told to stay away. When federal authorities took his testimony, García said that they tried to link him to organized crime.

The *Proceso* report points to a possible motive for targeting the students: opposition within the teachers college and among teachers and students to the education policies of the government.

Rural teaching colleges have been particularly targeted because they are considered centers of left-wing political activism.

The teaching college in Ayotzinapa was founded in 1926 as part of a commitment by the governments that followed the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917) to expand rural literacy and rural education. By the mid-thirties, there were 36 rural teaching colleges. Typically, they take in impoverished peasant youth (140 each year at Ayotzinapa) and train them to become rural educators.

Six months after the forced disappearance of the 43 *normalistas*, social tensions continue to rise, while all of the major parties, from the ruling PRI and the right-wing PAN to the bourgeois "left" PRD and the Morena Party of Andres Lopez Obrador, are implicated in this historic crime.

The conditions are emerging for a revolutionary explosion against Mexico's corrupt and criminal government. What is needed is a workers' party, independent of all the factions of the bourgeoisie, and armed with a revolutionary socialist program based on the unity of the working class throughout the Americas in a common struggle to put an end to capitalism. Only through the building of a Mexican section of the International Committee of the Fourth International can this historic task be realized.



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