

# The Oaxaca massacre and the eruption of class struggle in Mexico

**Neil Hardt****25 June 2016**

On Sunday, June 19, a force of heavily-armed Mexican federal police fired automatic weapons into a crowd of 500 striking teachers and their supporters blocking a highway in the impoverished town of Nochixtlán in the southern state of Oaxaca, killing at least thirteen and wounding dozens more.

The massacre reveals the brutal lengths to which the Mexican ruling class will go to impose its attacks on Mexican workers. Opposition will not be brooked.

Those who lost their lives, mostly young people, were protesting in defense of public education. Teachers across Mexico, most forcefully in Mexico's deeply impoverished southwest, have demonstrated against efforts by President Enrique Peña Nieto to privatize education and impose authoritarian methods of testing and hiring teachers.

In the wake of last Sunday's massacre, a groundswell of opposition has emerged nationally against state repression and right-wing "reforms," part of Peña Nieto's "Pact for Mexico," aimed at slashing social services. Thousands of workers, youth and peasants attended funeral processions for the dead in Nochixtlán. Residents have since rebuilt the barricades taken down in the police operation.

On Wednesday, 200,000 doctors and nurses struck in sympathy with the teachers and against attempts to privatize the federal social security and health systems. Students at major Mexican universities boycotted classes this week to protest Sunday's attack and ongoing efforts by the government to impose higher education costs.

Parents of the 43 Ayotzinapa student teachers "disappeared" by the Mexican government in September 2014 continue to tour the country in protest, after the Peña Nieto administration shut down the only independent investigation of the attack.

Through the Pact for Mexico, the Mexican oligarchy, backed by US imperialism, seeks to implement a massive transfer of wealth from the Mexican working class to the banks and corporations.

The US ambassador to Mexico, Roberta Jacobson, met with Peña Nieto the day after the attack in Oaxaca to express support for his reforms. After a perfunctory and insincere expression of regret over the slaughter in Nochixtlán, Jacobson emphasized that the "opportunities for bilateral cooperation have never been better" between the US and Mexico, and that "only through alliances on education can we succeed in training the Twenty-First Century labor force."

It is likely that the federal police who opened fire in Nochixtlán were US-trained officers using weapons provided by the Obama administration. Through the Merida Initiative, the US has spent over \$2.3 billion arming and training Mexico's police and armed forces since 2008, providing them with deadly weapons, drones, surveillance equipment and airplanes.

In addition, the US Northern Command has spent hundreds of millions of dollars on separate training programs that, unlike under the Merida Initiative, are not subject to any human rights withholding provisions. Nearly 5,000 Mexican police and military personnel were trained at US military bases in 2015 alone.

The educational reforms of the Pact for Mexico have their origins in similar programs being implemented in the United States and around the world. In cities such as Detroit and Chicago, the Obama administration has worked closely with the trade unions to impose pension and wage cuts, school closures and antidemocratic testing policies on millions of teachers.

The resurgence of class struggle and, in particular, the struggle of teachers, is not only a Mexican, but rather an international phenomenon. In Detroit, thousands of

teachers staged “sickouts” to protest the dilapidated condition of the city’s schools. Similar strikes and protests have taken place in Chicago, Los Angeles, Seattle and Atlanta. A strike wave of teachers and professors has swept across five Brazilian states in recent weeks, as opposition grows to counter-reforms undertaken by Interim President Michel Temer.

The Mexican ruling class has responded to the growth of social opposition and the reemergence of the class struggle not only by employing state violence. As a backup, it has also brought to the forefront various self-proclaimed “left” or even “socialist” groups in an attempt to disarm social protests and prevent working-class opposition from taking an independent, revolutionary form.

Key is the role of former Mexico City mayor and ex-Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who now heads the National Regeneration Movement (MORENA) party. He founded this new party in 2014 after splitting with the supposedly “left” PRD. López Obrador, who will run for president in 2018, pledges to “transform Mexico through the electoral process.”

In the wake of this week's signs of a broadening movement of strikes and protests, López Obrador posted a video calling for a national protest march for Sunday, June 26 against the “political mafia” and “hypocritical conservatives.” In the video, López Obrador says the demonstration will be directed against corruption and will pose the question: “Why not choose humanism? Why not search for reconciliation and peace?” As for the teachers’ work stoppage, he calls for a “dialogue” with a state that has ruled out compromise.

MORENA is being groomed to play a similar role as SYRIZA in Greece and Podemos in Spain. The party won a majority of seats in the Mexico City Constituent Assembly in the June 5 elections. It is being widely hailed as Mexico's foremost “broad left” party after the collapse in support for the PRD. The latter has been thoroughly exposed as a right-wing party by its vote for the Pact for Mexico, its role in carrying out and covering up the Ayotzinapa massacre, and its electoral alliances with the right-wing National Action Party (PAN).

Like its counterparts in Greece and Spain, MORENA is a nationalist, pro-capitalist, anti-socialist party. Its

radical phraseology is designed to tie the Mexican working class to the blood-soaked Mexican state. If brought to power, MORENA will play the same role as SYRIZA in Greece. It will enforce the Pact of Mexico in conjunction with US imperialism, and, if necessary, respond to opposition in the working class with violence and repression.

The Mexican working class cannot solve the severe problems plaguing Mexican society by tying itself to bourgeois parties such as MORENA and proceeding on a nationalist basis. It can do so only in a united revolutionary struggle with its class brothers and sisters worldwide, including in the United States.



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