

Four dead, 1,000 arrested as demonstrations continue across Mexico

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The Mexican government on Thursday declared that it would not rescind its gasoline subsidy cut, as clashes at protests against the measure in recent days left four dead, dozens hurt and over 1,000 arrested.

The cut, known as the *gasolinazo*, will result in a 20 percent gas price hike in the coming year. Although Mexico is a leading oil producer, it imports over half its refined oil and domestic consumers pay just under \$4 per gallon, more than in the United States. The gas price hike is already increasing the cost of basic consumer goods such as tortillas, further squeezing the impoverished working class and peasantry.

“Not one step back,” Interior Secretary Jose Antonio Meade said in an interview with Radio Formula yesterday. Speaking at a separate event, President Enrique Pena Nieto said, “Protesting and looting will not bring about a change in reality.”

In an official video released Thursday night, Pena made the absurd claim that “to artificially maintain lower prices would mean cutting resources from the poorest Mexicans and giving resources to those who have the most.” He said the government would have slashed funding for education and other social programs if it had decided against the cut in the gas subsidy.

His challenge to the Mexican people—“What would you have done?”—was widely denounced on social media.

On Thursday, two protesters were killed in clashes with police in Ixmiquilpan, Hidalgo during a demonstration of several thousand people. That night, over 20,000 marched through the northern industrial city of Monterrey, Nueva Leon in one of the largest protests to date. A demonstration scheduled for Monday afternoon in Mexico City will serve as a major test of the protest movement’s strength.

Roadblocks were set up on highways leading to Mexico and a strike by transit workers broadened to include the city of San Juan Del Rio in Quintana Roo. The strike was also joined by some 3,000 truckers in Monterrey.

Demonstrations continued along Mexico’s northern border, where protestors blocked railroad crossings to the United States at Nogales. Protests also took place near the border with Guatemala.

Overall, the demonstrations appeared to have been more limited Thursday, in part due to the Three Kings Day holiday.

Recent days have seen a significant increase in the police presence, with 9,000 police occupying commercial centers in Mexico City and 18,000 deployed to the State of Mexico, where looting is widespread. Federal police were also deployed to Veracruz.

As of Thursday afternoon, 300 people had been arrested in Veracruz, 139 in Chiapas, 537 in the State of Mexico, 182 in Nuevo Leon, 106 in Mexico City, and dozens more elsewhere. In Chiapas, relatives of the detained clashed with Navy sailors guarding a prison and demanded medical attention for those beaten by the police.

The *gasolinazo* protests have begun to attract the attention of the ruling class in the United States, which until now has largely blacked out press coverage for fear the protests will generate sympathy among American workers. The intelligence-linked web site Stratfor wrote that the demonstrations were spontaneous and had “largely remained regional” and “not yet coalesced into a coordinated national movement.” Stratfor noted that taxi, truck and bus drivers had called strikes “in several states, lending weight to the demonstrations.”

“There is a risk,” the web site warned, “of violent demonstrations spiraling out of control and sparking further protests. Supply disruptions could also occur as looters attempt to hijack gasoline trucks.”

Fears in the American and Mexican ruling classes of “supply disruptions” underscore the strategic necessity of uniting Mexican and American workers. An increasingly prominent section of the Mexican ruling class, led by National Regeneration Movement (Morena) leader and former mayor of Mexico City Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO), is attempting to undermine the protest movement with the twin poisons of nationalism and class collaboration.

AMLO issued another Youtube appeal yesterday afternoon in which he called for “all Mexicans to come together in the great task of national transformation.” A “rebirth of Mexico” would take place only through electing him president in the 2018 election.

“There will be opportunity for change in 2018,” he said, calling for “a new national project” to be achieved not through class division, but “agreement.”

The Mexican pseudo-left operates in the orbit of Morena, propping it up with “left” phraseology. While criticizing AMLO’s attempts to limit strikes and protests, the Pabolite Socialist Workers Movement (MTS) issued a statement Wednesday calling for “a defense of national sovereignty” and a “break with the dependence of the country on the government of Trump.” The statement calls for various trade unions and student groups to gather “to discuss a plan for national struggle” to address “the present situation in our country.”

It is impossible to address the poverty and inequality that dominates Mexican society on the basis of a nationalist perspective.

It is not due simply to its leaders’ cowardice that Mexico remains even more subservient to American banks and corporations today than in the years preceding the Mexican Revolution of 1910-20. The Stalinists and trade unions--both corporatist and *independista*—paved the way for the current social catastrophe by disarming the working class with nationalist demagoguery and subordinating the workers to the Mexican state in the name of supporting the “progressive” section of the bourgeoisie.

This nationalist program is all the more bankrupt today under conditions where technology and

transportation have bound the Mexican and American economies together more closely than ever.

A November 2016 report by the US Congressional Research Service reads: “The expansion of trade has resulted in the creation of vertical supply relationships... the flow of intermediate inputs produced in the United States and exported to Mexico and the return flow of finished products greatly increased the importance of the US-Mexico border region as a production site. US manufacturing industries, including automotive, electronics, appliances, and machinery, all rely on the assistance of Mexican manufacturers.”

United objectively in the productive process, increasingly facing the same transnational exploiters, confronting right-wing oligarchic governments on both sides of the border, the Mexican and American workers’ fates are inextricably linked. Workers on both sides of the border must emphatically reject all attempts to sow divisions and instead unite in a common struggle against Yankee imperialism and the Mexican capitalist class. The banner of this struggle is the fight for the United Socialist States of the Americas.



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