

Social anger grows after Mexico earthquakes

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Following this month's devastating earthquakes, anger is rising at the Mexican government's sluggish distribution of supplies and minimal response to citizen's needs, together with leading officials' efforts to exploit the disaster for political gain. In many states, the working class has responded by bypassing the government altogether, organizing citizens' brigades to independently canvass damaged areas and distribute aid to those in need.

On Saturday morning, a major earthquake struck Mexico for the third time this month. The latest disaster comes barely two weeks after the south of Mexico and Guatemala were hit by an 8.2 magnitude quake, the strongest in a century, as well as a 7.1 magnitude earthquake on September 19 that affected the capital and nine other states.

Saturday's earthquake had a magnitude of 6.1 with an epicenter in the southwestern state of Oaxaca. Although mostly unnoticed in the capital, the earthquake monitoring system went off in Mexico City, causing many to evacuate their homes. Two women, aged 58 and 80, died of heart attacks after hearing the alarm. In Oaxaca, at least two are dead and seven injured due to the latest quake.

Meanwhile, the death toll from the September 19 earthquake has risen to 318. At least 69 people had been rescued from collapsed buildings, overwhelmingly due to the efforts of thousands of working class volunteers who rallied to rescue trapped victims throughout the city. After the September 19 earthquake, over 11,200 residents of Mexico City have asked the government to evaluate the structural integrity of their homes, while in the State of Mexico over 2,000 homes were reportedly damaged. In the state of Puebla, over 12,500 homes are affected, of which 2,500 were considered beyond repair and will be demolished. About 55,000 homes were damaged in the state of Chiapas following the September 7 earthquake.

As with every other major natural disaster, the working class and peasantry will be forced to bear the cost of the earthquakes, with the government offering only minimal assistance. While the Secretary of Finance has announced that up to \$360 million may be available through the World Bank, an initial assessment by the United States Geological Service found that damages from the September 19 quake alone could cost up to 1 percent of Mexico's GDP (about \$10 billion).

Social tensions are rising as the official establishment continues to discredit itself in the eyes of the population. The "left" Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) governor of the state of Morelos, Graco Ramírez Abreu, came under criticism after a video went viral on social media showing police officers detaining several trucks from the National System for Integral Family Development (DIF) with supplies for the victims of the September 19 earthquake. Two drivers were reportedly ordered to unload their supplies at Morelos' DIF, which is run by Elena Cepeda de León, the governor's wife.

Protests and clashes with police ensued when it was discovered that the storage unit in Morelos's DIF already had over 90 tons of supplies. About 500 people gathered at the DIF on Friday night to remove goods from the storage center and distribute the aid themselves. Others reportedly blocked passage to police-escorted trucks going to the DIF. Cepeda de León denied that aid was being withheld for political reasons and threatened legal action against the "looters." The state's commissioner of public security warned that he would "impose order" in the city. The governor labeled the story as "fake news," brushing aside numerous videos documenting the event.

In the Mexico City borough of Iztapalapa, residents took over water pipes and blocked roads to protest a severe water shortage caused by the earthquake affecting 80 percent of the borough, or 1.5 million

people. Residents also hijacked several distribution vehicles, which they claimed were only servicing well-connected individuals. Protestors then marched to the borough's city hall to confront officials who were giving an informational presentation to earthquake victims.

Thousands who suffered damage to their homes have yet to return due to a lack of qualified engineers to evaluate their safety. Many have reported that their homes were seen by non-specialized personnel, and inspections were often limited to assessing external structures, even when there is significant internal damage. Engineering professor Pablo Iván Ángeles Guzmán told *El Universal* that “in some cases there have already been visits by Civil Defense, but they are only filling out a simple three-page form,” noting that his own evaluation would last a minimum of three hours. An investigation by the newspaper found that only four out of Mexico City's 16 boroughs answered calls for help last Friday.

In an attempt to channel social anger back into bourgeois politics, the major Mexican political parties have given demagogical promises to donate some of their 2018 presidential campaign funds to the earthquake's victims, including the Party of National Action (PAN), the Party of Democratic Revolution (PRD), the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the Movement for National Regeneration (Morena), and the Citizens' Movement (MC). Morena has also proposed cutting the salaries of government functionaries by 50 percent to give a paltry 2,400 pesos (about \$135) a month to each affected household.

If elected, these tried-and-tested bourgeois parties—including the supposed “lefts” of Morena—would continue defending the capitalist system and the staggering social inequality it has produced in Mexico.

As has been the case with natural disasters in the Caribbean, Mexico, and the United States, it has been the working class which has taken independent action to help victims out of a sense of class solidarity. Nothing less than a frontal assault on the wealth of the ruling class can ensure that society's resources are distributed not to fill the pockets of the rich, but to prevent another disaster by allotting billions to infrastructure spending and to other social needs of working people.



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