

Massive student protests hit Mexico City universities

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In Mexico City on Monday September 3, right-wing shock groups known as “porros” physically attacked high school students who attend the College of Science and Humanities (CCH) of Azcapotzalco at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), the largest university in Latin America. The students were peacefully protesting in front of the main UNAM administration building, calling for an end to the violence they face at the hands of porro groups, who are known for attacking left-wing demonstrations.

The students were demanding the expulsion of porro groups from campuses when they were attacked by porros wielding sticks, rocks, Molotov cocktails and firecrackers. Over a dozen students were injured during the attack, which involved stabbings, and two were seriously hurt.

Students charged that UNAM security officers did not attempt to stop the attacks last Monday, and even that the head of the university’s emergency unit, Teofilo Licona, coordinated the attacking groups.

On Tuesday the University’s rector identified 18 student porros involved in the attacks, along with the groups they belonged to, and announced their expulsion.

On Wednesday tens of thousands of students from UNAM as well from other major metropolitan education centers such as the Metropolitan Autonomous University, the College of Mexico, and the National Polytechnical Institute marched in solidarity at UNAM. Classes at UNAM and other schools were suspended and students barricaded several classrooms.

The UNAM student assembly met on Saturday to consider further action. They agreed on the following demands: prosecution of the “intellectual and physical” authors of the attacks; the ouster of Rector Enrique

Graue and of the University’s head of security; adequate protection for students from violence by porro groups; greater democratization of the university, with students, faculty and workers given more control; and large increases in funding for students and schools.

Porro groups have been paid by politicians and university authorities for decades to break up protests, quell student demands and serve as provocateurs.

According to UNAM researcher Imanol Ordorika, who has written extensively on the subject, the groups originated from an amalgamation of student gangs, conservative groups, university authorities, and their supporters in student federations modeled after government-aligned union organizations.

Such reactionary, mercenary groups played a key role in crushing the 1968 Mexican student revolt, which faced violent repression from legal and paralegal state forces.

Later, in June 1971, in what became known as the “Corpus Christi” massacre, a group of porros known as Los Halcones (The Hawks) attacked a protesting group of students, leaving many dead and others seriously injured. It was widely believed that the group was financed by then-president Luis Echeverria, later indicted for his role as Interior Minister in the 1968 Tlateloco massacre.

Historically porro groups have been linked to all three major parties—the Party of the Institutional Revolution (PRI), the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), and some politicians of the National Action Party (PAN) in the state of Mexico.

Today the porros continue to assert they are “student organizations.” But they also continue to be paid to act on behalf of politicians, institutions and high-level authorities.

At Wednesday’s protests, students named politicians

who use porros on a regular basis in the UNAM CCHs of Azcapotzalco and Naucalpan, from where most of the attackers last week originated.

In a column carried yesterday by Mexico's *La Jornada*, student activist Elvira Concheiro Bórquez explained the continuing functions of porro groups: They are "the vehicle of harassment, violence, corruption and the constant attempt to control students, but also at the necessary time they are available to those who tolerate and protect them or whoever pays them.... They are not the result or spontaneous creation of external dark forces. [Porrismo] is a functional component of the structure of the anti-democratic university governance.... It is this educational institution that feeds an anti-democratic culture and contempt for the participation of young people.

Yesterday, UNAM's rector Graue met with Mexico's president-elect Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO). Graue conceded the obvious—that UNAM's supposed efforts to end porro groups had been woefully insufficient. He refused, however, to concede that university authorities are in any way behind the groups.

AMLO said that Mexico's City's prosecutor, who had previously questioned his jurisdiction over the case that occurred at what is an autonomous university, would in fact prosecute it.

AMLO insisted that "stability" must be maintained at UNAM. He called for "privileging dialogue," insisting that "we have to try not to fall into any provocation, not accept violence, use dialogue, dialogue and dialogue, and have confidence in the authorities of our university and things will go well."

AMLO stressed that the "responsibility and maturity of young people" will prevent interest groups from trying to get involved in the student movement "to destabilize."

In other words, AMLO said: students, stop demonstrating, the solution to your requests is already in sight. Go back to your classes so that everything returns to normal!

Yesterday students at all but a handful of UNAM schools in fact returned to their classes. However, the demands of the UNAM assembly and those of millions of other Mexican students will not and cannot be met by the new bourgeois government of AMLO. The students have planned a major demonstration for

September 13 and another to mark the 50th anniversary of the Tlateloco Massacre, on October 2. Turnout is expected to be large.



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