

Mexico City transit bridge collapse leaves 24 dead, scores injured

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The collapse of an overpass on Mexico City's newest metro train line Monday night has left at least 24 dead and 79 injured after train cars and chunks of concrete plummeted onto a street 65 feet below, crushing passing vehicles.

The disaster has fueled growing popular anger over criminal government negligence and corruption that has also led to hundreds of thousands of COVID-19 deaths in Mexico, among the countries worst hit by the pandemic.

At the site of the collapse, rescue crews and first responders worked frantically to save the lives of the injured and pull survivors from the rubble, the fallen train cars and damaged motor vehicles. Heavy equipment was brought in to lower the train cars hanging from the tracks and recover the bodies of four passengers trapped inside. Helmeted troops armed with automatic weapons surrounded the site.

Distraught relatives raced from hospital to hospital trying to find missing loved ones who were taking the train that night. One youth who found out that his father, a driver, had been killed in the disaster told Univisión, "Like everyone else I want justice. This was not our fault."

The train disaster took place at around 10:30 p.m. Monday on an elevated section of the number 12 Line of the city's metro system in the southeast of the Mexican capital. The 12 Line, the newest section of the mass transit system, was built in 2012 to connect the eastern part of Mexico City, among its less developed areas, to the city center.

From its start, the project was plagued by cost overruns, late completion, shoddy construction and charges of wholesale political corruption. According to Jorge Gaviño, who was the director of the metro system in 2017, the line "was born with endemic problems that would never be solved in its life" and would require continuous maintenance.

The Mexican media reported that people living in the Los Olivos neighborhood near the collapsed overpass had repeatedly warned last year that cracks were appearing in the bridge and that there was visible shaking of its columns and overhead beams. The structure had been damaged in the powerful 2017 earthquake that struck southeast of the city, killing 369 people.

Transit workers announced Tuesday that they will carry out a strike to shut down all 12 lines of Mexico City's Collective Transport System (STC) over increasingly dangerous conditions and lack of maintenance and to demand the immediate sacking of the system's director, Florencia Serranía.

Even as bodies were still being pulled from the rubble on Tuesday morning, Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador declared, along with his sympathy for the dead and injured, his "solidarity" with Mexico City's Mayor Claudia Sheinbaum, a member of his ruling MORENA (National Regeneration Movement) party.

López Obrador, popularly known as AMLO, insisted that there would be a swift and thorough investigation of the disaster and that there would be "no impunity for anyone." He promised that "absolutely nothing will be hidden" from the public. At the same time, he warned against "falling into the realm of speculation and blaming without having proof of those possibly responsible."

Sheinbaum made similar remarks to reporters, declaring, "At this moment, we can't speculate about what happened. There has to be a deep investigation, and whoever is responsible has to be held responsible."

Both AMLO and Sheinbaum have ample political motives for tamping down "speculation." The present Mexican president and his political allies have controlled the Mexican capital since the beginning of the 2000s.

It was under the former mayor, Marcelo Ebrard, now Mexico's foreign minister and one of AMLO's closest political allies, that the 12 Line was built. He told the

media Tuesday, “I am not afraid of anything,” and that he would place himself “at the disposition of the authorities.”

Under Ebrard, the 12 Line became one of the most expensive public infrastructure projects in Mexico City’s history, completed late with a massive 60 percent cost overrun. The main company involved in the construction was CARSO Infraestructura y Construccion, S.A.B. de C.V (CCICSA), a company controlled by the family of the country’s richest billionaire, Carlos Slim, one of the “honest businessmen” whom AMLO invited to join in his “unity campaign” to reform Mexico when he was first elected in 2018.

Within 10 days of the line’s opening in 2012, it was shut down because of electrical problems. Construction failures forced the shutdown of most of the 12 Line for months in 2014 as repair work was done on stations, including the one where Monday night’s tragedy took place. A subsequent study found that the train wheels used on the line, manufactured according to European standards, were not compatible with the rails that had been installed, which were based on American standards.

In 2015, a commission created by the federal Chamber of Deputies recorded 11,000 construction flaws on the train line and concluded that the project had involved massive corruption.

The tragic deaths on the Mexico City metro system came in the midst of continuing mass deaths from the COVID-19 pandemic.

On Tuesday, the number of recorded coronavirus infections stood at 2,350,000, while the number of deaths had risen to 217,345. In March, the Mexican Health Department acknowledged that the official toll involved an undercount off 60 percent, meaning that the real death toll was closer to 350,000.

A damning report issued last month by the University of California, San Francisco found that the AMLO government’s policies—including its failure to allocate resources to combat the pandemic, grossly inadequate testing and a lack of any support for basic measures such as social distancing, travel restrictions and the use of face masks—had led to the mass deaths. It cited, for example, the repeated statements from Assistant Health Secretary Hugo López Gatell, the government’s spokesperson on the pandemic, that face masks did not offer protection against catching the virus.

The AMLO government, the study found, “prioritized keeping up appearances, and partisan politics, before health.”

These policies have been driven by definite class interests. Hundreds of thousands of lives have been sacrificed to assure the massive fortunes and profits of both Mexican and international capitalism. The policies pursued by the supposed “left” nationalist government of AMLO in Mexico are barely distinguishable from those carried out by the fascist would-be dictator, President Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil.

The only effective shutdowns in the country were those enforced by Mexican workers, who carried out wildcat strikes in April and May of last year which were met by thousands of layoffs at the largely foreign-owned factories on the US-Mexican border.

At the behest of Washington, AMLO agreed to declare all manufacturing “essential” in order to assure the supply of parts to US auto and other manufacturing corporations, while relying on the companies and the unions to cover up outbreaks in the Mexican factories.

The right-wing PAN (National Action Party) issued a statement Tuesday indicting AMLO’s Morena party for Monday’s deaths. “The Morena politicians kill with their corruption and their bad decisions; we already saw it with their terrible handling of the pandemic, and now we are seeing it with the tragedy in the Metro, where innocent people died because of the corruption and indifference of the authorities in Mexico City.”

While all of this is true, it comes from a party that initiated the US-backed “war on drugs” that has killed at least 70,000 Mexicans. The pandemic, like the Metro disaster, has exposed the criminality of the entire Mexican bourgeoisie, including its so-called “left” representatives like AMLO, and the necessity of mobilizing the working class independently in the struggle for the socialist transformation of society.



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