

Ayotzinapa students and parents protest state killings as Mexican presidential candidates promise military build-up

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A protest in Mexico City by teaching students from rural Ayotzinapa and parents of the 43 students from there who were killed in 2014 has thrown a wrench in the 2024 presidential elections in Mexico.

Wednesday's protest came only a few days after the main candidates launched their campaigns focusing on calls to strengthen the repressive state apparatus. With the approach of the tenth anniversary on September 26 of the disappearance of the teaching students at the hands of gangs and government forces, there is growing anger among both their relatives and fellow students over the continuing cover-up under President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, known as AMLO.

Demanding to speak to López Obrador about the lack of progress in the case, several dozen protesters pushed a parked vehicle into one of the doors of the presidential building. They were then blocked from entering with tear gas.

The parents of the victims, who have set up an encampment outside of the National Palace, have denounced the president's protection of the military, which refuses to cooperate. Specifically, they have demanded for months the release of 800 files of the regional military intelligence agency that was active during the events, as well as phone transcripts and other documents.

Both López Obrador and his hand-picked presidential candidate Claudia Sheinbaum denounced the protest as a "provocation," alleging that the parents and teaching students are being manipulated by right-wing opposition groups financed by foreign governments.

Outrageously, López Obrador described the protest as a "dirty war" against his government, equating it with the campaign of state killings against leftists during the second half of the 20th century.

While AMLO said that there would be no investigation or arrests related to the protest on Wednesday, which would be extremely unpopular, his statements and those of Sheinbaum set the stage for such repression.

For her part, the main opposition candidate Xóchitl Gálvez, who leads a coalition of the former rival capitalist parties PRI-PAN-PRD, denounced the protest as "truly worrisome." She added: "I do not like this scene of violence, it is a historical place, it is the heritage of the nation."

Asked specifically on Wednesday by the newspaper *La Jornada* whether she "would be willing to sanction elements of the Army if their participation is proven?," Gálvez said she lamented the recent drowning of seven national guardsmen and stressed her "respect for the Army."

While Gálvez, who lags at least 30 points behind Sheinbaum in the polls, will use anything to damage the image of the ruling Morena party of AMLO and Sheinbaum, the killing of the Ayotzinapa teaching students in 2014, as they were traveling to a protest, has remained an explosive charge ready to blow up under the entire political establishment.

In 2018, the ruling class allowed López Obrador himself to take power

after denying him the presidency by means of electoral fraud in 2006 and 2012. Their aim was to deactivate the explosive intensification of the class struggle, which at the time was being driven by a mass movement protesting both the military and the state as responsible for the Ayotzinapa killings.

Having promised to bring the perpetrators to justice and send the repressive military to the barracks, AMLO instead enshrined domestic military operations in the Constitution and became the head of the Ayotzinapa cover-up operation, consistently protecting top officials under his predecessor Enrique Peña Nieto of the Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI).

López Obrador has continued the war launched in 2006 by President Felipe Calderón (PAN; National Action Party) ostensibly against gangs, even after the security chief under the PAN and PRI administrations, Genaro García Luna, was sentenced in New York for receiving millions from the Sinaloa Cartel. Far from reducing violence, AMLO oversaw a record 171,085 homicides in his first five years in office.

Sheinbaum and Gálvez promise to expand the military

Since the official launch of their campaigns on March 1, Sheinbaum and Gálvez have focused their speeches on promises to build up the military, especially the National Guard created under AMLO.

Sheinbaum has highlighted her security strategy as mayor of Mexico City, promising to expand it to the rest of the country. She claims to have cut crime in the capital using a "zero impunity" approach involving "coordination with the National Guard, with the Ministry of Defense, with the Navy."

On Monday, her security chief in Mexico City and now key member of her future cabinet, Omar García Harfuch, presented as the "First Axis of Government," a security plan that will "consolidate" the National Guard with increased resources and create a National Intelligence System, bringing together all security, judicial and financial institutions under a "plan for combat."

Harfuch was chief of the Federal Police department in the state of Guerrero at the center of the Ayotzinapa events and was tracked by GPS to the meeting where federal officials concocted the initial cover-up. However, he has never had to answer for his participation given his protection by AMLO and Sheinbaum.

While employing many of the same terms, Gálvez began her campaign with promises to double the troop strength of the National Guard from 150,000 to 300,000 members, to double the ranks of state and municipal police departments with higher crime rates, and to build a "maximum security mega-prison".

Both candidates have also placed front and center their supposed commitment to fight corruption, pointing to the well-established records of their opponents when it comes to protecting cartels and corrupt

officials.

Such security and anti-corruption sloganeering has long been a testament to the fact that no faction of the ruling elite offers anything to workers except a further shift toward police state repression and subordination to US imperialism.

Sheinbaum has combined her promises of building up the security apparatus with rhetoric vowing to defend both democratic rights and Mexican sovereignty. Last Saturday at a rally near the US-Mexico border in Ciudad Juárez, she called on the US presidential candidates Joe Biden and Donald Trump “not to use migration as the central issue in the US elections.”

The previous day in Mexico City she insisted that she would pursue economic development to resolve the migration issue. She vowed “never to bow our heads” before the United States. She added: “Coordination yes, subordination no.”

One only needs to look at the record of López Obrador, who made the same promises, to understand the emptiness of this nationalist posturing.

López Obrador has consistently increased the number of members of the National Guard, Army and Navy assigned to harassing migrants, reaching 46,916 soldiers last year. A record 782,176 migrants were detained by Mexico last year at the behest of the United States, while Mexican soldiers are frequently denounced by survivors for handing them over to cartels to terrorize them through kidnappings, extortion, torture and rape. Most of those detained are cruelly sent to southern Mexico.

Meanwhile, Mexicans continue to top the list of US Border Patrol encounters, representing 34 percent of migrants crossing the border in January 2024—the same percentage of the total since October 2019. More than 2.74 million Mexicans have been stopped at the border in this period, and many more have left Mexico under AMLO.

Nonetheless, as the Ayotzinapa teaching students were breaking into the presidential palace on Wednesday, López Obrador was explaining to reporters inside: “The people of Mexico are happy, happy... We are taking the first steps towards true democracy.”

A Fourth Transformation toward Dictatorship and War

According to López Obrador, Mexico is undergoing its “Fourth Transformation,” which the president uses to elevate the historical significance of his policies to that of the war of independence against Spain, the Liberal reform movement and war against France, and the 1910-1920 Mexican Revolution.

AMLO is far to the right of any of the Mexican national bourgeois leaders of the previous “transformations,” but it must be stressed that he does represent a continuity.

The entire history of Mexico has been characterized by the inability of the bourgeoisie to fulfill the main tasks of the democratic revolution: eliminating all landed estates, destroying the landed aristocracy, and securing independence from imperialism.

Independence from Spain was ultimately secured by conservative forces and former Royalists who opposed the deposition a year earlier of King Ferdinand and the declaration of a liberalizing constitution in Spain. The leadership of the independence army rallied around the “Plan of Iguala,” calling for a new monarchy government by Ferdinand or another European prince, while retaining the privileges of the Catholic Church.

In 1846-48 the United States invaded Mexico and took over half of Mexico’s territory. Only a decade later, the “Reform War” broke out between Liberal sectors of the bourgeoisie against the monarchists, which was followed by the invasion of the French Empire of Napoleon the Third to secure the rule of the Habsburg Emperor Maximilian I of Mexico.

In 1867, after defeating the conservatives and ousting the French forces, Liberal leader Benito Juárez was elected president and oversaw the implementation of the 1857 Constitution, which proclaimed numerous individual rights while encouraging the development of capitalism. In addition to the constitutional emphasis on private property, an earlier

“Lerdo Law” was also part of the “Liberal Reform,” and together led to the active expropriation of property owned by the Catholic Church, along with communal indigenous land. These lands were cheaply taken over by private owners, ultimately benefiting the landed aristocracy and foreign capitalists.

The Mexican Revolution began in 1910 with an armed revolt to overthrow Porfirio Díaz, a puppet of the landed oligarchy and US imperialism, who had ruled for 31 years. Between his overthrow in May 1911 and 1915, power switched between five factions of the ruling capitalist class, which had essentially merged with the landed oligarchy, and none could solve the democratic questions of imperialism or land. The radical peasant armies of Emiliano Zapata and Francisco Villa failed to develop an independent political strategy to the liberal bourgeoisie. Even the 1917 Mexican Constitution, which would include some of the most progressive social clauses in the world, including rights for workers and peasants, could only pose the questions.

The left nationalist president Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940), who is also celebrated by AMLO and who founded the PRI, advanced the most significant democratic reforms since the revolution, including the nationalization of railroads and oil, an expansion of land reform, and creation of communal ejido properties. However, these measures have been mostly dismantled since, beginning under his successor and ex-minister, Manuel Ávila Camacho.

The history of Mexican capitalism, moreover, has been characterized by a growing integration and subordination to the United States. This process has accelerated since the development of technologies that globalized production since the 1970s, allowing a greater exploitation of cheap labor in Mexico. This integration has been accompanied by an abandonment of any form of social reformism, as the Mexican oligarchy has tied its fortunes to attracting investments from Wall Street, and meeting the geopolitical interests of US imperialism.

López Obrador has taken this process of economic and military subordination to a new stage, at a time when US imperialism drags the world into a nuclear third world war, and embraces genocide and fascism. In the short term, Mexico has seen a massive industrialization and economic growth, along with a limited increase in wage levels, but the underlying contradictions and deepening crisis of US imperialism herald massive attacks on living standards, and jobs across the entire North American region and beyond.

Everywhere, capitalism is unable to satisfy any basic demands that arise from the conditions it creates.

The ongoing protests over the Ayotzinapa case, the significant mass protests in Mexico City against the US-Israeli genocide in Gaza, and major strikes recently among Audi workers and teachers are signs of a political radicalization of broader sections of youth and workers and of the explosive class battles to come.

Neither the Morena party nor the opposition parties offer an alternative. The only way forward for the working class to defend its social and democratic rights is to fight for the international unity of their struggles against all forms of bourgeois nationalism, anti-immigrant chauvinism and capitalism itself.

This is the perspective being advanced by the Socialist Equality Party campaign for the US presidency in 2024, which should be seen by Mexican workers as their own. The SEP has selected Joseph Kishore for president and Jerry White for Vice President.

Last week, in response to the visits by Biden and Trump to the US-Mexico border to agitate against migrants, White recalled that in 2019, tens of thousands of maquiladora workers carried out wildcat strikes in Matamoros, across the border from where Biden was speaking in Brownsville Texas. White explained in a tweet:

“During those mass strikes, conducted in defiance of the stooge corporate-controlled unions, workers marched to the border in

Brownsville and called on their US counterparts to join in the strike, shouting, 'Americans, wake up!'

"This powerful appeal, based on the international unity of the working class against their capitalist governments, is the progressive answer to the anti-immigrant chauvinism of Trump, Biden and the nationalist trade unions, which pit workers against each other in a race to the bottom."



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