

Mexico: Towards a revolutionary situation?

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On 26 September, a protest by students in Iguala, a city of over 100,000 people, in the state of Guerrero in southwest México, was heavily repressed with police opening fire on the demonstrators. Six people were killed, many more injured and 43 students arrested. Since then none of them have been seen again.

On 8 November, the general prosecutor announced to the media that the police had handed over the students to criminals, who then murdered them and incinerated their bodies. Since this announcement, México has been in a state of mounting fury. The scale and brazenness of the events shocked the country into action, with tens and eventually hundreds of thousands taking to the streets to demand justice, an end to the killings and corruption and eventually the resignation of President Enrique Peña Nieto.

The 43 students of Ayotzinapa

Ayotzinapa is a tiny village of only 84 inhabitants in the Mexican state Guerrero. The teacher training college located in the village, the Escuela Rural Normal de Ayotzinapa, is known for the radicalism of its students. On September 26 a group of students from this school went to Iguala, a nearby town. Their aim was to get to México City to participate in a protest to commemorate the Massacre of Tlatelolco, in 1968, when 200 to 300 students were killed by the police. For this they wanted to collect money by demonstrating, a common method of protesting and raising funds at the same time which was a known practice by the students in Iguala and other places in México.

What they did not know was that this time the mayor of Iguala was not willing to let any protest take place in the town. The reason was that his wife was planning to start her election campaign on the same weekend, she was aspiring to the office of her husband for the next term. José Luis Albarca ordered his police to repress the protests by any means. The officers obeyed. They confronted the students and opened fire on them. Three students and three other people, apparently not participating in the protest, were killed. Many were injured, and the 43 were arrested.

After one month of investigation, on November 8, the general prosecutor of the country, Jesus Murillo, announced at a media conference in México City what many could not believe. The students were, apparently, handed over to members of the cartel Guerreros Unidos by the police. Three members of Guerreros Unidos had subsequently been arrested and revealed the case to the police. According to the official version, the criminals took the students to the landfill of the neighbouring town of Cocula. On the way, about 15 had died of suffocation in the transporter. The survivors were killed by a shot in the head, and all of them were burned at the landfill.

However, until now, this version of events has not been officially confirmed. As yet, investigations have found no definitive evidence of the remains of the murdered at the landfill. The association of the parents of the missing students announced that they will not believe the story until proof is found, and accused the general prosecutor of trying to close the case down as quickly as possible.

José Luis Albarca, mayor of Iguala, who was denounced by police officers for having given the orders to hand the students over to the drug mafia, fled on October 22, together with his wife, María de los Ángeles Pineda Villa, when an order for their arrest was issued. As has now been officially acknowledged, both of them had close links to organised crime. Investigations revealed that María Pineda was in charge of the finances of Guerreros Unidos in Iguala! Two of her brothers were founding members of the criminal organisation who had been killed during internal fighting. After this, she took over the business.

Alive they took them, alive we want them!

News about corruption, links between politicians, police and organised crime, ordered murders and sequestrations was no surprise to the people of Mexico. Over 120,000 people have died in crimes of violence in Mexico and 27,00 are missing, since early 2007 when the military involvement in a supposed war on drugs began. But the case of the students of Ayotzinapa was just too cruel, too brutal, and too unbelievable to stand. Millions asked themselves: How is this possible?

Before Ayotzinapa, everything was supposedly improving in México. The president, Pena Nieto, was determined to carry out a reform programme, including the opening of the oil sector. International oil companies, above all from the US, and speculators were yearning for this to happen. Pena Nieto was praised by the international capitalist media for this initiative. The Economist proclaimed enthusiastically that this was Mexico's moment.

Since Ayotzinapa everything has changed. The country is facing one of the most massive protest waves ever seen. On November 11, protestors set the local office of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), the party of President Pena Nieto, in Chilpancingo (capital of Guerrero) on fire. One day before, students, teachers and relatives of the disappeared occupied the airport of the tourist town of Acapulco. In Mexico City, after several protests, the doors of the National Palace were set on fire, and in the state of Michoacán the party bureau of the right wing party PAN was attacked.

The biggest mass protest took place on September 20, when the parents' association of the missing students called for a national demonstration in México City. The police talked first about 15,000, then 30,000, and finally had to admit that more than 100,000 people joined the protest at the Zócalo (main square) in the city.

Several trade union delegations also took part in that protest. The Telmex workers' union (telecommunication company) organised a four-hour break in solidarity on that day. Other unions present were the national finance workers' union, the university staff union, STUNAM, and the union of flight attendants and pilots. During that day there was also a meeting of representatives of students, trade unions and other organisations at the bureau of the SME electricians' union to coordinate further action, including the call for a 24-hour-strike on the December 1.

On that date, another protest wave shook the country. There were protests in at least 10 Mexican states. Apart from the solidarity and the anger about the 43 disappeared students, the demand for the president Pena Nieto to resign was most visible. In México City, where again thousands protested, a parents' representative of the students rejected the president's attempt to calm down the situation: 'We had to leave our works, land and houses to go searching for our sons, because the state doesn't do it. [?] I want to tell Pena Nieto that he is not Ayotzinapa; we have dignity!' He also denounced the attempt of the ex-governor of Guerrero, Ángel Aguirre Rivero, to silence them with money.

In Chilpancingo, and also in Acapulco, protestors shut down the commercial districts. In Michoacán, the access roads to the city of Lázaro Cárdenas and its industrial district were blocked in a protest organised by the National Coordination of Education Workers (CNTE). And in Oaxaca, the international airport

?Benito Juárez? was occupied by activists of the Asamblea Popular del Pueblo de Oaxaca (APPO, Popular People's Assembly of Oaxaca).

Across the country, the protests were joined by, among many others, the Coordination of Education Workers of Guerrero (Ceteg), the National Coordination of Education Workers (CNTE), the Electricity Workers' Union (SME) and the recently created National Student Coordination (CNE). Many students, teachers and professors around the country went out on strike.

What is at stake in México?

The case of the disappeared students of Ayotzinapa has highlighted the rotten situation of the Mexican capitalist state. Everybody knows that this is just the tip of the iceberg. During the search for the dead bodies, many others were found (officially 38 by now), and it was announced that at least 30 students had already disappeared in July in Cocula, the same town to which the secundaristas from Ayotzinapa were supposedly taken and killed. In June 2013, three peasant leaders in Guerrero, Arturo Hernández Cardona, Ángel Román Ramírez and Rafael Bandera Román, were killed by drug cartels.

Unfortunately, these are no exceptions, but just a few individual examples. Since the ?war on drugs? was declared in 2006 by the former president Felipe Calderon (PAN), tens of thousands of people have been killed. Official numbers range between 60,000 and 80,000, other estimates reach up to 120,000 or even more. The country has been heavily militarised.

The war on drugs was in fact a social war, undertaken as a result of pressure from the USA. Like Prohibition in the USA in the 1920s and 30s, it has merely increased the size of the banned trade, the profits and the violence of the gangs in their war with one another and the state. Calderón's use of the army only increased the slaughter and gave cover to the state to target students and workers fighting for their rights.

The only way to end its devastating consequences for México is to legalise drugs and instead launch a war on poverty and mass unemployment, the soil out of which drug abuse grows, creating armed popular militias to guard the communities and disarm both the drug lords' gangs and the police.

The so-called war on drugs is in reality a war on the poor, who suffer from the violence from both sides, the drug cartels and the state. It is a big business for the US war machine, which sells weapons to both the Mexican military and the criminals.

This politics has generated huge profits for the participating corporations, but changed nothing about the drug market and the power of organised crime. On the contrary, the case of Ayotzinapa shows how closely politics, police and crime are linked together. The ?war on drugs? is evidently a big disaster.

The two right wing Mexican parties, the PRI and the PAN, are involved in in the conflict but so too is the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD), founded by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas in 1989, once a left populist party aiming to clean up Mexican politics. It too has sunk into the morass of corruption and violence as evidenced by the fact that the mayor of Iguala and his wife were both members of the PRD, which supported them!

And so, too, was the governor of Guerrero, Angel Aguirre Rivero, who resigned on the October 24. The president, Enrique Peña Nieto, from the PRI, is also involved in a corruption scandal about a private residence, which he was acquiring for his and his wife from a construction company that had received profitable contracts from the government.

México is the second biggest economy of Latin América, after Brazil, and one of the most important trade

partners of the United States. Since the US, Canada and México signed the free trade agreement, NAFTA, in 1994, many US companies outsourced their production to México to benefit from the low wages and the low workers' protection laws. On the other hand, US agriculture companies export subsidised food to México, ruining the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of local farmers. Canadian mining firms come to the country to exploit resources and workers and leave behind ecological disasters.

All this was presented as a huge benefit for the country and its development. Indeed, México is a rich country. Nevertheless, official numbers indicate that as much as 52% of the population is living below the poverty line! According to the Economic Commission for Latin America, the number even increased from 42% in 2006 to 52% in 2012, alongside the 'war on drugs'.

México needs a Revolution!

All this reveals that México is facing not just an episodic, political crisis but a fundamental crisis of the state machine, its institutions, the main parties, the police, the judiciary, in short, the capitalist system. The masses no longer trust anybody, be it the police, the politicians or the judges. They are filled with anger, which can be seen in the demonstrations.

Already, in 2012, people had begun to organise self-defence groups in order to defend themselves not only against drug gangs, but also corrupt policemen, above all in the states of Guerrero and Michoacán. In Guerrero, they founded an Asamblea Nacional Popular, which is based on local committees, students' and teachers' organisations. In order to coordinate further protests, the Asamblea Inter-Universitaria and the Coordinación Nacional Estudiantil (CNE) were founded by students.

There is already a long and rich tradition of local protest organisation during the last decades in México. We just have to remember the uprising of the Zapatistas in Chiapas, who defend their autonomous territories until today, or the Popular Assembly of Oaxaca (APPO), which created the embryo of a counter power organisation to the official state institutions. In the last few years there were also big workers' struggles in the oil, electricity and mining sectors, against the violation of workers' rights and privatisation plans of the government (which, however, remain on the agenda). Until now, this accumulation of popular and workers' struggles has not produced new political parties, as in other Latin American countries (Venezuela, Bolivia, Brazil?).

The time is ripe to organise a revolutionary party. Lenin's simple, but striking, characterisation of a revolutionary situation, those on the top are not able to rule anymore and those below refuse to be ruled anymore, is certainly approaching in México.

The left reformist party, Morena, Movimiento Regeneración Nacional, which originated from a split from the PRD and is led by the former presidential candidate Andrés López Obrador, is trying to present itself as an alternative. This is certainly one of the biggest dangers facing a revolutionary alternative, since Morena represents some institutional power and also support, but wants to renew the capitalist state machine instead of smashing it.

What is necessary in México is a leadership which is built from below, bringing together the experiences from the last years, connecting the student protests to the workers' and the peasants' struggles, and culminating in a revolutionary programme for the overthrow of capitalism. It is urgent to coordinate the existing organisations and discuss the perspectives for the protests, including:

The organisation of an indefinite general strike to bring down the government

Generalisation and coordination of the experience of self-defence organisation. No more trust in the

capitalist police and army apparatus! Build soldiers' councils to fight alongside the people!

For a popularly elected tribunal to conduct an inquiry into the disappearance of the 43 students and the collaboration between local government, police and criminal cartels!

Build workers' and peasants' councils to coordinate and lead the struggle and to take the power out of the hands of the police, the judiciary, the state bureaucracy and the capitalist class!

For a workers' and peasants' government, based on councils and the popular defence groups. Take on the source of corruption, misery and injustice: the capitalist system!

Obviously, such a revolutionary movement must discuss the next steps, the urgent measures to end the misery of millions of Mexicans: a minimum wage based on the real needs of the workers and peasants, a plan of work for all, the expropriation of the capitalists, the rich and the landlords (latifundarios) etc.

With this, the Mexican workers, students and peasants are not alone, but part of a worldwide protest, which is recognising more and more that the capitalist system is not presenting a solution for the growing problems of society. A 'real democracy' can only be realised by a revolutionary movement, which builds a government based on the self-organisation of the workers. This must culminate in a worldwide movement and organised in a new world revolutionary party, a Fifth International.

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