Strikes Spread in Mexico, Thousands of Police Deployed to Capital

Police made up to 600 arrests throughout Mexico yesterday as protests continued against President Enrique Pena Nieto's cut to gas subsidies, known colloquially as the gasolinazo. One police officer was killed during confrontations in an impoverished neighborhood of Mexico City, and the mayor deployed 9,000 police to guard commercial centers throughout the city.

Yesterday also saw indications that localized protests by workers may be developing into a broader strike movement. Fourteen thousand bus, truck and taxi drivers in the oil-producing state of Veracruz announced a statewide strike of indefinite length, with many leaving their trucks, cabs, and buses parked on the street.

Workers in Veracruz, located on the Atlantic coast, joined transportation workers in the Pacific coast city of Guadalajara, who also struck yesterday, though initial reports show the strike as only partial. Truck drivers and demonstrators continued to block several key highways and tollbooths linking major inland Mexican cities.

The protest continued as US President-elect Donald Trump threw further doubt into Mexico's US-export-based manufacturing industry when he tweeted a threat to penalize Toyota for its plans to build an auto plant in Baja California.

In Morelia, 2,000 transportation workers marched demanding the resignation of President Pena Nieto and the revocation of the subsidy cut. *El Financiero* warned that there are "signs of a total strike of transport" in Michoacan. In Acapulco, Guerrero, taxi drivers are encircling Petroleos Mexicanos (Pemex) oil trucks, forcing them to stop and taking turns siphoning the gas from their tankers. When a group of soldiers attempted to stop one group of taxi drivers yesterday, the drivers said that if the soldiers intervened they would light the tanker on fire. The soldiers backed down.

The trade unions are stepping in to prevent the demonstrations from coalescing into a nationwide strike. Trade union bureaucrats who announced the recent strikes stated explicitly that they were forced to do so by workers, who in the words of one trade union official, are becoming "violent."

Castelan Cruvelli, president of the Veracruz transport workers union ASTRAVER, denounced striking workers for threatening scab drivers and appealed to the government for help: "This has not gotten out of control, we are hoping that a government liaison will engage in dialogue with us, as always in a peaceful way."

Alfredo Dam Ham, leader of the Mexican Transport Workers Alliance (AMOTAC), pledged to the government that the strike would remain peaceful and appealed to drivers to refrain from blocking any roads.

The entire ruling apparatus—including the trade unions, the corporate press, businesses and the capitalist parties—are fearful that the *gasolinazo* protests have the potential to ignite into a movement of millions of Mexican workers. Last night, police arrested up to 600 people as riots and looting spread throughout the country, including youth as young as 13 years old.

The main national association of gas stations, shop owners and department stores called for the government to send the armed forces to crush demonstrations. The group's president, Manuel Cardona Zapata, told the television program *Despierta* yesterday, "We need federal intervention, and if necessary the army, because this situation is out of control."

According to Cardona, rioters have looted 250 stores in recent days as protests spread throughout the state of Mexico, Michoacan, Hidalgo, Mexico City, Veracruz, Tabasco, Queretaro and Quintana Roo.

Mexico City Mayor Miguel Angel Mancera, a member of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), said the subsequent police deployment was "to guarantee the free expression of ideas." [Video](#) circulated yesterday, however, showed police looting stores in the State of Mexico.

Though looting has undoubtedly occurred, it is minuscule compared to the Pena Nieto administration's looting of the oil industry, which was nationalized in 1938 after a major strike by oil workers against British oil corporations. The oil subsidy cut is part of the Mexican ruling class's efforts to privatize Pemex and to hand the country's oil resources over to private corporations.

Protesters, led by transportation workers, have continued to [block](#) several oil processing centers, creating what Pemex described as a "critical situation" for oil production. Heavily armed riot police confronted demonstrators in at least one location and were able to "liberate" the Pemex facility when the workers peacefully retreated from the barricades after a tense standoff.

Transportation workers and demonstrators also reportedly established a new blockade around a facility near the border city of Mexicali. Elements of the federal and state police, as well as the army, are guarding other key facilities. Pemex also announced that the blockades are causing severe gas shortages in Baja California and Chihuahua.

Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, ex-candidate for president and leader of the Movement for National Regeneration (Morena), issued a video statement yesterday afternoon and warned of "chaos" caused by demonstrators who he said were following "fascist strategies." "We want to put order in the chaos," he said. Lopez Obrador told viewers to put their faith in a legislative resolution to overturn the gas hike, saying, "Congress represents the people."

Morena and AMLO are expected to poll well in next year's presidential elections, with many commentators anticipating a Morena victory. Morena is an ostensibly "left," populist bourgeois party that plays a key role in Mexican politics by directing demonstrations back into the safe channels of the Mexican state and away from the class struggle. Morena

helped suffocate opposition to the Pena Nieto government's education reforms, paving the way for the government to cover up its role in murdering 43 student teachers in Guerrero in 2014.

The protests in Mexico have been blacked out by the corporate media in the US, despite the fact that millions of Mexican citizens currently reside north of the border. As of Thursday afternoon, the online front pages of the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, CNN, ABC, Fox, and CBS all failed to mention the demonstrations. This is not an oversight. The American ruling class fears that the development of a movement of the working class in Mexico will ignite a parallel struggle by workers of all nationalities in the United States.

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