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Strategy of tension in Mexico?

"Teachers killed" in Oaxaca police attack, says union

- News from around the world -

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Several people were killed, according to local union leaders, when thousands of state and federal police attacked the encampment (plantón) of striking schoolteachers in the central square of the Mexican city Oaxaca on 14 June. The attack was a desperate move by Oaxaca state Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortíz to crush the more than 50,000 striking schoolteachers, who have been leading a massive movement calling for Ruiz Ortíz of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) to resign.

But it also fits in with what increasingly looks like a 'strategy of tension' stoked up by Mexican President Vicente Fox ahead of the July 2 presidential election. This strategy has involved the violent attack on San Salvador Atenco, and similar attacks on striking copper miners and citizens of the Isla Mujeres, protesting against the establishment on their island of a rubbish dump for the garbage from nearby tourist resort Cancun.

[<https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/atenco24a.jpg>]

Several thousand police attacked the teachers' encampment at 4.40am firing tear gas and brutally beating strikers. According to the teachers' union SNTE police carried away several bodies of people shot dead, which has led to the confusion about the number of fatalities, with the Red Cross at one point reporting 11 dead, while the national teachers' union now puts the figure at three or four. While the police wrecked the encampment and set part of it on fire, there is no guarantee they can hold the *zócalo* (central square) against a massive and popular movement.

The five-week old strike is much more than a dispute over teachers' pay. The Oaxaca Section XXII of the National Education Workers' Union (SNTE) has attracted massive support for its demands, which include equal pay throughout a state which is divided into three salary zones based on the supposed cost of living. The teachers are also demanding an increase for students receiving grants, which now amount to 450 pesos per month. That's \$40 US dollars. They're demanding decent schools, classroom supplies, and government funding for uniforms which are out of reach of so many poor families that the children stay at home.

The SNTE has skilfully contrasted the lack of resources for education in Oaxaca with the evident corruption of the PRI state government. Ruiz Ortíz has spent millions of pesos on unnecessary building works in the central city area, widely seen as a scam to siphon money to his business cronies. Moreover, strikers allege that some 900,000 pesos has disappeared into PRI funds. More than 800 local communities representing Oaxaca's many ethnicities have supported the SNTE struggle, linking it to their own demands, repudiating violence, assassination, the holding of political prisoners, repression of the press and the heavy hand of political bosses ("caciques"). Teachers in Mexico, who are generally very badly paid but highly popular in their local communities, have long been a centre of militancy and the social movements.

Following the violence on 4 May during the police attack on Atenco, the subsequent violence and rapes committed against prisoners following the Atenco raid, the repression of the Isla Mujeres protests and the attacks on the striking miners, there is no doubt a generalised pattern of repression, a 'strategy of tension', is emerging. Two things probably determine this - the July 2nd presidential election and the 'Other Campaign', propelled by the Zapatistas (EZLN).

[<https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/oaxacaiv1.jpg>]

The candidate of Vicente Fox's National Action Party (PAN), Felipe Calderon, is running neck and neck with Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, candidate of the centre-left Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). A 15 June opinion poll

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result showed that Lopez Obrador has regained the lead, and has about 35% compared with Calderon's 32%. Mexico's business elite and the political right are waging a hugely alarmist campaign against the politically very moderate PRD, alleging the country is becoming 'ungovernable' and a PRD government would worsen this. TV images of running fights between protestors and police obviously contribute to the atmosphere of fear that Fox and the PAN (but also the PRI) are trying to generate.

At the same time, many militant social movements and political groupings have participated - more or less critically - in the EZLN's 'Other Campaign' which aims to create a broader alliance of social movements on an all-Mexico level. The attack on Atenco was clearly designed to coincide with the visit of Subcommandante Marcos as part of the Other Campaign tour, and was constructed around a giant provocation - preventing flower sellers setting up stalls on a piece of land owned by Wal-Mart - which was clearly planned in advance. Marcos and the EZLN are the other part of the climate of fear that the right wing media is trying to generate.

[Click here to watch the amazing video 'Atenco - Breaking the Siege'.](#)