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Mexico

Atenco leaders sentenced to 67 years imprisonment

- News from around the world -

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In a vicious act of class reprisal Ignacio del Valle Medina, Felipe Alvarez Hernández and Héctor Galindo Gochicua, leaders of the Peoples Front for the Defense of the Land in Atenco, were sentenced on Saturday 5 May to 67 years 6 months jail each for the events in Atenco in early May 2006. In a timing which is undoubtedly cynical and symbolic, the court chose the first anniversary of a mass meeting in Atenco at which subcommandante Marcos denounced the brutalisation of Atenco's citizens.

[Letter from Ignacio del Valle \(English\)](#)

[Carta de "Nacho" del Valle \(Spanish version\)](#)

That brutalisation- started with clashes on Wednesday May 3 2006, when more than 200 people were arrested and two killed, as police brutally prevented flower sellers from Atenco setting up stalls on the building site which is to become a new Wal- Mart shopping mall.

[<https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/marcosatenco.jpg>] **Ignacio del Valle with Marcos in Atenco**

Rosario Ibarra de Piedra, chair of the Mexican Senate's Human Rights Commission denounced the sentences as a "terrible vengeance, which has the objective of silencing the demand of the people for liberty and justice".

These vicious sentences come in the wake of the fraudulent election last summer when right-wing candidate Felipe Calderon was put into power, on the back of panic in the Mexican ruling class (and the US government) that the election of PRD candidate Manule Lopez Obrador might lead to Mexico linking up with Bolivia and Venezuela, opening a new front of leftwing struggle in Latin America.

It also comes in a climate of growing repression aimed at the popular movements - massive repression against the rebellion in Oaxaca in which dozens appear to have been killed, many are missing and many more are being held as political prisoners. As reported by Narco News the police and military are stepping up their repression of the Zapatistas' Other Campaign. The provocation in San Salvador Atenco in May 2006 was directly linked to the participation of the town in the Other Campaign and the visit of Marcos; in addition it was an attempt at revenge for the successful local struggle in 2002 that prevented the local peasants' land being seized for a new Mexico City airport.

Repression is growing apace in Mexico. Under previous president Vicente Fox and now Felipe Calderon, both of the neoliberal PAN party, the number of political prisoners has grown to over 400. Deaths in social protests are becoming much more common too - the highest level since the military repression against the Party of the Poor in Guerrero state in the early 1970s. This is the consequence of the neoliberalisation of Mexico since the late 1980s. Social inequality is growing rapidly - Mexico now has some of the richest people in the world and many of the poorest, especially in the countryside. The Mexican bourgeoisie, dripping in narco super-profits and the profits from agribusiness and the *maquiladora* assembly plants, has responded with extreme violence to the explosion of social struggles.

In 2006 the people of Atenco were viciously attacked by paramilitary police, dozens of women were raped, two people were killed, dozens of houses wrecked, money stolen and dozens severely wounded. Now it is the victims who suffer what are in effect life sentences. A huge international campaign for the release of all Mexican political prisoners is needed.

Below is an account of the events of May 3-4 2006 in Atenco.

Atenco May 3-4

An eyewitness said, "At 7am this past Wednesday, May 3, state police blocked 60 flower vendors from setting up their stands at the Texcoco local market. The police beat and arrested those who resisted.

"The flower vendors called to the residents of neighbouring San Salvador Atenco for help and the Atenco residents blocked the highway that borders their town and leads to Texcoco.

"The police response was overwhelming: hundreds of state and federal police, most clad in riot gear, arrived to lift the blockade. Atenco resisted, with machetes, clubs, Molotov cocktails and bottle rockets. The police tried to lift the blockade five times throughout the day, and five times they were repelled.

"The violence was extreme. Photographs published in local papers show Atenco protestors beating a fallen policeman, police beating tens of fallen protestors. Severe beatings. Protesters kicking one fallen police officer in the face, groups of police pulverizing tens of protestors with rocks and batons.

"Police also attacked photographers from both the national and the international press. Photographers and television cameramen from Associated Press, Reuters, Milenio, Jornada and Televisa all reported beatings and attempts to confiscate cameras. Photographs and film coverage of the beatings were published on the internet and shown on national television. Local and international news articles however, have not mentioned the systematic police violence against reporters."

Why did this heavy-handed repression take place? It is about much more than stopping local peasants from selling their flowers where Walmart wants to be. This district is an area with a long history of militancy, where local people in 2002 stopped the building of an airport on peasant land around Atenco. This campaign reached near-uprising proportions. Moreover Atenco has symbolically declared itself an 'autonomous municipality', like the Zapatista communities in Chiapas.

Local popular leaders invited Subcommandante Marcos, in nearby Mexico City for 'Other campaign' meetings, to visit Atenco as part of his tour. It was in the wake of his visit that the repression took place. During his visit, Marcos promised to align the Zapatista Army of National Liberation with Atenco's struggle. The Atenco Front, with machetes in hand, was in charge of providing security for Marcos during the May first Labor Day march to Mexico City's main plaza where the Front's leader, Ignacio Del Valle, spoke before tens of thousands gathered in the plaza.

Upsidedown World reported, "Two days later riot police stormed the house where he (Ignacio del Valle) had been hiding since the attack in Texcoco. At that moment the Televisa cameraman was outside the house filming the police operation when some five police officers approached and repeatedly beat him with clubs. As a result there is no film coverage of the police raid.

"Several newspaper photographers, however, photographed Del Valle's arrival to prison several hours later that night. He was carried in a headlock by a masked police officer, who, in the photographs, is pointing for the photographers to leave the area. Another masked officer walked slightly behind, grabbing Del Valle's back.

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"The two masked officers walk Del Valle through a gauntlet of a hundred riot police with helmets and shields. Del Valle's head is covered with a towel in the pictures, but his face, swollen and bloody is partially visible. Also visible is a blood stain the size of a fist on the groin of his jeans, evidence of repeated strikes to his testicles."

Subcommandante Marcos reappeared in Atenco at a rally on Friday 5 May, holding up empty cartridge case which he said police had used live ammunition when 14-year old Javier Cortés was killed on 3 May. Marcos called on the commercial media to stop their 'smear campaign' against the people, who have been accused by TV and newspapers of supporting the EPRI. Marcos also announced at a protest rally in Plaza de la Tres Culturas that the Other Campaign was being suspended and that in the light of the situation in the Texcoco valley he would remain in Mexico City indefinitely.