

Political Repression and the Rise of Mexico's Narco-State.

The Electrical Workers Union versus President Calderon

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"We are confronting a monster; a force that ridicules, deceives and wants to destroy us". Miguel Angel Ibara, member of the Mexican Electrical Workers Union, (SME) on the 80th day of a hunger strike. (La Jornada July 18, 2010).

There is a direct relation between the rise of criminal gangs, the deepening of neo-liberalism and the repression of social movements and trade unions.

Mexican President Calderon's firing of over 44,000 unionized electrical workers is the latest in a series of repressive acts which have shattered the social fabric of society. The denial of meaningful, well remunerated employment and the criminalization of legitimate trade unions like the Mexican Electrical Union (SME) has led to mass immigration and to an increasing number of young people joining the drug gangs. State repression and electoral corruption has prevented Mexican workers from redressing their grievances through legal channels and has aided and abetted the rise of a parallel narco-state which controls vast regions of the country and which recruits young men and women seeking to escape poverty.

Over the past 25 years, Mexico has regressed socially, economically and politically as a result of the neo-liberal offensive, which began with the stolen election of 1988 in which Carlos Salinas robbed Cuauhtemoc Cardenas of the presidency. Subsequently, Salinas signed the free trade agreement, NAFTA, which led to the bankruptcy of over 10 million Mexican farmers, peasants and small urban retail shop owners, driving many to immigrate, others to join social movements and some to revolt as was the case with EZLN. Over 10 million Mexicans emigrated since NAFTA.

State repression and the forced isolation of the EZLN, in Chiapas and other rural movements in Guerrero, Michoacan and elsewhere, the denial of rural justice, forced many peasants to flee to the urban slums where some eventually became members of the emerging narco-gangs.

By the turn of the new millennium Mexico's experiment with neo-liberal "reforms" deepened the systemic crises – inequalities widened, the economy stagnated and poverty increased. As a result, millions of Mexicans fled across the border into North America or joined popular movements attempting to change the system.

Two powerful social and political movements emerged, which sought to reverse Mexico's slide into political decay and social disintegration. On the political front Andres Manuel

Lopez Obrador, the Presidential candidate of a broad citizens coalition, led millions to an electoral victory in 2006 – only to be denied through massive voting fraud perpetrated by supporters of Calderon. The second force, a coalition of trade unions and social movements, led by SME, fought to preserve the public social security system and state ownership of the electrical system from privatization and exploitation by the voracious predator foreign and domestic capitalist class.

Mass mobilizations involving hundreds of thousands marched in Mexico City and throughout the provinces, while millions of consumers expressed their solidarity, as did all of the major trade unions in Europe, Latin America and elsewhere.

What was at stake was not merely the jobs of the unionized electrical workers and the social security system but one of the most effective social movements defending a social safety net for the working class.

By attacking SME and the social security system, one of the last major social institutions providing social cohesion, Caldera and the judicial system were further denying Mexicans legal political and social instruments through which they could aspire to defend their living standards.

By destroying the social net via the privatization of public programs and institutions, by repressing vital social movements like the Zapatistas in Chiapas, the teachers and trade unions in Oaxaca and the SME in Mexico City, the Mexican State is effectively denying hope for improvement via democratic political processes.

Neoliberal stagnation, state repression of democratic popular movements and the repeated theft of electoral victories by peoples movements in 1987 and 2006 has led to widespread and profound disillusion with politics as usual. Even more ominously it has turned thousands of Mexican youth into enemies of the state, and toward membership in the numerous violent narco-gangs. The Mexican states' rejection of peaceful electoral changes and its repression and denial of the rights of social movements like the SME has left few outlets for the mass frustrations which are percolating under the surface of society.

In the last four years over 25,000 police, soldiers, civilians and narco members have been assassinated in every region of the country. Despite Calderon's militarization of the country, the 40,000 soldiers in the streets have failed to prevent the escalation of violence, clearly demonstrating the failure of the repressive option to end violence and prevent the disintegration of Mexico into a 'failed state'.

The recovery and reconstruction of Mexico, begins with strengthening the social fabric of Mexican society – the promotion of the urban and social movements and in particular the mass democratic trade unions like the SME.

These movements and trade unions are the essential building blocks for the transformation of Mexican society: the end of neo-liberalism, the repudiation of NAFTA and the reconstruction of a powerful public sector under workers control. To fight the twin evils of the corrupt militarized neo-liberal state and the violent parallel narco-state, which currently exploit and terrorize the country, a new mass based political-social movement which combines the solidarity of the trade unions like the SME and the popular appeal of political leaders like Lopez Obrador must coalesce and offer a radical program of national reconstruction and social justice. The alternative is the further disintegration of the Mexican state and the descent into a condition of unending generalized violence, where the rich live

in armed fortresses and the poor are subject to the violent depredations of the military and the narco terrorists.

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