

Mexico: major strike of Baja California day workers

In the state of Baja California, thousands of Mexican migrant laborers are struggling against the conditions of their exploitation.

Most of the information and libertarian or "radical" information and analyses that reach us about Mexico don't go beyond eternal leftist illusions about these movements (above all, the Zapatistas), exalting their most ambiguous aspects (communitarianism, demands linked to identity politics, etc.) or masking them (with a militaristic logic and a vertical mentality, a reformist and political discourse, in their attitudes vis-à-vis other struggles) according to their needs.

This absence of critical logic and nuanced analyses takes on a reductionist form (often linked to ethnic and communitarian identity) around the many struggles carried out by the exploited of Mexico, and does not help to understand the relationship between them in their diversity (urban struggles, struggles against drug trafficking, theft of land and development projects, against repression, against daily social control and various forms of authority and exploitation) and therefore fails to provide an overview of the current state of the the class struggle in Mexico. This brief article, coming from a little bit of experience in Mexico, from some research and from some exchange of information and discussion, attempts to remedy this. It is also a call to discuss and debate.

The movement of San Quintin

On March 17, tens of thousands of day workers (TN: workers hired by the day) rose up in the town of San Quintin (State of Baja California). The strike has lasted for several days. Convened by an alliance of day worker and / or Indian organizations, it saw confrontations between hundreds of farm workers and the forces of order (diverse police and military bodies) and several offensive actions. The general secretary of the local government described the events of the early days as "a situation of almost total anarchy", with the main road (the "Transpeninsular") blocked for 120 km and the valley of San Quintin practically under the control of the strikers.

The clashes and the road blockade occurred after the authorities' refusal to negotiate demands for improving working and living conditions on the spot (wage increases, reduced working hours, signed contracts and access to social security, the end of violence against workers and sexual abuse of female workers by supervisors, and - the list goes on). The release of 200 Indian Raramuri (Tarahumara) reduced to conditions of slavery at a nearby operation also contributed towards the mobilisation.

The municipality of San Quintin "hosts" between 60,000 and 80,000 laborers in extreme conditions of poverty. It is part of an area straddling several northern states of the country (Sonora, Sinaloa and Baja California), where hundreds of thousands of migrants coming from the south, especially Oaxaca, are exploited. The products of these gigantic farming operations in which they toil are mainly for export. Their sale is an important part of the wealth of these states, and the land belongs to the families who run them.

While some representatives of the strikers threaten to extend the movement into areas nearby (and

perhaps among migrants of US agricultural areas) if negotiations with the institutions fail, thousands of laborers remain mobilized after the demonstrations of strength of recent days.

On Mexico

The current social situation in Mexico is marked by the disappearance of the 43 students of the Normal School of Ayotzinapa (in the state of Guerrero), the result of collusion between the state police and drug trafficking. The Guerrero movement is powerful (with its origins in the armed struggle of the 70s, whose inspiration is Maoist) and conducts almost daily actions to seize the municipalities, and sometimes establish forms of community management (which marks a clear difference with the historical logic of the conquest of power).

The significant skills of organisation and action of these movements (especially peasant and Indian) is embodied in a wide variety of popular organizations, very involved in community management, in the spirit of the historic Zapatism and today influenced by its neo-version. They are also more marked by Leftist tendencies than is generally admitted, and have a long history of political recuperation and tendencies towards authoritarianism, via the traditional authorities of communities in general.

The peasant and indigenous movements are the main actors in the struggles against drug trafficking, with the introduction of "Community Police" in Indian communities (especially in the state of Guerrero), which Power does everything to infiltrate into or to recuperate, and the self-defense militias (especially in the state of Michoacán), outside of these communities, in a much more murky role.

So this represents hundreds of thousands of armed men and women in the country, with an attachment to autonomy vis-à-vis the institutional powers. In general, there are no clear references to a desire for radical change and revolution around the country, outside of the few remaining armed organizations or sections of authoritarian leftists (some significant in terms of numbers): Stalinists, Trotskyists and Leninists.

The trade union movement, since the long hegemonic rule of the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) from 1929 to 1989, is controlled by vertical majority unions, by mafia-type management of sectors of activity which everyone knows about. So strikes are limited. Since the closure in 2009 of the public company Luz y Fuerza del Centro (electricity distribution, whose union included combative tendencies), and a movement among the steelworkers of Arcelor Mittal Port of Lázaro Cárdenas (important economic hub of the narco-state of Michoacán) in 2009, from which the only thing remaining is the CNTE teachers Coordination created by the combative tendencies in the Teachers Union (SNTE) to escape this union's bureaucratic control. This coordination is engaged in most of the Central and Southern States in fairly heavy fights. It encompasses the entire spectrum of leftist authoritarian tendencies, of minorities who are less authoritarian and a combative base.

(This article is deliberately not about antiauthoritarian tendencies and circles in Mexico, which will be later covered by other articles).

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