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Mexico

Why are Mexican students fighting?

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On August 27, 2018 the student community at the College of Sciences and Humanities (CCH) campus in Azcapotzalco - one of the 15 baccalaureates of the UNAM (National Autonomous University of Mexico) - decided at a meeting to take over the facilities and initiate a stoppage, a decision taken because of various problems including a lack of teachers, unpunished attacks by violent groups and authoritarian decisions by the college leadership. Days later, on September 2, the burnt body of Marcia Miranda, a student at CCH East, was found in the state of Mexico. This news had a great impact because in Mexico seven women are murdered every day, and the possibility of being a victim of femicide increases exponentially for young women. Despite such a shocking incident, the university said nothing.

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That is why, faced with the dreadful news of Marcia's femicide, a demonstration was called on September 3, which ended at the UNAM's Rectory building in Ciudad Universitaria (C. U). Members of Maria's family were involved, but also relatives of the victims of other femicides such as the mother of Lesvy Berlin – a victim of femicide within the facilities of C. U. - and members of the family of Mariela Vanessa – a student of Spanish language and literature missing since April 2018. In addition this demonstration was intended to continue highlighting the demands of the student comrades at CCH Azcapotzalco.

While the rally was being held, a group of approximately 50 thugs attacked the participants with sticks, tubes, Molotov cocktails and stones. The demonstration thinned out, trying to save the mothers of the victims but also trying to safeguard the integrity of all those present. The thugs fulfilled their mission: to break up the demonstration, using extreme violence. Several students were injured and two were hospitalized, one of whom lost part of an ear and the other was stabbed in the kidney.

It is important to say that the violent groups are shock troops formed mostly by students from the same universities but directed by people outside the colleges; there is usually a group of thugs for each school or campus. These shock troops are used by the directors of the institutions and by political figures from the regime parties to intimidate students organized by social movements. These groups have been organized since the 1970s for the same purposes and have been responsible for a huge list of dead and injured students.

The straw that broke the camel's back

The attack on the demonstration on September 3 was the straw that broke the camel's back in the discontent of the university community where insecurity, gender violence, impunity, criminalization of drug use and inadequate budgets are just some of the points raised in the demands and disagreements that students have and being discussed today in the meetings.

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The way in which the discontent of the university community was made visible was through meetings in which thousands of students participated, promoting the stoppage of activities in 41 campuses of the UNAM and other universities in solidarity with the demands, such as the IPN (National Polytechnic Institute), the UPN (National Pedagogical University), as well as universities from other regions of the country.

The first public action was on September 5th with a march inside Ciudad Universitaria. This impressive march toured a large part of the facilities and ended in the rectoría, the same place where the attack of September 3 took place, but this time there were more than 30,000 students, scholars and workers, leaving a clear message: the university community will not allow more violence against its students.

In the new political landscape where large sectors of the population are questioning the pillars of neoliberal policies applied for 40 years, this student mobilization accelerates the fight against a decomposed and dying regime and warns the new incoming government that the new generations will continue to stay on the streets to defend rights and change the country fundamentally.

In the coming days each school will decide the demands that the movement as a whole should put forward to continue the fight and the form in which they will be fought for, because this moment has uncovered the rage of university youth, after the experiences of #Yo Soy132, the campaign for the 43 students of Ayotzinapa to be returned alive and the struggle for public education. [1]. The winds of change are backed by a new generation of university students who want to rebuild a country deeply wounded by violence, impunity and neoliberal policies.

PS:

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[1] On September 26, 2014, 43 male students from the Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers' College were forcibly taken then disappeared in Iguala, Guerrero, Mexico. None of them have ever been seen again. #YoSoy132, was a protest movement composed for the most part of Mexican university students from private and public universities, residents of Mexico, claiming supporters from about 50 cities around the world.[2] It began as opposition to the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) candidate Enrique Peña Nieto and the Mexican media's allegedly biased coverage of the 2012 general election.[3] The name Yo Soy 132, Spanish for "I Am 132", originated in an expression of solidarity with the original 131 protest's initiators. The phrase drew inspiration from the Occupy movement and the Spanish 15-M movement.