

Police killing of Giovanni López sparks protests, political crisis in Mexico

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Protests erupted late last week in Guadalajara and Mexico City over the brutal police murder of 30-year-old bricklayer Giovanni López in early May of this year after a video of his arrest surfaced on social media. All factions of the Mexican bourgeois establishment are scrambling to save face as scenes of brutal police repression in the state of Jalisco, led by the right-wing Citizens Movement (MC), are now circulating on social media.

The demonstrations have deepened the political crisis confronting the Movement of National Regeneration (Morena), the national ruling party led by President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO). The protests demonstrate growing international opposition to police violence triggered by the police murder of George Floyd and also reflect broad social anger over the Mexican government's criminally negligent response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting massive economic fallout.

Footage of the May 4 arrest in López's hometown of Ixtlahuacán, about 30 kilometers from Guadalajara, released last week, shows a crowd of roughly ten police arresting a non-violent López as bystanders explain that he is being arrested for not wearing a face mask. López died in the hospital the next day of a traumatic brain injury. Relatives confirmed signs of torture on his body.

López's brother claims the family initially did not release the video because they were approached by an intermediary for Ixtlahuacán Mayor Eduardo Cervantes Aguilar (Party of the Institutional Revolution—PRI), who offered them 200,000 pesos (about \$9,000 US dollars) in hush money and threatened them with death if they released the video. Cervantes Aguilar refused to appear for a state hearing on Friday and his whereabouts are unknown.

Enrique Alfaro, governor of the state of Jalisco, has sought to defuse popular anger through a combination of token reforms, lies, and repression. Alfaro ordered the

arrest of three of the police who arrested Giovanni López, claiming there are more arrests to come. The Jalisco state police have taken over policing responsibilities in Ixtlahuacán, where 34 of the 69 municipal police have not passed so-called confidence tests related to connections to organized crime.

The Mexican police and military wantonly use violence against the population and protesters, as was demonstrated by the role of Iguala, Guerrero police in the 2014 disappearance and presumed murder of 43 teaching students from a college in the nearby town of Ayotzinapa. An investigation by the Mexican Attorney General found that the students, who were protesting severe cuts to education, were likely killed by a local gang after being herded onto buses by Iguala police before being incinerated and dumped into a river.

However, attempts to portray López's murder as simply the work of a particularly corrupt local police force are exposed by the brutal repression meted out by Alfaro against a demonstration on Friday at which protesters were beaten and arbitrarily detained by police, including by plainclothes police armed with sticks, bats, and pipes, who carted demonstrators away in unmarked pickup trucks. According to his mother and videos posted on social media, law graduate Jesús Isaí Luna Martínez was beaten and detained by police without provocation. Her mother saw him in the hospital but has not been able to see him since. There are reports that up to 29 demonstrators have similarly "disappeared" and have not been located yet.

The Ixtlahuacán police were fulfilling Alfaro's mandatory face covering policy when they arrested López. Alfaro himself announced the face covering policy with a threat that those who failed to comply would face use of force. Alfaro's MC has sought to exploit the criminally negligent response to the COVID-19 pandemic by Morena national government of President López

Obrador, channeling justified fear of infection behind this right-wing law-and-order party.

As in the United States, Alfaro attempted to justify the police crackdown by claiming some protesters came from other states, asserting without evidence that they were paid professional agitators associated with the Morena party aimed at subverting the MC government.

AMLO has distanced himself from the protests rejecting claims that he orchestrated them with the statement “No soy jefe de pandilla” (“I am not a gang leader”), saying that Alfaro should provide evidence to back up his statements. AMLO has stated that the federal government is planning not to get involved in the investigation of López’ killing, supposedly to avoid unnecessary “partisanship.” AMLO is responsible for a massive expansion of the Mexican government’s repressive apparatus, having established the National Guard in violation of his previous pledge to end the militarization of Mexican society.

Meanwhile in Morena-governed Mexico City, police brutally repressed demonstrations calling for justice for both Giovanni López and George Floyd. After a peaceful vigil of about 300 on Thursday, a smaller youth-led protest began on Friday at the US embassy. The demonstration was met with roughly 500 riot police and marched from the US embassy to Casa de Jalisco, which represents the Jalisco government in the capital.

Social media footage shows police brutally beating demonstrators, including a sixteen-year-old named Melanie, who was thrown to the ground and kicked repeatedly, including in the head, before being taken to the hospital with bruises on her face and skull.

As a face-saving measure, Mexico City Mayor Claudia Sheinbaum condemned the brutality and ordered the arrest of two police officers. The Trump administration, through its ambassador to Mexico, then placed the Morena government in an uncomfortable position by unreservedly lauding the police for their “courage and professionalism towards criminals.”

Even as these protests expand, a new police killing has surfaced on social media. In a scene reminiscent of the police strangulation of George Floyd, footage has also emerged of 28-year-old Oliver López (no apparent relation) being killed on March 27 at a gas station in Tijuana by a team of five police, one holding his legs, another with a boot on his neck. Bystanders recording the video can be heard exclaiming “Lo mató, lo mató!” (“He killed him! He killed him!”) as López body stops moving. This video and the story has circulated widely on social

media, with a petition for justice for Lopez gaining over 50,000 signatures after film director Guillermo del Toro shared it on his Twitter account.

The naked police murders of these two workers demonstrate that police violence in Mexico, the United States and worldwide is fundamentally class based. Giovanni López was a bricklayer and had fair skin. Although Oliver López’ occupation and image do not appear to have been released, he lived with his adoptive mother and was awaiting the birth of his second child.

Workers across the world confront the same police brutality, the same hostility from the entire political establishment, and the same underlying economic and public health grievances as workers are forced back into unsafe workplaces in the middle of a pandemic under threat of starvation. As the MORENA government allows the virus to run rampant, the country first surpassed 1,000 official daily COVID-19 deaths on June 4, the day of the first Giovanni López protests, exceeding the death toll in the United States, which has roughly twice Mexico’s population. The Mexican economy is projected to contract by 9 percent in 2020, with even AMLO expecting an undoubtedly conservative 1 million job losses.

However, the racist narrative of the Democratic Party is fundamentally opposed to unifying these struggles on a class basis. Workers and young people the world over must reject this racist narrative with contempt and build the strongest links possible across all races, ethnicities, genders and nationalities. All capitalist parties are increasingly relying on the police and military as the enforcers of private property and exploitation against the working class. Workers must break from all of these capitalist parties and demand the abolition of the police as an integral part of the struggle for socialism.



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