

Mexican Police, Army Attack Hundreds of Striking Farm Workers in Baja California

May 11, 2015



In another attempt to break a strike and keep agribusiness products rolling north into the United States, the Mexican Army and State Preventive Police again attacked hundreds of striking farm workers in the San Quintín Valley of Baja California who had blocked the Trans-Peninsular Highway on May 9. Workers blocked the highway to protest Governor Francisco de Lamadrid's cancellation of a promised meeting between his government and farm worker leaders.

Farm workers went on strike on March 17 over higher wages, carrying out a brilliant but brief strike and highway shutdown before being attacked by the police at that time. While several hundred have continued various marches and protests, many other farm workers returned to work and employers claimed that production had returned to normal.

Workers reported that on May 9 police and the military invaded their homes, attacked and beat them with clubs and shot them with rubber bullets. Several farm workers and a few police officers were injured badly enough to be hospitalized and dozens farm workers suffered less serious wounds and injuries. The police claimed that workers had set fire to fields and burned two police cars and police station.

Spokesmen for the Alliance of National, State and Municipal Organizations, the coalition of indigenous organizations that is leading the strike, called for the removal of governor de Lamadrid of the conservative, pro-business National Action Party (PAN) for his repeated and violent attacks on workers.

The Mexican government's use of the military and police to break the strike for higher wages by tens of thousands of farm workers in the San Quintín valley of Baja California represents only the most recent expression of the government's use of police and military force to crush strikes, break unions, and prevent the development of an independent labor movement. San Quintín's farm workers will need solidarity from other Mexican workers and U.S. workers if they are to win their demand for higher wages. While there have been expressions of solidarity from unions on both sides of the border, there is not yet a movement big enough to beat the growers and their Baja government.

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