

Brutality in Oaxaca

Friday 2 February 2007, by [LA BOTZ Dan](#) (Date first published: December 2006).

DECEMBER, 2006 — THE Mexican Federal police have pulled out of the central plaza of the city of Oaxaca, Oaxaca after occupying it for three weeks. The buildings on the square have all been freshly painted to cover the graffiti. A Christmas tree, a nativity scene, and poinsettias have been set up. But several of the surrounding shops have been boarded up, their windows broken during the recent clashes between citizens and police. Others on the verge of bankruptcy may board up soon.

The state Secretary of Culture has organized some events such as a recital by a local choir, and some Mexican tourists listen, but there are few foreign tourists to enjoy it. The new president of Mexico, Felipe Calderón, takes credit for restoring order.

The movement that began as a teachers strike, became a virtual rebellion, and culminated in violent clashes was crushed by the Federal occupation of the city of Oaxaca. Altogether in the last six months there were 20 killed including U.S. Indymedia journalist Brad Will, 270 wounded, and 349 arrested.

Yet despite the severe level of repression, the movement has not died. Some 40 prisoners, many of whom were tortured, a practice common in Mexico, have been returned from the state of Nayarit. The principal leader of the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO), Flavio Sosa, remains in jail, but a spokesman for the group vowed to continue their fight to remove Governor Ulises Ruiz.

Nevertheless, the local context has now changed. The governor has set up his own commission on the reform of Oaxaca and invited local groups to participate, a cynical move that some organizations have criticized, refusing to participate. At the same time, Local 22 of the Mexican Teachers Union (el SNTE), which signed a new contract with the state Secretary of Education several weeks ago, has broken with APPO, accusing the latter of having botched negotiations with the previous government. Still, many teachers will rally to APPO's call to remove the governor.

But for now in Mexico it is Christmas time, from December 12, Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe, until January 6, Day of the Magi. According to Mexican papers, more than four million Mexicans, documented and undocumented, have returned from the United States to Mexico for the holidays. The remittances sent by the 10% of Mexicans who now live in the United States amount to \$20 billion, much of it going to poor communities in Oaxaca.

Many people who have returned to Oaxaca, bringing blenders to their mothers, will listen to the tale of the six months' struggle by the teachers and the people of Oaxaca to remove the governor. Then they will have to decide whether they return to the United States, where Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is rounding up the undocumented at the meatpacking plants, or if they will try to stay in Mexico.

APPO says the struggle to remove Ruiz will resume in mid-January, and there is little doubt that it will.

P.S.

* From Against the Current, January/February 2007, No. 126.