

100,000 Mexican Campesinos Protest on Emiliano Zapata's Birthday



Mexico City, August 10 (RHC)-- Thousands of campesinos poured into the streets of Mexico City to celebrate the birthday of the iconic Mexican Revolution leader Emiliano Zapata and to demand more federal government support for infrastructure and development in rural areas, local media reported.

Organized by the National Autonomous Front of the Countryside, campesinos from more than a dozen Mexican states rallied at Zocalo Square at the National Palace, the city's main political hub. The march then continued toward the Ministry of the Interior, where some protesters planned to set up an encampment.

With some 130,000 protesters in 3,000 buses expected to join the march, the government deployed 3,700 security agents to patrol main protest points, while police helicopters also watched from overhead, La Jornada reported.

Protesters flew banners with slogans such as: "They've taken everything from us, even fear" and blasted Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto for neglecting rural communities with inadequate budgets and government inattention to land reform, a central tenet of the legendary Zapata's populist platform.

Mexico's campesinos have suffered the consequences of more than 20 years of the North American Free Trade Agreement between Canada, the U.S., and Mexico. Launched in 1994 under then-President Bill Clinton, NAFTA has displaced 1.5 million Mexican campesinos as a flood of subsidized, cheap U.S. food imports undermined local markets and adversely impacted Mexico's agricultural sector and food security.

Members of the Mexican Electrical Workers union and the CNTE dissident teachers union, in ongoing heated talks with the government after protests erupted in violence during a fatal police crackdown in Oaxaca in June, also joined the protest in solidarity with the campesinos and their demands.

While the country's campesino movements have raised distinct complaints and demands, the underlying issues also parallel the issues raised by striking dissident CNTE teachers in their fight to overhaul the country's public education system. The union has criticized neo-liberal education reforms brought in by Peña Nieto in 2013 for failing to recognize the unique education needs in rural and Indigenous communities, demanding a new approach to public education that protects it from creeping privatization.

^oThe campesino marches coincide with the 137th birthday of the legendary Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata, a symbol of campesino resistance in the country and founding father of the Zapatismo movement from which the iconic Zapatistas of Chiapas draw their name.

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