

# *Hundreds Arrested in Mexican Rural Laborers Protest*

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Mexico City, March 19 (teleSUR-RHC) Hundreds of Mexican rural laborers were arrested in the coastal town of San Quintin, in the northern state of Baja California, following protests by some 10,000 workers demanding better work conditions and wages.

For hours, the protesting workers blocked the only road connecting the entire Peninsula with the U.S. border. The workers, who are demanding a salary of \$20 per day, say contractors are currently paying them less than \$10.

Local media reported that nearly 200 people were arrested after demonstrators clashed with police agents who sought to disperse the protests. The state's governor, Francisco Vega de Lamadrid, blamed outside groups for the disturbance.

Following the clashes, shops and gas stations were looted and cars torched, with police reporting that shots were fired. After the incident, nearly 1,200 security agents were deployed to safeguard the municipality of Ensenada.

San Quintin is one of the most important agricultural valleys of Mexico due to the volume of its exports and number of rural laborers, estimated at 60,000. According to a recent report by the Autonomous University of Chapingo, the situation for day laborers in Mexico is precarious because they have no social

or occupational safety, and their employers do not adhere to the minimal regulations in place.

The day laborers of Baja California work picking strawberries, onions, asparagus, tomatoes and berries for the U.S. market. The Mexican state's largest fields are owned by 12 families, including that of Manuel Valladolid, the state's minister of agricultural development.

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