Call for a tourist boycott of Oaxaca City, June 28, 2005

Note: forwarded message attached.

Subject: Oaxacan reporters
From: Margaret Knapke <margaretknapke@earthlink.net>
Date: Mon, 27 Jun 2005 10:57:29 -0400
To: OhioWorkingGroupOnLA@topica.com, andres@desmilitarizacion.net

Dear Friends,

Please take a moment to read the following:

There is a very serious situation going on here in Oaxaca, Mexico.

Thirty-one press workers with Noticias, the largest newspaper in the state, have been trapped inside of their office building since the pre-dawn hours of Friday, June 17th when busloads of people set up camp in the street and blockaded the entrance and exit points. The crowd is extremely hostile and intimidating and is taking orders from a local politician who is both a representative in the state legislature and union boss with the CROC, a "labor organization" strongly tied to the PRI party since its founding. The crowd also consists of hired thugs ("porros") and plainclothes police. Uniformed transit police, as well as the UPOE (a militarized state police force) are providing security for the shock group outside of the Noticias building.

The crowd has blockaded an entire city block in downtown Oaxaca City with dump trucks filled with gravel and dirt, set up a giant tent structure (such as used at outside weddings), and brought in port-a-potties. All under the approving watch of state police forces.

At first, the newspaper workers were able to eat the food that was in the company cafeteria, but that is gone now. A number of the trapped workers report gastrointestinal illness and one diabetic is said to be in a delicate condition. The crowd outside is blocking any attempt to deliver food or medicine. In a desperate sounding phone call to the local unlicensed LPFM station, one of the workers said the psychological effects are taking their toll - in particular because the crowd won't let them sleep at night. The crowd gets drunk and belligerent every night and bangs on the doors and windows and has even threatened to set the building on fire. Some of the workers inside are starting to crack under the pressure of knowing that no one has been able to do anything to get them out or to guarantee their safety. The workers have been literally left there to starve to death under conditions of collective psychological torture.

All the while, the federal government does nothing and the local media is absolutely silent.

This needs to be contextualized in the current climate of press freedoms in Mexico. According the annual Reporters Without Borders report on press freedoms worldwide, more journalists were assassinated in Mexico last year than any other country in the Western Hemisphere - knocking Colombia out of its #1 position. So far this year, one newspaper owner was killed when ambushed by gunmen while driving home, a radio reporter was gunned down outside of the station where she worked, and another reporter is "dissapeared" and is presumed dead after he left his office to interview a source. I'm not even going to list the threats, acts of intimidation, and harassment that have now become common for

journalists who touch the subjects of organized crime and government corruption.

*Noticias* is really the only major media covering the very blatant government corruption in Oaxaca. Although it's really only pointing out the obvious, it enrages the powers-that-be here. The fact that state politicians can so openly attack the best-selling newspaper in the state so openly and with such total impunity is sending a very clear and threatening message to honest and critical journalists throughout the country - "report what we tell you to or there will be serious consequences".

As a reporter, the only thing I can do... is to tell as many people as possible. As an international reporter, my media access is somewhat limited. So, I'm asking those of you who have access to the community airwaves to PLEASE BROADCAST THIS INFORMATION. Vladimir Flores and I have audio (all in Spanish), contact info of those inside, copies of communiques, still photos, a video, etc. If you work on a show that has an interview format and this sounds like an interesting topic to discuss, contact me. If you need translations of audio or documents relating to this subject, I will gladly help. Please check mexico.indymedia.org/oaxaca for resources or listen to June 20 and 23 editions of FSRN for more background.

Finally, I would like to ask all of you reading this to ask yourselves, "What would [our station] do if something similar happened to us or to one of our reporters?"

Thank you for your attention,
Shannon Young  <audiophyl@com>  
Oaxaca, Mexico

All comments and criticisms are welcome.  <george.salzman@umb.edu>

If you want me to add or remove your name from my e-mail distribution list, please let me know.

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*Last update of this page: June 29, 2005*