

Johnny Hazard dispatches from Mexico

—On this day in 1976, left singer-songwriter Phil Ochs died; on this day in 1989, Yippie activist Abbie Hoffman died. Both committed suicide and both apparently lived with bipolar disorder and thus were unable to continue living, despite their ability to provoke raucous laughter in the rest of us. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLqKXrID1TU>

—LIFE OF MUMIA ABU-JAMAL IN DANGER. TEACHER fired when her students sent letters to Mumia.

As we write, Mumia Abu-Jamal is in grave medical condition. It was reported yesterday evening (April 24) that after Mumia was earlier taken from the hospital over objections from his family, and then two days ago removed from the prison infirmary and placed in the general prison population, his medical condition is worsening.

For decades the authorities have sought to silence the imprisoned radical journalist and former Black Panther, whose radio broadcasts earned him a reputation as "the voice of the voiceless." His prison writings, including "Live from Death Row" and hundreds of broadcast articles collected in several books, have been read around the world. A medical alert from Noelle Hanrahan of "Prison Radio," (which I am attaching) says that he is now barely able to eat and showing symptoms possibly associated with "hyper glucose levels, diabetic shock, diabetic coma, and with kidney stress and failure."

Mumia urgently needs 24-hour medical care. Readers are asked to contact prison authorities and demand that he "be seen immediately, and not be left to go into a diabetic coma."

Below is a solidarity message from Class Struggle Education Workers in defense of Marilyn Zuniga, the third-grade teacher in Orange, N.J., who has been suspended and is threatened with firing because her students sent get-well cards to Mumia.

“NJ Teacher Whose Students Sent Get-Well Cards to Mumia”

“Defend Marilyn Zuniga”

The Class Struggle Education Workers stands in solidarity with Orange, N.J., elementary school teacher Marilyn Zuniga, who was suspended after her third-grade students sent “get-well” messages to Mumia Abu-Jamal, the re-nowned black radical journalist who was framed and convicted in the 1981 shooting death of Philadelphia police officer Daniel Faulkner.

Despite Mumia’s innocence, he was sentenced to death and kept on Death Row for 29 years. He is still imprisoned for life while the authorities are determined to silence this “voice of the voiceless” one way or another.

Zuniga’s suspension by the Orange school board stemmed from a lesson she taught on civil rights leaders back in February during Black History Month. She asked her class of black and Hispanic students to consider the meaning of a quote from Jamal: “So long as one just person is silenced, there is no justice.”

On March 30, Jamal went into diabetic shock with life-threatening high blood sugar and was taken from prison to an outside hospital. Two days later he was suddenly returned to SCI Mahanoy, the same prison whose medical personnel had failed to diagnose or treat him. That's when the kids sent their cards. Zuniga told a WABC reporter: "In April, I mentioned to my students that Mumia was very ill and they told me they would like to write 'get-well' letters to Mumia."

Zuniga's victimization was not because school children sent cards to prisoners but because the prisoner is Mumia Abu-Jamal. The suspension is part and parcel of a decades-long vendetta against Jamal spearheaded by the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP), dutifully whipped up by the right-wing media, and supported by both Democrat and Republican politicians. John McNesby, the president of the Philadelphia FOP, wasted no time in attacking Zuniga. "It's absolutely not teaching them anything except how to interact with a convicted cop killer." (New York Daily News, 11 April).

Jamal has been in the crosshairs of the notoriously corrupt Philadelphia police since he was a teenage member of the Black Panther Party. His subsequent courageous and eloquent writing and radio broadcasts in Philadelphia earned him both a reputation as the "voice of the voiceless" and the undying hatred of the Philly PD and the FOP. The cops shot and beat Jamal on the night Faulkner was killed, then railroaded him onto death row. For 30 years, they tried to execute him. In December 2011, Jamal's death sentence was overturned in favor of "life with no parole." Now Jamal's enemies hope medical neglect and abuse will finish the job. For those who are determined to silence Mumia, the third-grade class at the Forest Street Elementary School in Orange, N.J., can't be allowed to get in the way.

There is opposition to Zuniga's suspension and possible firing. Prominent academics, including Noam Chomsky and Cornell West, signed a letter from Educators for Mumia Abu-Jamal and sent it to the superintendent of the Orange public schools calling for her immediate reinstatement. The letter likens the messages from Zuniga's class to the letters written by students worldwide that were sent to Nelson Mandela while a prisoner of South African apartheid and branded a terrorist by the U.S. State Department.

When the Orange school board met on April 14, a vociferous crowd of Zuniga supporters demanded that the teacher be allowed to speak. Zuniga stated that she was "very proud of my students' work" while conceding that she believed she had erred in publicizing the students' messages online, for which she apologized. As Zuniga reaffirmed her love for her students, their families and Orange community, as well as her desire to continue teaching at Forest Street Elementary School, the crowd cheered, "Let her teach!" The school board tabled the issue of Zuniga's fate and will meet again in May.

There should be more teachers like Marylin Zuniga. The Class Struggle Education Workers demands: Full re-instatement for Marylin Zuniga. Let her teach!

—Parents of missing Mexican students take action

<http://www.theragblog.com/johnny-hazard-parents-of-missing-mexican-students-take-action/>

—Mexico’s missing students: Report debunks official account

MEXICO CITY — The long-awaited report of the Grupo Interdisciplinario de Estudios Independientes, formed under the auspices of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, was released on Sunday, Sept. 6, almost a year after the atrocities of Sept. 26 and 27, 2014.

It contradicts almost all of the assertions of the Mexican government, including the theory that the students were burned in a landfill in the city of Cocula, adjacent to Iguala, after local police turned them over to drug gang members. The report documents local, state and federal participation in the many hours of violence against the students.

The Interdisciplinary Group includes Francisco Cox Vial, a Chilean prosecutor who worked to extradite Augusto Pinochet from England; Claudia Paz y Paz, a Guatemalan who worked on the case against ex-president Efraín Ríos Montt; various other Latin American and Spanish experts, and, as expert witness, José Torero, a forensicist now based in Australia who, though he is not the first to debunk the burning theory, has had more impact than others and thus has attracted attacks from government-linked mass media like the newspaper Milenio and various radio and television news programs.

These attacks—questioning the little time that Torero spent at the site compared with time spent writing and in laboratory work—provoked him to demand in interviews that media stop “bombarding” the airwaves with attacks and speculation.

The report laments the refusal of the military to permit access to the base of the 27th Infantry Battalion (where survivors believe the students were taken) or interviews of personnel. This has caused critics like the writers and editors of the magazine *Proceso* to allege that the military has emerged, not only as part of the increasingly powerful Mexican police state, but as a power in itself.

The polling firm Parametría has released a series of polls about the credibility of President Enrique Peña Nieto and other pillars of the government regarding what is known in Mexico as *el caso Ayotzinapa*. (Ayotzinapa is the name of the community where the education school is located.)

Polling conducted in October, February and August (before this report, which undoubtedly will exacerbate the president’s disapproval ratings) show that, in response to the question, “Do you believe the government’s version of the events?”, 54% said no in October. In February, 68% said no, and in August, 64%. To the question, “Do you approve of the government’s having closed the case?”, 64% said no in February and 83% said no in August. (This question was not asked in October.)

Given the overwhelming lack of confidence in the government in this case, why has outrage not been more bluntly expressed? Part of the reason is the extreme repression meted out against protesters in November and December and part of it is the traditional lull in critical, creative and

educational activity that occurs in Mexico during the extremely long Christmas season (December 12 to February 2), and a sense of shock, mourning and numbing also plays a part. (I spoke with a musician with a reputation as an activist who invented a pretext to cancel a concert with the parents because the idea of facing them was too sad, too frightening.)

This shock doctrine-style repression has been accompanied by the distraction of elections and other sports and entertainment spectacles and by the giving away (really) by the federal government of about 12 million high-definition television screens to protect citizens from what some apparently fear most: the digital blackout. When the government says social programs won't be affected by budget cuts, this is the kind of programs it has in mind.

Protests have revived since the June 26 occupation of the plaza in front of the Bellas Artes museum in Mexico City, and the relatives of the 43 are on an intensive tour of college campuses in the city now to prepare protests for the upcoming anniversary, which may include a hunger strike by parents, school strikes, work stoppages, an attempt to speak with the Pope in Philadelphia, or stronger actions that no one will announce in advance.

This diversity of proposals from the relatives and from the rest of the Ayotzinapa community is a reflection of their backgrounds: a few of the family members are teachers or had previous experience in activism; many are strongly Catholic and had never traveled far from where they live until the atrocities were committed. Most are subsistence farmers with little formal education. Most speak an indigenous language; some speak very little Spanish.

The reaction of Peña Nieto himself to the report was slicker, less openly hostile, than that of the media who operate on his behalf. He expressed willingness to meet with the families of the victims and with the experts themselves, most of whom had planned to leave Mexico on Thursday, Sept. 10, and, through spokespersons, a willingness to extend the time allotted for the group of experts to work. (Why not? This dissipates the impact.)

He expressed outrage that such violence had occurred and pledged to get to the bottom of it, much like a father who announces that he's discovered that there's macho violence in this family and we're going to find out who's responsible.

A former Minneapolis teacher, Johnny Hazard now lives in Mexico City where he is a professor at the Universidad Autónoma de la Ciudad de México and author of "Con estos estudiantes: La vivencia en la UACM," a book about that alternative university.

—Student protests continue in Mexico

Students at most public universities in the Mexico City metropolitan area went on strike last week as part of the continuing protests against the massacre and forced disappearance of five and 43 (respectively) students of the teacher preparation school in Ayotzinapa, Tixtla, Guerrero. The "disappeared" students were ambushed—some shot, some kidnapped—by local police in Iguala, Guerrero, on Sept. 25 and 26.

Federal officials announced last week that at least some of the mass graves said by detained cops to contain the bodies of the students have, in fact, been other corpses. This is an indication

of the extent of either police collusion with narcos or police propensity to kill people and hide their bodies.

Last week in Chilpancingo, the capital city of Guerrero, someone—possibly students or members of the left dissident (and majority) caucus of the teachers’ union—burst into the main state office building and burned part of it; yesterday, in the same city, there were occupations of banks and convenience stores, carried out by the teachers according to the newspaper *La Jornada*. These actions occur in a context in which the governor of Guerrero, Ángel Aguirre, continues to deny any possible complicity in what has happened in Guerrero. His administration has been marked by acts of repression that include the detention of the community self-defense leader Nestora Salgado and the state police killing of two students from the same education school in 2012. He is accused by the mainstream newspaper *El Universal* of having at least 15 relatives on the state payroll.

The widespread condemnation of the massacre by major news media and others who tend to be unconditional allies of the government has meant that the usual accusations of “vandalism” have not been voiced. Teachers and education students, especially in rural states like Guerrero, Oaxaca and Morelos and in progressive urban areas like Mexico City, have been in the forefront of protests against education “reform” which, like in the U.S., means subordinating critical thinking to standardized testing. Students at some schools of the Instituto Politécnico Nacional (IPN) marked one month on strike on Friday, Oct. 17. Most of the others joined the strike about a week later. The surprising firmness of the polytech students, sometimes perceived as more conservative than their liberal arts counterparts, has been an inspiration for others throughout the country. They accomplished the resignation of the director of the IPN.

—Repression and rebellion in Mexico

Nine months after the forced disappearance of 43 education students a three-mile-long protest march culminated in an occupation of the plaza of the principal museum and cultural center in the country, Bellas Artes. This took place the day after the opening of a major exhibition of Michaelangelo and DaVinci. The cultural and political events that took place continually had a captive audience in the 10,000 people who lined up on Saturday and many more on Sunday to see the exhibit inside. Everyone was in good spirits (still angry at the government of course) in spite of a bit of rain at the beginning of the occupation on Friday and the end on Sunday. People were eager to participate in the revival of the movement after months of severe repression and some inevitable attrition weakened the protests. (The offices of CENCOS, a movement communication organization linked to the Vatican II-era Catholic church, were raided by unidentified infiltrators just two days before Friday’s march. This was the least violent of the intimidation tactics of the government.)

The success of the weekend’s action lies in two factors: 1) Elimination of the frustration factor regarding marches that end with a couple of hours of boring or acoustically incomprehensible speeches or a series of shorter rounds of speeches at a variety of destinations.

2) As Joshua Kahn Russell and Arun Gupta point out in “Beautiful Trouble: A Toolbox for Revolution”: “Occupations are difficult to sustain indefinitely. Have a plan—including an exit plan.” An hour for each disappeared student turned out to be a good amount of time to sustain this marathon protest. [Imagine an occupation of a strategic target—a government building, an important intersection, the Mall of America in Bloomington, Minnesota—for an hour for each black person murdered by police in the U.S. since Ferguson.]

It’s important to consider that the massacre and disappearance of the students of Ayotzinapa is one of many massacres perpetrated by the government since last summer:

Tlatlaya, Estado de México, June 30: Twenty-two people killed by the army in a small warehouse. Among the “dangerous criminals”: a 14-year-old girl shot in the back. The post-massacre manipulation of the scene was so blatant that even conservative sources like the U.S. State Department and Mexico’s in-house human rights commission have condemned this action. (This didn’t stop the U.S. from approving the sale of 18 Blackhawk helicopters and an unspecified number of all-terrain military vehicles to Mexico in recent months.)

Iguala, Guerrero, Sept. 26-27: Three education students and three bystanders killed immediately, 43 students disappeared and still unaccounted for.

Mexico City, November: Three young artist-activists kidnapped in broad daylight by federal police. Two still held without charges, despite having won injunctions ordering their release.

Apatzingán, Michoacán, Jan. 6-7: Sixteen agricultural workers murdered and others seriously injured by federal police, accused of being gang members. Some of the surviving families received bodies obviously mutilated gratuitously by the police.

Mexico City, March 13: The MVS radio network, acceding to government pressure, fired Carmen Aristegui, one of the only independent journalists in Mexico with a top-rated program, for the second time.

Tanhuato, Michoacán, May 22: Another extrajudicial execution by the federal police. This time, the government claims that all of the killed suspects (alleged members of the Jalisco Nueva Generación cartel) tested positive for having discharged a firearm but, curiously, they only killed one cop. Forty-two “delinquents” and one police officer totals that number again: 43. February to June: Twenty-nine people killed in election-related violence around the country between the start of the campaigns in February and the elections in June. Victims include candidates of all major parties and an education student from the Universidad Nacional Pedagógica killed by federal police in Guerrero on election day.

What is the relation between this avalanche of atrocities, most planned and perpetrated by the Mexican government, and the economic and educational “reforms” it is implementing? As Naomi Klein stated in the introduction to her classic study “The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism,” “Mike Battles puts it best: ‘For us, the fear and disorder offered real promise.’ The 34-year-old ex-CIA operative was talking about how the chaos in post-invasion Iraq had helped his unknown and inexperienced private security firm, Custer Battles, to shake roughly \$100 million in contracts out of the federal government. His words could serve just as

well as the slogan for contemporary capitalism—fear and disorder are the catalysts for each new leap forward.”

—Marijuana in Mexico

An injunction upheld recently by the Mexican supreme court recognizes the right of the four litigants to cultivate, consume and possess marijuana and appears to pave the way toward further liberalization of drug laws. The decision is confusing and has been misinterpreted by some as a general legalization.

Politicians, including hardline President Enrique Peña Nieto, have spoken approvingly of the decision, saying that though they are personally opposed to drug use, it's time to open the debate. This contrasts with their eager participation in a drug war that has cost thousands of lives since 2006. Peña Nieto took office in 2012 after having promised to restrict the use of the military in the destruction of marijuana and opium crops and, especially, their participation as police in their constant shoot-outs against “narcos” who often turn out to be ordinary citizens traveling or visiting a night club (or a school). The drug war, when begun by then-President Felipe Calderón, was seen by skeptics as a means for him to consolidate power after narrowly winning the election amid accusations of fraud, much as Bush did with the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. Some noted that many of the states targeted for anti-drug action were also areas of guerrilla activity. This is especially the case in Guerrero, where just two weeks after the marijuana decision was announced, the former director of the Escuela Rural Normal Isidro Burgos of the village of Ayotzinapa claimed that the school was a hotbed of marijuana use and sexual harassment. To claim that weed and sexual harassment occur at any school would not be remarkable, except that this is the school whose students were killed and disappeared on Sept. 26, 2014, in a case that has brought worldwide disrepute to the Mexican government. The comment comes in the midst of many mainstream assertions of the supposed criminality of the students and is an attempt to equate misdemeanors possibly committed by some students with the government-sponsored kidnapping and mass murder to which they have been subject. The education students of Ayotzinapa probably consume less alcohol and marijuana than other young Mexicans, given the discipline imposed by the political organization that most of them belong to, the Federación de Estudiantes Campesinos y Socialistas de México.

This tactic of what we could call marijuana-baiting—discrediting someone politically or morally through accusations of marijuana use—is very common in Mexico and has only abated slightly in the past two years, as consumption increases (according to surveys and to what anyone can see and smell) and attitudes in favor of legalization begin to be expressed more openly. Comments like “I don't use drugs. Just beer and tequila for me” or the use of the word *mariguano* as an insult for someone who may really consume crack cocaine or glue or who merely appears to lack motivation are still common. Unlike in the United States, it is still possible to find many people between the ages of 15 and 80 who have never tried marijuana. Mexico City Mayor Miguel Ángel Mancera has spoken in favor of medical marijuana, perhaps

conscious of a 2005 letter in which economist Milton Friedman and other “Chicago boys” declared that drugs should be legal because they could generate revenues, equally legal, of \$10-14 billion per year. (Mancera, lawyer and owner of a chain of restaurants, tends to favor the monied class.) This apparent openness to drug law reform can be compared with laws enacted in the city in recent years that apparently favor the gay and lesbian community and have the obvious purpose of attracting tourism and providing a liberal veneer for a government that bases its survival on police brutality, a savage urban renewal program and cooperation with right-wing political parties and business groups, all of which affect GLBT communities negatively and disproportionately.

Former presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador believes the talk of marijuana to be a distraction from the aggressive privatization occasioned by Peña Nieto’s reforms. López Obrador was an ally of Mayor Mancera until a few months ago and was instrumental in putting him in office, but his new party, Morena, has distanced itself from the party of Mancera, the Partido de la Revolución Democrática, which has controlled city government since 1997 and has, according to most observers, moved drastically to the right. Others on the left believe the marijuana case to be a distraction from the disappearance of the 43 students and the government repression that has occurred since. It’s hard, for example, to find a dissident journalist who hasn’t been murdered, fired, or had his or her house broken into by goons who take computers and documents but not other valuables. The murder and disappearance of women continues at a horrifying pace in Ciudad Juárez and elsewhere, with the government denying or covering up the crimes. A recent book by Jenaro Villamil documents how Peña Nieto has expressed, since law school, his admiration for pre-revolutionary dictator Porfirio Díaz, whose most famous saying was “Kill them in cold blood.”

Many people are still depressed and in shock after the post-Apoytzinapa protests didn’t lead, as many anticipated and hoped, to the overthrow of the government or at least the resignation of the president. Most deal with extremely low wages, unemployment, or violence close to or at home. Twenty percent of women from 5 to 19 years of age have children. In this context, it’s easy to understand an increase in the already-alarming levels of drinking and alcoholism, especially among young people. Most neighborhoods in Mexico City are now dotted with unlicensed bars. Violence against women—from petty acts of harassment to sadistic murders—appears to be on the increase, though there are no reliable statistics. A discussion of the use of mind-altering substances in Mexico would not be complete without mentioning their possible relation to gender violence. While, as mentioned, youth drinking is on the rise among men and women, old-school drinking continues to thrive in environments where if there are any women, they are bar employees or sex workers. Antonio Ramírez, founder of support groups for men and author of *Violencia masculina en el hogar*, writes that though substances like alcohol and marijuana have disinhibiting effects that may facilitate acts of violence, they are not the cause, though substance abuse is present in a large percentage cases of gender violence: “Many men say that it wasn’t they who beat the woman, that alcohol made them do it. This suggests that if the man hadn’t been drinking he wouldn’t have been violent, but the fact is that drinking and thus

putting his family at risk, is in itself violent. If he knows that when he drinks or uses drugs he's violent and may 'lose control,' why does he drink so much?" Marijuana is the number two substance that men who enter support groups in Mexico report consuming.

In this context, most activists probably support the legalization of marijuana to increase personal liberty and to weaken the cartels but don't see the increase in the use of substances as positive.

—Pope perplexes Mexico

A review of the pope's visit in the Mexican press

BY JOHNNY HAZARD

Jorge Bergoglio, aka Papa Francisco or Pope Francis, arrived in Mexico on Friday, Feb. 12, for a six-day visit. Before his arrival two questions loomed: a.) Would he meet with families of the 43 education students disappeared by the government, with victims of clerical sexual abuse, or with families of victims of the mass murder of women that has plagued Ciudad Juárez since 1993 and all of Mexico in the past few years? and b.) Would he make specific mention of these problems during his marathon of homilies? The answers to these questions turned out to be no and no.

Vatican spokesperson Federico Lombardi played a stellar role as the pope's bad cop. First, weeks ago, he announced that there was no time to meet with victims of every possible atrocity (though there was time to meet with socialite daughters of politicians, etc.). He offered to the survivors' and victims' groups the consolation prize of front-row seats at the symbolic social justice mass in Ciudad Juárez. As the families of the 43 and their allies among human rights groups from their home state of Guerrero continued to ask whether they would be attended to, Lombardi accused them publicly of "pressuring" the pope. The families then refused the tickets for the mass, which in any case was held 35 hours from where they live. They'd been looking to meet with the pope since he was in Philadelphia in September. Bergoglio waited till he was back in Rome to act as his own bad cop and explain that he was not able to meet with families of the 43 students because of internal conflicts among them. (Is this a variant of the arguments against African liberation from white supremacist colonial rule because "the blacks are fighting among themselves"?) In the same conversation, the pope explained that it didn't seem necessary to meet with victims of sexually abusive priests in Mexico because he had already done so in Philadelphia and in Europe. (See *La Jornada*, Feb. 19, front page.)

On Saturday, the day that he mostly dedicated to activities within Mexico City, two people were arrested for holding up a banner along the parade route that read: "The revolution begins now. Wake up! The blind can't lead the blind." An older man along another part of the route was arrested for exhibiting a banner critical of the clergy. Twenty police officers were required to detain him and to threaten bystanders and independent reporters. Blogger and columnist Enrique Pérez Quintana comments that the government arranged for the pope not to see poor people—literally installing temporary walls between avenues and poor neighborhoods—and instead to be photographed with mini-skirted, incongruously blond pop stars who happen to be spouses of politicians. Activist priest Alejandro Solalinde has made similar comments, arguing that the pope had good intentions but was used and misled. But the pope and the Vatican knew that the deals they cut with the government and the business class of Mexico would lead to this. Columnist

Mariela Castro of *el Diario de Chihuahua* asks that the money trail that determined where the pope would go and under what circumstances be made transparent. John Ackerman in the magazine *Proceso* adds that the papal visit “demonstrated the enormous influence of money and power” and cites financing from Telmex, Aeroméxico, Chrysler and Banorte, the opportunism (and exorbitant “security” expenses) of the president, the mayor of Mexico City, and the governors of the states visited, and the constant broadcasting of papal messages on the two major television networks. Ackerman asserts that “as a gesture of gratification and obedience, the pope never departed from the script prepared by the despotic Mexican power structure.” One avenue that does pass through poor neighborhoods, Eje Central Lázaro Cárdenas, was used frequently as a papal transportation corridor (apparently because it has a confined lane for trolleys), but neighbors report that the metal curtains of all the storefronts—especially if they were graffitied—were painted over by the city government in a strange, temporary color. Thursday morning, people were removing that paint and letting the tags and graffiti be seen again.

His visit brought the Mexico City metropolitan area to the brink of a pollution alert on Sunday—usually the least dirty day—because of massive traffic tie-ups and the use of powerfully loud and smoky fireworks to welcome him. (A curious violation of Mexico’s historic principal of secularism is that churches, with total impunity, set off these fireworks—which visitors unfamiliar with the custom believed were bombs—in the wee hours of the morning to celebrate saints’ days.) He stayed at the Papal Nuncio in a remote part of the south of the city, and streets and subway stations were closed all along the route to and from there and wherever he went every day.

The pollution that day affected Mexico City but began in the working class suburb of Ecatepec, where the pope spent most of the day and whose diocese was governed for years by a multimillionaire-turned-priest-turned bishop named Enésimo Cepeda. In 2011, 103 women were murdered in Ecatepec. Many of the bodies of those murdered in 2011 and of those murdered this month have been dumped in Río de los Remedios, where remains are hard to find among the raw sewage and garbage. Not a word about this from the pope.

His extravagant traveling style belies his expressed concern for the environment: When he left the city on Monday to go to Chiapas and on Tuesday to Michoacán, he returned to Mexico City the same day, as if there were no lodging in those states. Thus his motorcade snarled city traffic and increased pollution again, unnecessarily, twice a day, not to mention the CO2 pollution caused by these extra flights.

On Monday in Chiapas, where he ostensibly would emphasize Indigenous people’s rights in the epicenter of the Zapatista uprising of 1994, he also had time set aside to meet with “families,” as if they were a group in need of attention. He contradicted again his supposed commitment to the environment, in a country plagued by overpopulation and poverty, by making remarks hostile to people who instead of having children would rather “go on vacation,” and “live in comfort,” people who, when they finally decided that they wanted children, found that “time had passed them by.” He brought up to the stage a couple who had divorced and remarried and looked for some kind of exception to church rules and a parade of people with medical problems that reminded observers of a Protestant revival tent. The organization *Católicas por el Derecho de Decidir* (Catholics for the Right to Choose) ran full-page newspaper ads demanding a reversal of church policies regarding condoms, divorce and abortion. Dozens of women are in Mexican prisons for having undergone abortions, or even for miscarriages that someone inferred

were induced. Much has been made of his asking forgiveness that day in Chiapas of Indigenous people, in a discourse that didn't go beyond Eurocentric charity.

In Ciudad Juárez he was to emphasize labor and immigration issues. Progressive U.S. media like Democracy Now have repeated approvingly the pope's apparent barbs against savage capitalism, which he pronounced in Ciudad Juárez (and were heard by tens of thousands more across the river via big screens in El Paso's Sun Bowl Stadium). To speak of the plight of immigrants who pass through this border city, he used words like "enslaved, kidnapped, extorted ... trafficking." But, as Arturo Cano, one of the most honest and creative journalists in Mexico, points out in the newspaper *La Jornada*: "When it comes time to identify causes or guilty parties, however, there are no economic models nor immigration policies; rather there are poverty, violence, organized crime. Symptoms, not causes."

What was billed as his labor address was spoken in a hall filled with thousands of chamber of commerce-types and their families—again, curiously blond—and no more than 50 workers or representatives of genuine unions, all relegated to the back. The local government bought various full-page ads to claim that a new Juárez has emerged and that there have been "no kidnappings in 22 months." Journalist San Juana Martínez has detailed in *La Jornada* many recent cases of young women who are kidnapped and forced to work in prostitution in strip joints in downtown Juárez, just a few blocks from downtown El Paso. Statistics vary, but a figure of 300 women and girls per year killed or "disappeared" in the 21st century seems reliable. The human rights organization CIESO speaks of a pattern reminiscent of "sadistic pornography" in the killings and mutilations of women. The night before the pope's arrival, activists painted magenta crosses with the names of murdered women and girls on hundreds of telephone poles along the pope's route. By morning, government employees had painted them over in red.

Proceso, a widely-circulated magazine of news and analysis, dedicated more than half of its Feb. 21 edition (nine articles, all critical, including the one by John Ackerman quoted above) to coverage of the papal visit. The cover reads "What's Behind the Pope's Silence" (*El trasfondo del silencio papal*). Denise Dresser, a usually very moderate commentator, writes in "The Light that Barely Shone" of how the "rebel pope" that many Mexicans had hoped to see was eclipsed by one who "spends too much time with the elites that the church should question"; the one who "was accused of allowing two priests to be captured and tortured during the dirty wars in Argentina"; who "hung around in the National Palace with 500 privileged people, many of whom are icons of the impunity that prevails in Mexico."