



The Miners: honour and union strength

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Thursday, 5th May 2016

This week we have been celebrating 39th Ordinary General Convention of the National Union of Mineworkers, which has been held every two years since its founding on 11 July 1934, as established by its statutes. Over these 82 years of life and union struggle there have been few extraordinary conventions, when circumstances or conditions warrant – such as the cowardly attack these past 10 years – to analyse, discuss and make decisions on issues that affect or concern to this great and historic union.

There have been many issues under discussion, and we have also heard the reports of each and every one of the union's leaders, from the President and Secretary General to the other members of the National Executive Committee and the General Council for Vigilance and Justice. Few bodies are as democratic and transparent, because the deliberations and resolutions of the convention, which is the highest authority, are conducted reached freely, in total democracy, and its determinations and agreements are final. A public notary is always present in each of the sessions and working groups, and in commissions that are created.

This time there are some fundamental issues that concern and occupy the miners which are also of vital importance for society and government. One such issue is that of the growing inequality and unequal accumulation and distribution of wealth in Mexico, in ever fewer hands, while poverty and exploitation grow exponentially for the vast majority of the population who face fewer opportunities for a fair, dignified life and safeguarded wellbeing.

It is worrying, as all speakers during the opening ceremony of the Miners' 39th convention remarked, that politicians and governors, whether through ignorance or ambition, have not put in place any measures to correct this tremendous economic and social inequality and, what is worse, they defend a flawed model of growth which puts stability and social and labour peace at risk.

The government, entrepreneurs and bankers are proud, they have said, that in Mexico, over the past three years, no strikes have broken out, when in fact they should be ashamed, because Mexico now has the lowest wages in Latin America. 20 years ago, or even less, we were leaders in terms of wages, benefits and social welfare. It is also of concern and frustration that Mexico's labour authority itself violates the national law and international conventions which require respect for the right to strike, which is the last resort for workers against abuse, threats, harassment of all kinds and repression by companies and bosses.

As Jyrki Raina, General Secretary of IndustriALL Global Union clearly stated during his speech at the start of the convention, the 50 million members of this global organisation are unhappy and disillusioned with the way in which the Mexican government maintains this erroneous policy to

uphold and promote protection contracts for the 'official' or *charro* unions, because this is one of the worst mechanisms which encourage labour exploitation and slavery, sometimes to an inhuman degree. Raina also pointed out that 10 years ago wages in Mexico were 2 or 3 times above those of China and now we are 40 percent below that country, according to official figures from Bank of America and other international organisations.

Steve Hunt, Director of District 3 of the United Steelworkers of America and Canada, noted that employer protection contracts and the leaders who promote them represent the second oldest profession in the world. Atle Hoie, international secretary of Fellesbundet of Norway, said that that country's pension fund is seriously considering withdrawing the investments it has in Germán Larrea's Grupo México, given the environmental damage this company has caused, as well as its criminal acts against workers and employees, all of which makes it one of the world's least ethical companies. He added that labour and human rights in Mexico should be absolutely respected just as they are in Norway, and offered full support to the Miners and Mexican workers.

Meanwhile, Valter Sánchez, secretary for International Relations of the Brazilian Confederation of Metalworkers, said that the historical struggle of the Miners in Mexico is an inspiration to all workers and that on many occasions they have held demonstrations outside the Mexican embassy in Brazil in solidarity with Mexican miners. He also commented on the difficult political situation in his country since the coup that the right is planning against President Dilma Rousseff and against former President Inacio Lula da Silva, which aims not only to end democracy, but to impose an immoral and negative model of labour exploitation.

In short, this great Miners' convention will surely end with great contributions of ideas and proposals to build a fairer and more democratic country, as well as a more balanced society, in line with our goal of creating a new model of development based on shared prosperity. Congratulations on all this to the miners of Mexico and the world.