



# IndustriALL: the global challenge

NAPOLEÓN GÓMEZ URRUTIA

Thursday, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2016

Last week, between 24 and 26 May, the Executive Committee of the IndustriALL Global Union met in Frankfurt, Germany. This union is the largest that exists internationally, with over 50 million members across 140 countries. The meeting took place at the site which hosts the facilities and offices of the union IG Metall, the most important union on a global scale which represents workers in the leading branches of German manufacturing.

At the start of the conference I presented to the other delegates of the executive committee, on behalf of the National Union of Mineworkers Mexico, a proposal which was unanimously approved and adopted as a resolution stating this prestigious organization's condemnation of the dismantling of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) under the pretext of a financial crisis caused by the lack of input from member states of the OAS. This commission is crucially important for maintaining research and monitoring visits to those member states that must constantly combat complaints and reports of frequent human rights violations, because legal systems across Latin America do not function correctly and are swamped in corruption and impunity.

These IndustriALL meetings, which are normally held every six months, represent an important gathering of the world's most prominent leaders, since their ideas, contributions and experiences are essential in defining a strategy and action plan for the trade union movement in the face of the challenges and problems affecting unions' present and future. One example of this is the growth of inequality and the growing concentration of wealth in fewer and fewer hands, as I have discussed in other articles.

A case that has caused a huge scandal since early 2016 was the report published in January by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), which states that 50 percent of the largest multinational companies only directly employ 6 percent of the workers who generate their production. The remaining 94 percent are employed by suppliers and contractors, in other words, there is an "invisible" workforce of 116 million people.

In general, these contract workers receive poorer wages and conditions which are accompanied by exploitation, abuse and the violations of trade union rights that occur along the manufacturing and supply chain. According to the United Nations, the principles governing the conduct of those corporations which outsource their workforces, and the respect that they should have for human rights, mean they are formally bound and responsible for their actions before the law and they can and should be subject to numerous accusations for criminal acts they commit throughout the production process, whatever form those may take. The use of contractors or outsourcing companies does not exempt multinationals from their responsibility.



This is precisely one of the things that IndustriALL is trying to accomplish with model agreements, especially in certain industries where the degree of exploitation reaches inhuman levels. Hence one of IndustriALL's main tasks is to guarantee freedom of association and fair and decent wages through collective bargaining structures and within a broader general plan of action, collaboration and transformation (ACT).

Today, those of us on the IndustriALL global executive committee are very proud to have established five strategic goals that are universally recognized, supported and endorsed. In fact, no other large organization has been able to consolidate anything similar.

The five objectives are: to develop union power; to defend the rights of workers; to challenge international capital; to combat precarious work and to achieve sustainable industrial policies. Beyond these actions, we have translated activities at a regional level, we have focused attention on the labour progress and based goals on creating strong, united, democratic and independent organizations representing the majority of the world's workers.

One of IndustriALL's greatest successes is to have achieved international unity and solidarity, crossing the borders which once divided the struggles of different unions and groups of workers against tyranny, exploitation and inequality, but also the differences that separated the activities among different industrial sectors. This is why the union includes sectors from extractive branches, such as mining, all the way through to processing and manufacturing of all industrial products which form the basis of economic growth in all countries.

Current issues are also addressed by this enormous global group, ranging from the impact of historical agreements such as that signed in Paris in December 2015 on climate change, which represents the culmination of the first stage of a long and complicated process towards energy transformation which will ensure a fair transition so as to realize the potential of creating greener jobs, as well as actions for climate change, but based on specific public policies, solid social protection programs and sustainable industrial policies.

There is no doubt that the Frankfurt meetings represent a serious step in the humanization of work and global solidarity for justice and the collective dignity of the working classes and society as a whole.