



Donald Trump and the Mexican reality

Napoleón Gómez Urrutia

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This week began with congressman Sander Martin Levin, a member of the US House of Representatives, making a state visit to Mexico alongside various colleagues. Their intention was to examine and discuss the lack of respect for human and labour rights in our country with the Mexican government, to seek compliance with the freedom of association, research wage policies and collective bargaining systems, and to establish fair bases on which the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), signed 23 years ago by the three member states of Canada, the USA and Mexico, could be amended or repealed.

Repeated violations of the rule of law and the correct application of justice, combined with all the corruption that goes unpunished, are creating a crisis both within our country and for Mexico's image on the international stage. It's no coincidence that Donald Trump himself accuses Mexicans of stealing his country's jobs and keeps on trying to prevent North American companies from moving across the border, which is why he is demanding that salaries, rights and benefits are seriously bolstered south of the border.

Even a right-wing government that is against the interests of the working classes is putting pressure on Enrique Peña Nieto's administration to change its policy and strategy, if indeed they want Mexico to remain in NAFTA. Who would have thought it?! North Americans looking to protect their own interests have ended up pushing for greater justice for Mexican workers and employees, particularly a significant increase in income and benefits, as well as improvements in working conditions related to health and safety, freedoms and environmental protection.

In various articles and columns I have repeatedly asserted that Mexico needs to alter its strategy and policy, because the one currently being pursued by government will only lead to economic and social breakdown. If resources aren't improved and income fairly redistributed, acquisitive power will go down, taking demand with it and thus reducing consumption to a level which ceases to be attractive for investment, particularly within the domestic market. Relying on exports is always a risk, subject to the vagaries of external factors, quite apart from the fact that injustices are building up day by day, and jobs being created involve exploitation, and are often inhumane.

We have been clear about this: those Mexican salaries that seem so satisfactory to business owners and civil servants from the Departments of Employment and the Economy, are pitiful - some of the lowest in the world - which generates ever greater poverty and inequality. Furthermore,



government authorities feign ignorance in order to avoid recognising the employer protection contracts used by companies in cahoots with official trade union organisations, as a means of disrupting and destabilising employment relations. Added to this is the fact that these same politicians love to assume that despite this pitiable situation, which by rights they should be ashamed of, that there are actually no strikes taking place in Mexico: an absolute, blatant lie which can easily be disproven. Who are they trying to fool? Who are they hoping to butter up and attract with these false statements?

By way of example, Germán Feliciano Larrea's Grupo México (Mexico Group), Alberto Bailleres' Grupo Peñoles (Peñoles Group) and Alonso Ancira Elizondo's Grupo Acerero del Norte (Northern Steel Group) pay miners wages that are controlled, subject to and threatened by their companies, which fluctuate on average in their equivalent foreign currency from **5 to 10 dollars per day**, while in the US and Canada they range from **35 to 45 dollars per hour**. In fact just last week one of the largest copper mines in British Columbia, Canada, agreed during its revision of the collective bargaining contract with the members of District 3 of the United Steelworkers union to increase the wage payments to **almost 53 dollars per hour** (\$52.59). The difference is particularly brutal given that the machinery and equipment used in our countries to extract and transform metals is similar, universal in fact, as well as the processes, because they are open copper mines just like the ones owned by Grupo México at Cananea or Nacozari in Sonora, but the wages at the Mexican mines are incredibly low – immoral – while the price of metals produced in any country remains the same, dictated as it is by international markets.

Under these conditions, it is easy to see why many foreign companies want to move their investments to Mexico given that there are so many benefits for them here, from poverty salaries to a whole host of support and facilities; even state governments are all vying to attract them, despite the major social cost and risk for the future of social stability. As if that wasn't enough, almost all companies are exempt from paying tax. They effectively find themselves in a paradise that offers them ever more concessions and rights over Mexico's land, dealing with a government made up of defensive, complacent or just simply complicit public servants.

In light of this, when some companies - such as the three mentioned above - have threatened to leave the country if new taxes or duties are set or introduced, it can be seen as an act of pure, baseless blackmail, because it would be almost impossible for them to find anywhere else offering the same level of privileges, which over recent years has made them some of the richest men in the country. And then it's Mexico and Mexicans who are left to face the pollution, destruction and human misery.

The Trump administration is applying serious pressure for improved labour conditions, based on the fact that NAFTA was originally conceived as a parallel agreement to protect workers' rights, a fact which was not included or formally adopted into the final trade deal. Added to this though, we need to see new and progressive labour reforms that would create changes from the bottom up, rather



than simple window dressing, and which would truly protect fundamental labour guarantees, democracy and the freedom of association. We can't let Trump, albeit for contradictory and ironic reasons, end up as the ultimate protector of the interests of Mexican workers.