



For a Profound Change to Economic Policy

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When I started to get involved in trade union politics and then was first elected leader of the miners union, I did so because I was convinced, and am even more so today, that the only - or rather perhaps the best - form of organization that could bring about social change, was the workers' movement. Workers who are united together under a solid organisational structure are the most capable of defending their human and labour rights, pushing for better working conditions, rising up and protesting where these are breached and fighting for respect for the dignity of their class and demanding improvements in quality of life to bring about a change in the development model.

Those who simply choose to get in line rather than fighting for their principles and values find themselves beaten down, and this is where they will remain, not only in terms of trade union activity, but in life itself. This is why I, as leader of a union which has built solid relationships with other national and international groups, with business owners and politicians in North America and many other countries around the world, have proposed that together we make history by taking our fight right up to the Senate of the Republic, in collaboration with the new government that is set to take office at the end of this year, with the intention of protecting the mining, steel and metalwork industries and all industrial and agricultural sectors of the economy.

At this time and in light of the circumstances that Mexico is going through, we can identify four key areas to be addressed actively:

One, defending the national economy and Mexican and North American chains of production, from the unfair competition generated by the overcapacity of China and other nations, by using more vigorous methods to tackle the dumping that does us no favours at all.

Two, strengthening the Mexican economy with an ambitious investment programme to modernise our core industries, such as mining and steel, but also the country's energy and construction infrastructure, which would enable us to open up new domestic opportunities to create better paid jobs, along with further training and capacity-building for workers, companies and the industrial sector as a whole.

Three, establishing firm and negotiated compromises to ensure that companies respect workers' fundamental rights and pay fair wages that reflect their contribution to national growth.



At the same time, we should enter into productivity agreements that contribute to strengthening and consolidating sources of employment.

Four, fostering collaboration between governments, companies and trade unions in the region to strengthen trade exchange and productive chains, the capacity of the work force and the purchasing power of workers and the population at large.

The president of the United States, Donald Trump, has put enormous pressure on his counterparts in Canada and Mexico to agree to modifications of the NAFTA agreement to suit his interests. He has been especially forceful and aggressive towards our country, to the extent that quite apart from the wall that he wants to build between our nations, he has demanded to revert to negotiations and sector-based agreements that benefit the United States. A few days ago he even threatened to impose tariffs of 25 per cent on imported steel and 10 per cent on aluminium. This was met with panic and strident condemnation in Mexico on the part of the government, business owners and even puppet trade union leaders who have seen an impact on their privileges and self-interest.

It is not the first time that the US government has taken measures against steel imports. It happened before under Barack Obama's presidency, which even reached up to 500 per cent on Chinese products and in more than a dozen other cases, which also led to Canada starting to use antidumping measures to prevent the entry of subsidised goods.

In 2016, the Global Forum on Steel Excess Capacity, established by a group of the 20 most important countries and coordinated by the OECD, reported that it is estimated that the global surplus in steel manufacturing capacity had reached around 737 million metric tonnes, the highest level in the industry's history. The fundamental problem is China's overcapacity, which doubled its metal exports between 2008 and 2015.

Mexico has also placed tariffs on Chinese steel, but at a very low level, barely 15 per cent. In his latest statements, Donald Trump now says that Canada and Mexico would be exempt from the tariffs as soon as there is a new and fair NAFTA trade deal in place. This position does offer an opening for an intelligent strategy to be developed that would protect workers, companies and the Mexican people in various ways.

Firstly, we have to work together to defend the steel industry, as a first step perhaps by applying the same tariffs against the United States, China and other countries which are exporting steel and aluminium at unfair prices. Secondly, we have to change labour policy to improve salaries and working conditions in these industries. Not all companies are closed off and perversely stubborn in their desire for profits at any cost. There are modern and responsible corporations which recognise the role of democratic trade unions. One example is Arcelor Mittal,

The logo for La Jornada, featuring a stylized sun or gear icon to the left of the word "La Jornada" in a bold, red, sans-serif font.

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which has reasserted its commitment to invest more than a billion dollars in its operation at Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán, despite Trump's threats.

Unfortunately, there are other companies which follow the old model of protection contracts, very low salaries and insecure working conditions. It is a shame that despite requests from governments, legislative bodies and trade unions in the United States and Canada, Mexico continues to pursue its policy of maintaining low wages within NAFTA. Even worse than this is the fact that sell-out, corrupt and crooked trade union leaders like Senator Tereso Medina of the CTM (Confederation of Mexican Workers), are personally in charge of many employer protection contracts, as our colleagues from the textile factories of Coahuila described in detail in their meeting with the Democratic Congressmen Bill Pascrell and Sandy Levin, during the most recent round of NAFTA negotiations.

This Medina has tried to present himself as the defender of the steel industry, when in reality he is one of the prime movers behind the latest labour reform proposal that seeks to betray Mexico's Constitution, eliminate workers' democratic rights to choose their trade union and perpetuate poverty salaries. He is *a wolf's in sheep's clothing*, false, hypocritical and, of course, cowardly in comparison with this country's true and genuine working class.