

## **In the face of slander, miners continue to demand truth and justice**

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**Wednesday, 6<sup>th</sup> April 2016**

10 years have passed since the terrible tragedy at the Pasta de Conchos coal mine, in the municipality of San Juan de Sabinas, Coahuila, caused by German Feliciano Larrea Mota Velasco's Grupo México, and we are still in the dark about what really happened. There has never been an appropriate independent investigation to determine the causes of the explosion and to punish those responsible for the industrial homicide, which plunged the families of the 65 miners who died into mourning, with the full weight of the law. Justice has still not been done and this is the third government which has pretended to make decisions that are quickly forgotten or abandoned.

Hardly anyone is interested in uncovering the truth. Over the course of this decade all those involved – businessmen, politicians and enemies of trade union organisations – have covered up for each other, all with the same attitude of cowards, traitors and charlatans who have thrived and continue to thrive on the misfortune and human sacrifice of decent and responsible workers. But there is a similar lack of concern from those who could bring justice and punish the criminal negligence of shareholders, directors and accomplices in the exploitation and plundering of the country's natural resources at any cost, including workers' lives and health.

And even today they continue with finances or manipulated publications which attempt to divert attention and avoid direct responsibility for this industrial and social crime. In doing so they use all kinds of tricks, media and distorted information with those who seek to hide the truth and cover up their responsibility for the terrible tragedy that changed the lives of 65 Mexican families.

The latest action is to use even the magazine *Proceso* to publish a totally unfounded report to distort reality, including an alleged agreement that seeks to exonerate Grupo México and its directors and members of the board and the labour authorities. What a shame and what a disgrace that they still resort to such evil actions and that certain media accept them, instead of courageously and objectively showing the truth. In the face of all this vindictiveness and slander, we in the National Mineworkers Union have for 10 years repeatedly explained the truth of the mining conflict and demonstrated that nothing can stop us on the road to demanding truth and justice, despite the malicious reports and ongoing dirty campaign against the miners.

During the government of Carlos Salinas de Gortari, amid intense privatization policy which ended with State intervention and regulation in the economy by way of parastatal companies, contractors agreements were invented on the pretext of giving those companies competitiveness and flexibility. What's more, outsourcing or third-party companies were created to create a new form of workforce

contracting in addition to existing one, that of permanent and temporary unionised workers. Since then, pressure from governments over the last 30 years has forced many unions to give mobility and reduce corporate responsibility towards their staff.

Labour policy then became fully business-oriented policy with the strengthening of monopolies, the emergence of many new fortunes created under privatization, misappropriation and lack of social and political commitment to the interests of the nation and of Mexicans. What the new investors who acquired State companies and consortia actually wanted to do and are still trying to bring about is to get rid of the unions, particularly democratic unions, and the collective labour contracts which burden them with responsibilities they would rather remove, destroy or control with any form of institutional support and governmental complicity. Unfortunately in many cases they have succeeded.

Collective bargaining or temporary agreements can never exonerate or relieve companies of their essential responsibility not only for production, but to protect and care for the lives and health of all workers. What neither Germán Larrea or Xavier Garcia de Quevedo, president of Industrial Minera México, responsible for the operation of Pasta de Conchos, or any other engineer, administrator or manager can avoid, is their responsibility in the industrial homicide that took the lives of 65 Mexican miners, the result of ambition, greed and criminal negligence.

In many countries, and Mexico is no exception, most journalists and media covering labour issues come from the middle or upper class. The same is true of the politicians responsible for implementing labor policy and supposedly defending of the rights of the working class. This means that little is published on the actions and life of unions apart from sensationalist reports or frequent attacks on organizations and leaders in order to discredit, weaken and divide them and seek their submission or permanent destruction.

Of course, some union leaders succumb and prefer not to fight for their members or to defend their honour and dignity. But that not only creates and fosters the impunity and corruption of businessmen, politicians and the leaders themselves, given that in most cases all they feel untouchable, sharing among themselves the wealth generated by complicity and immorality, deepening inequality in Mexico, it also shuts down opportunities for the democracy and transparency required for healthy, fair and balanced social, economic and political activity.