

Labour policy: manipulation and deceit

NAPOLEÓN GÓMEZ URRUTIA

THURSDAY 1ST DECEMBER, 2016

On 21st November, during the fourth activity report given by the President of the Federal Conciliation and Arbitration Committee, (JFCA by its initials in Spanish), the Work and Social Security (STPS) Minister Alfonso Navarrete Prida proudly declared that over the past 36 months of Enrique Peña Nieto's uninterrupted government, no strikes have broken out in the country, and that this was a highly notable achievement on the part of this administration, because they have been able to sustain a positive dialogue between capital and employment like nowhere else in the world.

Naturally, he made his effusive statement, which he has already repeated on various occasions, in front of a hall full of trade union leaders of very dubious reputations and representatives from completely discredited employment law firms. Of course the miners were not present, nor were we mentioned by name, nor me as the union's President and General Secretary, although he did make direct¹ reference, as he always does, to the fact that we did not agree with his statements.

And how could we, when the department and labour policy that he has headed up since this regime began have devoted themselves to simply shelving strike notices or saying that no such notices exist when strikes do actually break out. Effectively then, his administration has consistently denied workers' right to strike, which is the very last recourse they have to defend and protect their rights against breaches or failures to comply by companies.

Through its labour civil service, Peña Nieto's government has dedicated itself to giving complete free rein to companies to act as guardians of workers' rights, preventing them from exercising their freedom and democratic right to organise, as set out in Federal Employment Law (LFT), the Mexican Political Constitution, Convention 87 and others of the International Labour Organisation, signed and ratified by the government of Mexico some 60 years ago.

The right to strike is a universal right, whether they like it or not. In this case, however, the very labour authority itself is breaking the law and flouting its responsibilities, because of its interests in and complicity with anti-trade union business groups – groups which have no sense of social responsibility towards their staff or the communities where they operate, nor towards the environment which, unchecked, they persist in damaging. These business owners do not act seriously and responsibly, and nor do they have any love for Mexico, as their daily acts of impunity and self-importance demonstrate.

How could we possibly celebrate Minister Navarrete's claims that there has not been a single strike in the last 36 months then, when in fact he should be ashamed of this repression of

¹ Translator's note: I think this should read 'indirect' – see the second mention of this towards the end of the article.



workers' free and democratic will? His claim is also entirely untrue, and to demonstrate this I will cite three cases to contradict it: only this year the workers of the National Miners Union went on strike for two weeks in August 2016 in Sections 150 and 234 of the Siderúrgica del Golfo (Gulf Iron & Steel) company based in Matamoros, Tamaulipas. These strikes were resolved in the union members' favour thanks to the tactics, unity and determination of everyone taking part, including local and national leaders. The same thing happened in March of this year in Section 271 with the miners' strike against Arcelor Mittal, based in Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán, which ended favourably for workers after 11 days.

Who exactly is Navarrete trying to fool, and what agreement has he made to keep national and foreign companies on side and use false information to build their trust, when the evidence plainly contradicts him? If, as it seems, this is how every area of federal and state administration operates, they are bound to generate mistrust rather than fostering confidence, because no one whether in or outside of Mexico will believe them.

This government is not going to like hearing this either, but its labour and economic policies are essentially flawed, given that they do not reflect what the country really needs, nor do they demonstrate awareness of social needs. They have simply imposed a flawed model, and no one in government seeks – or is able – to analyse, understand or far less bring about change. Salaries in Mexico today are practically the lowest in all of Latin America, benefiting companies which have no sense of restraint or shame when it comes to exploiting their workforce, even going so far as to hold back consumption and demand with all the negative consequences that this has for productive activity, effectively creating greater poverty.

Even more striking though, is Navarrete's declaration that employer protection contracts do not exist in Mexico, signed and promoted behind workers' backs by some of the very trade unions that were present at that speech, as if it was their private business. This is another thing he is using intentionally to mislead people, and which allows the system of criminal exploitation of the workforce to go on and become more widespread. This demonstrates the vicious circle more clearly than ever: protection contraction, poverty wages, human and trade union rights totally denied and suppressed, while excessive profits for businessmen and politicians just keep going up.

Although they seem to think that no one realises how wrong they are on this, in fact everyone knows it. They have been criticised and complaints have even been brought before the Public Prosecution Service, the ILO, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and other international bodies.

Minister Navarrete Prida still made reference to me personally, indirectly as always, saying that there was one leader who always criticises this strategy. I believe it to be wrong and time will prove this, although they will no longer be in power. He dared to say that I had decided not to return to the country and that I must have my reasons, which is another of Navarrete's lies. The question is rather why they won't let me come home. He knows perfectly well why I haven't yet returned, and



to feign amnesia, to put it politely, does not reflect well on him, knowing as he does as a former prosecutor that the corruption of the judicial system and buying off of politicians by some of the most dishonest businessmen in or outside of Mexico has not helped to alter or compensate for injustices. Quite the opposite: they are becoming ever more apparent, shameless and brazen.

It's not acceptable that these public servants mislead and seek to twist and play with reality and the needs of the nation, workers and Mexicans as a whole. This government turns four today, and they are running out of time to fix things, in accordance with the law, Mexico's urgent call, and its most pressing need.