

Industrial homicide and impunity

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Sunday 19th February 2017 marked the passing of 11 years since the terrible tragedy at Pasta de Conchos coal mine 8, in San Juan de Sabinas, Coahuila, where 65 miners lost their lives, 63 of whose bodies still remain abandoned in the depths of the mine, while 11 more survived with serious burns and injuries that left them scarred for the rest of their lives.

For the majority of the relatives, friends and colleagues of the fallen miners it feels as though it happened barely yesterday. 11 years later they can still hear the screams of desperation and pain that went on so dramatically for hours, days and weeks, until the suffering and cries gradually died out. Outside the mine where the workers lay trapped, the anguish, desperation and uncertainty of the families was palpable and striking, so intense that this industrial homicide could not, nor will ever be forgotten.

11 years have passed since this catastrophe caused by the criminal negligence, arrogance and callousness of the Grupo México company, which owned the mine, and its directors Germán Feliciano Larrea Mota Velasco and Javier García de Quevedo, who have been hoping for all these years that the mining and metalworkers from Mexico and across the world would simply forget, and never again recall the industrial homicide perpetrated at Pasta de Conchos with such deadly impunity.

In the words of the press release sent out this week by the National Miners Union to mark this tragic event: “Devoid of any sense of honour or manhood, Larrea and his cronies, along with his accomplices within and outside of government, keep expecting the miners and the Mexican people to just forget this great attack, and that the same will happen with the myriad international agencies who have condemned this ‘industrial homicide’ and have taken a stance of unconditional support for our calls for justice. There has not, nor will there be any forgiving and forgetting for those who carried out, concealed or covered up this attack on the integrity of mining workers and their families. Our sense of dignity and honour demand it.”

The demands of the miners since then have been, firstly, the recovery of the bodies so they can be handed over to the families and given a decent burial; secondly, fair and sufficient compensation for

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the wives and children of the workers, and to ensure that their education and health will be protected until they reach adulthood; and thirdly, for investigation into the causes of the explosion to be reopened, and for those responsible to be punished with the full force of the law, regardless of the level or position they hold within their organisations.

The governments of Vicente Fox, Felipe Calderón and Enrique Peña Nieto's current administration have all turned a blind eye to this situation, which represents a historic disgrace. All of them, company and governments alike, have kept up this cosy relationship of complicity, supported by the mainstream media.

It would seem as though they are all banking on the population moving on from these tragedies so they do not have to budge from their current passive positions, just as has occurred with other tragedies, such as the children who died in the ABC Nursery in the city of Hermosillo, or the 43 students from Ayotzinapa, the 22 young people from Tlatlaya, or the case of Tanhuato and countless other crimes and murders committed in the name of law and order. Perhaps some of them think that the people have very short memories.

Internationally, a campaign with a real sense of humanity and solidarity is gaining serious traction, driven principally by the United Steelworkers of the United States and Canada, and by Unite, the largest union in Great Britain, which asserts: stop the killing, and enforce the law. This strategy has been extended more broadly to become a way of tackling negligence and obliging companies and the authorities to respect and care for people's health and lives, putting this before any other concern, above all their personal greed, their profit targets or their inhumane practices.

It is time for us all to stand in solidarity with the needs of those who are the most neglected and marginalised in society and the economy. Those who have amassed more wealth should in particular contribute more, not through token acts of charity, but rather with programmes that truly open up new opportunities for employment and rewarding effort through greater revenue contributions that more than meet the basic needs of the masses to get by with justice and dignity, before it becomes too late and non-compliance and instability get out of control.

Given that the government has still not seriously got down to work, after many years of sitting comfortably, economic policy programmes urgently need to be implemented in order to restructure the



country's activities, since the hurricane is already upon us, bringing torrential rain, wind and storms from the north of the country.

I hope that *La Jornada's* comment in its inside cover a few days ago becomes reality, in the sense that Trump's arrival forces us to take stock of who we are, our values such as nationalism, sovereignty and independence, and that all of us, from those at the top to the bottom and those in between, will protect and defend Mexico through our work and day-to-day actions, although it does appear that we do not all share the same level of awareness about the gravity of the situation.