

# Historic struggle of the miners of Lázaro Cárdenas

Napoleón Gómez Urrutia

Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> April, 2017

Today, April 20<sup>th</sup>, marks 11 years since one of the worst state crimes perpetrated by public security forces in Michoacán and federal agencies, which have still not faced justice. The violent and armed repression began on this day in 2006, dispatched to the port of Lázaro Cárdenas by Vicente Fox's government to break up the miners' lawful strike action against the steel company Lázaro Cárdenas – Las Truchas, which at the time belonged to the Villacero group owned by brothers Julio, Sergio and Pablo Villarreal Guajardo.

The labour dispute started when the company breached the collective bargaining agreement of Section 271 of the National Miners Union and refused to recognise the genuine, real union leaders elected by the majority of workers through democratic and transparent proceedings, as well as breaching the right to freedom of association guaranteed under Federal Labour Law, the Political Constitution of Mexico and by Convention 87 of the International Labour Organisation, which our country signed over 60 years ago.

Two miners were shot dead by police as a result of this cowardly aggression, comrades Héctor Álvarez Gómez and Mario Alberto Castillo, and more than 100 people were wounded by the cruel and repressive forces sent from Morelia and the capital of the Republic. A few weeks later we heard that at a meeting of Fox's cabinet, before the military and police attack, in a show of supreme ignorance and thoughtlessness, the no-good then Labour Minister, Francisco Javier Salazar, convinced his fellow attendees that the miners would flee when they saw the security forces sent to evict them. Nothing could have been further from the truth.

The criminal negligence and recklessness of this man, and everyone else who attended the meeting chaired by Fox, led directly to the tragedy that we remember today; in so doing



we pay homage to these martyrs of the historic struggle of the Mexican mining union. Also to blame are the Villarreal Guajardo brothers, for having sought the intervention of state forces in a matter that was entirely related to employment, as well as the immoral involvement of certain traitors in the Lázaro Cárdenas workers' movement who were clearly corrupt and subservient to Grupo Villacero and Grupo México (owned by Germán Feliciano Larrea Mota Velasco) and the government, headed up by four individuals who represent the absolute dregs and scum of trade unionism, namely Elías Morales, Benito Ortiz Elizalde, Martín Perales and Miguel Castilleja.

This is one of the darkest and most shameful chapters in the story of the development of the working classes, stained with the blood of miners. Memory of it must surely still remain in the dirty minds of all those responsible for the arbitrary decision to repress workers who generate this country's industrial wealth through their effort and commitment.

On this day, like every year, we will hold a gathering at the port: afterwards, between 5,000 and 10,000 people will march, followed by a mass and an emotional tribute in front of the monuments built in memory of our fallen comrades, in Napoleón Gómez Sada square. A particularly noteworthy presence at these events will be the solidarity and brotherhood of more than 100 colleagues from the United Steelworkers union (USW) from the United States and Canada, as well as Unite, the largest and most powerful trade union in the UK. Among them will be three directors and some deputy directors of USW.

It is worth remembering and emphasising that the lawful strike of the workers of Section 271 of Lázaro Cárdena, Michoacán, was not crushed or put down, despite the brutal use of police tools and weapons, including helicopters firing on the workers, of which we have video evidence and witness statements. After more than 10 hours of attacks the military groups had to withdraw, faced with the strong and heroic resistance of the miners and the support and solidarity of the whole community, who had come out to fight and defend their sons, brothers, relatives and friends in that symbolic city, home to the largest industrial port on the Pacific coast of Mexico.

The strike lasted for more than five months and was finally resolved on 15<sup>th</sup> September, 2006, with an increase to wages and benefits of more than 40%, as well as the payment of



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100% of the salaries lost during the whole strike period and the company's firm commitment to respect the union's leadership and not to carry out unjustified or politically motivated dismissals.

The struggle of the mining workers of Lázaro Cárdenas and their loyalty to the national trade union leadership are an inspiration and example today for every member of the genuine, liberal and progressive working class of our country and the wider world.