

Brutal and Cowardly Murder

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Mexico today is experiencing uncontrolled violence without any real response or reprisals, evidence of the clear breakdown of a government that is indistinguishable from the two previous administrations in terms of the indifference, incompetence, deference and capitulation to the most reactionary and immoral interests we have endured. This violence cannot continue to go unpunished, especially when the targets are innocent citizens and workers whose hard work and sacrifice add to the nation's wealth on a daily basis.

During the night of Saturday 18th November a group of thugs from the Mexican Workers' Confederation (CTM in Spanish) linked to Torex Gold Resources, the Canadian company that owns the Media Luna mine, and local and federal authorities of the Ministry of Work and Social Security, decided to fire at workers at the mine in the town of Cocula, Guerrero. Their cowardly act killed two workers, brothers in fact, who had been on strike alongside their colleague since 3rd November. They were calling for better pay and employment conditions, respect for their dignity, and the freedom to belong to the trade union that they had democratically chosen, as is their legal right under the Federal Labour Law of the Political Constitution of Mexico and Convention 87, signed by our country's government in the presence of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), more than 60 years ago.

The company directors' brutal response to the strike was to instigate this cowardly act of aggression in collusion with local and federal government, and shamefully with the CTM's murderous local leaders. It is not right that corruption can generate these sorts of crimes and then they are simply tolerated as a result of the government adopting a passive, if not complicit, attitude, rather than respecting Mexican laws and protecting the lives and safety of the working classes. They should hang their heads in shame and remorse, but all, or nearly all of them, are involved. Things can't go on like this; there are even business owners and company spokesmen who use the situation to their political advantage to attack free and democratic trade unions, looking for non-existent guilty parties and letting the real culprits stay under the radar – and even in some cases welcoming them.

Whatever happened to respect for the rule of law and the authority of the President of the Republic, the Employment Secretary, the Home Secretary and the state governor? The governor has actually publicly declared that he is more concerned about the situation because this aggressive, criminal company has taken a hit on its Canadian stock exchange position, not because of the lives of workers or because he respects their right to freedom of association. On top of all of this is the sheer



negligence of the military and all parties responsible for monitoring the situation and ensuring compliance with justice and criminal and labour laws.

The impunity is such that the soldiers detained the killers to allow them to lie low for a few hours after the attack, surely on the orders of some higher authority. The physical perpetrators and instigators of this double crime in which the Sahuanitla Peña brothers lost their lives are presumably connected to the people behind the disappearance of 43 teacher training students from Ayotzinapa, Guerrero, through their connection to the military force based at nearby Iguala, and to other murders of rural people, teachers and community leaders. Perhaps Guerrero has just become so inured to violence; this might explain why its state governor, Héctor Astudillo Flores, is more concerned about the company's balance sheet, probably for ulterior motives or vested interests.

The workers have no trouble identifying the crooks and accomplices implicated in all this, those from the CTM as well as members of the army and police, and so their names were published in a press release issued by the National Miners Union four days ago. This was followed up with a letter to the President of the Republic, which has still not yet received a reply, condemning these acts and demanding him to intervene by calling for a thorough investigation, punishing those responsible and removing the mining concession from this foreign company, which has shown no respect for Mexican laws, nor people's right to life and freedom.

For big business owners like the ones that head up Torex Gold Resources, Grupo México, Grupo Peñoles, Grupo Acerero del Norte and Villacero, the desperate drive to grow profits has become an obsession and they do not baulk at staining their hands with the blood of miners, acting without any sensitivity or consideration for the life and dignity of workers and their families. This is why they are not in the slightest bit interested in resolving issues, complaints or demands through dialogue and negotiation, because they are used to seeing workers effectively as slaves, and they want to keep them that way at any cost, and more than that, because there is no authority in Mexico that obliges them to respect the rules and regulations of law. So they just end up doing whatever they feel like, and the country's moral and ethical reputation deteriorates in the eyes of those at home and abroad.

It's also now time for the government of Canada to enforce strict sanctions on the company, from their corporate president to their board of directors and senior management in Canada and Mexico. The National Miners Union, which I am honoured to lead, will go on, with the solidarity of many international organisations, to openly condemn these crimes in order that the perpetrators of the murders are jailed, and to call for the full, proper and immediate application of justice in this case. The working members of District 3 of the United Steelworkers Union have a saying that sets out their stall in the struggle for social justice: If you kill a worker, you're going to jail. If only



someone in Mexico had the bravery and strength to act in accordance with this principle to raise confidence in the legal system and change our course for the better.

The governments of Canada and Mexico must act with speed and justice in this dispute, while the North America Free Trade Agreement is being renegotiated.