

Union thugs kill two striking mineworkers in Mexico

Alex González**27 November 2017**

On November 18, armed thugs of the Confederation of Mexican Workers (CTM), the largest union in Mexico, reportedly killed two striking mineworkers in the southern state of Guerrero. The mineworkers have been on strike to demand the right to join the National Union of Mining and Metal Workers (SNTMMSSRM) and cease being a part of the CTM.

About 800 mineworkers have been on strike since the beginning of November against *La Media Luna* mine, operated by Canadian firm Torex Gold Resources, arguing that their right to join the union of their choice was not being respected. The mineworkers refused to be a part of the CTM, arguing that the CTM “does not defend our rights and betrays us, offends us, assaults us, and threatens us.”

The workers were also striking against the fact that the company had artificially divided its workforce into “locals” and “foreigners”, with “foreign” workers coming from other states in Mexico, such as Zacatecas, Chihuahua, Sonora, and Durango. In an effort to sow divisions among the mineworkers, “local” workers were given more difficult jobs and worse salaries than their counterparts.

The striking workers report that on the night of November 18, “armed groups of thugs from the CTM” assaulted workers at a barricade they had installed near the mine, killing two people and injuring many others. Far from being punished by authorities, the mineworkers claim that “although a group from the Army was able to detain the aggressors, they were released immediately, due to the action of some authority that was not made known.” The Army patrol that intervened in the assault corresponds to the area of Iguala, Guerrero, where 43 teaching students disappeared in the hands of state forces in 2014.

An eyewitness told the newspaper *La Jornada* that

“They [the police and the thugs] arrived with their faces covered. They started shooting into the air and yelling at us.” The mineworkers allege that the attack took place even though the company’s leading negotiator had agreed to work to resolve the labor conflict.

In a press release to “clarify media disinformation,” Torex Gold denied that the workers who had been killed were employed by the company or that a strike was even taking place, instead calling the refusal to work an “illegal blockade.”

The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) governor of Guerrero, Héctor Astudillo Flores, said that the situation was very “delicate” because the mineworkers’ struggle might make Guerrero a less appealing low-wage platform for corporations. “Of course, this scares away investment. These facts undoubtedly chase away any investor that has come to Guerrero or that wishes to come here,” said Astudillo Flores. He also made it clear that his administration is firmly on the side of the multinational corporations and that the mineworkers can expect no governmental assistance in their dispute: “I understand that this is an issue of an occupational nature, which escapes our state influence.”

The mineworkers at *La Media Luna* work under what is known as a “protection union,” which has supposedly been banned in the United States and Canada but are still legal in Mexico. Under such contracts, a union is imposed upon the workers and is automatically authorized to negotiate wages, benefits, and working conditions without any democratic input or representation from workers. A company can then, in one fell swoop, null previous contracts and eliminate concessions won by workers over decades of struggle. Workers who question or refuse to accept the new

conditions are fired and blacklisted by the mine owners.

At the Cananea mine in the northern state of Sonora, for example, one of the oldest labor contracts in the country was eliminated in 2007. Four years later, the CTM was imposed upon the workers under a new contract. More than 2,000 striking mineworkers were fired by the mine's owner, Grupo México, after their strike was declared illegal. Workers' rights were reduced to a bare minimum, with the resulting contract removing 197 of the standing 253 contract provisions. Mineworkers' vacation days were reduced from 12 to 7, holidays were lowered from 35 to 18 days, and contract workers were introduced into the labor force. Grupo México is the third largest copper producer in the world and is owned by German Larrea, the second richest person in the country.

The CTM is rightfully hated by workers as a stooge of their exploitative bosses. However, by joining the SNTMMSSRM, the workers are tying themselves to another nationalist organization that, by its very nature cannot defend, let alone guarantee, their social rights.

The SNTMMSSRM is affiliated with the United Steelworkers union (USW) and "global union" IndustriALL. Just like the CTM, the USW serves as an enforcer for the corporations and has betrayed countless struggles by US and Canadian workers. After the election of Donald Trump, USW President Leo Gerard pledged to work with his administration based on their common agenda of trade protectionism and economic nationalism.

IndustriALL was formed in 2012 from a merger of other "global unions," including the International Metalworkers' Federation and the International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers' Federation. These organizations trace their lineage to the CIA-funded International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), which was founded at the onset of the Cold War as an explicitly anti-communist organization to combat the influence of socialism in the labor movement.

There can be no "global union" under a capitalist market if nations—and unions themselves—can pit workers against each other to see who can offer the lowest wages and the tamest labor force. Workers can only be genuinely united on an international basis if they are armed with a program to consciously link their struggles across national boundaries for the socialist

transformation of the world economy.



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