



Mexican worker demands for the renegotiation of NAFTA

Twenty-four years of NAFTA has resulted in an economic and social disaster for Mexico. Far from what President Trump asserts, Mexico has had the worst of the deal. Apart from the disastrous situation in rural areas and massive migration, NAFTA has brought real regression in all labour standards, unemployment, increased the amount of precarious work and has led to a loss of rights.

All the promises made to Mexican workers have not been realized. We were promised better jobs and wages, but today we have worse jobs and the lowest wages in the continent. This is why Mexico's authentic trade unions are demanding all governments take steps to reverse these trends, as part of the NAFTA renegotiation.

Economic integration cannot be driven by deplorable labour conditions in one country. Any effort to ensure fair and equitable economic development means focusing our collective attention on those who have the least, and have lost the most. This should be the starting point for a truly progressive model of globalization.

OUR DEMANDS

- **Wage Adjustments** - The decline in real wages for Mexican workers has been dramatic. Purchasing power has fallen by 50 per cent. Raising wage standards is not just a matter of raising the minimum wage (which less than one-third of workers earn), but also raising professional salaries and contract wages. Mexico must start by eliminating salary caps imposed by government, even in instances when a company is willing to pay more. Maintaining artificially low wages fosters what is widely viewed as Mexico's "comparative advantage," designed to attract foreign investment. We believe in the principle of equal pay for equal work and we demand, in NAFTA, a process by which wages in Mexico can progressively increase, through free and fair contract negotiations (just like in Canada and the United States).
- **Decent Work** - More than half of the economically active population (EAP) in Mexico works in the informal sector. Real unemployment is around 15 per cent. Those who are lucky enough to have a job are increasingly likely to work precariously, with no social security, no benefits and no collective agreement - often working as subcontractors with no job stability and, therefore, no right to a pension. We demand that, through NAFTA, Mexico's growing crisis of precarious labour be contained. We must ensure the principles of "decent work", as defined by the International Labour Organization, are adhered to in Mexico.

- **Union Freedom and Collective Bargaining** - The package of special terms offered to investors in Mexico includes so-called employer “protection” contracts, administered by “ghost” unions and signed without any involvement or engagement of the workers themselves. If labour conditions are to improve, it is essential that workers reclaim their right to choose their own union, to be informed about their collective agreement and have the right to vote on it. ILO Convention 87 on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise must be respected by the Mexican authorities. So too must ILO Convention 98 (the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining) must be ratified and adhered to by Mexico. Demonstrated adherence to these core conventions must be a precondition of any new NAFTA.
- **Fair Dispensation of Justice** - Last year a constitutional reform was passed which aimed to improve the administration of justice in labour law. This included the elimination of corporate (and corrupt) control that employers, “ghost” union leaders and government held over Mexico’s conciliation and arbitration boards. However, a new set of proposed counter-reforms aim to undo this. In fact, these counter reforms aim to maintain corporate control over the boards and maintain the use of “protection” contracts. We demand that labour reforms guarantee an impartial dispensation of justice, union freedom and collective bargaining.
- **Migrant Rights** - Millions of workers have found themselves forced to migrate under NAFTA. We demand that they cease to be considered criminals and discriminated against and that they are guaranteed equal rights across North America.
- **Enforceable Chapter on Labour** - Any treaty should include a respect for and improvement of labour standards for all workers: not just as mere words, but as binding commitments on the whole of the treaty. Any breach of these treaty commitments must be enforced through sanctions.
- **Labour Rights that are Common for all in the Region** - Negotiators should consider establishing a common threshold for labour conditions in the whole of the North American region – a policy standardizing labour standards upwards, to the highest level now existing in the three countries.
- **Rights Before Profits** - It is not enough to have a chapter on labour, if the rest of the treaty contributes to rising poverty, more insecurity and promotes lower social and labour conditions. The asymmetries between the three NAFTA countries should be taken into account and a model that helps to reduce the inequalities between the countries and inside each of the three countries should be promoted.



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