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Latin America on the move: Strike remains a powerful trade union weapon



With more than 26 months of duration, the strike of the journalists of the Mexican agency of información Notimex is one of the longest conflicts in the contemporary trade union history of Latin America.



The young Mexican union leader Adriana Urrea at the head of the strike of more than two years of NOTimex journalists. Photo Guillermo Granados SutNotimex.

It began on February 21, 2020 and continues. It was launched by [SutNotimex](#), the Single Union of Notimex Workers, which has the active support of the National Union of Press Editors, an organization affiliated to the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) based in Brussels, Belgium.

By that date Notimex had fired 245 of its 327 employees. The main demand of the strike continues to be the restitution of the dismissed personnel and full respect for the Collective Labour Agreement.



Since then, Notimex's "classic" news service has been suspended. The agency replaced a portion of those fired and turned to other channels and social media to try to mitigate the impact of the strike on its day-to-day information offerings.

SutNotimex currently has a hundred members, 90% are women. "We have lived two years and two very complex months. No wages and no social benefits," Adriana Urrea, a young journalist and general secretary of the union, told this correspondent. Urrea participated in the last week of April in the 4th. meeting of the International Trade Union Network of Solidarity and Struggle held in Dijon, France.



Adriana Urrea at the manifestación of this last May 5

At the moment of the balance of this conflict always underway, the leader emphasizes with emotion the majority presence of women. "We are leading a very long struggle with comrades who do not accept to lift the strike because they feel it would be a capitulation." And that they are playing for the union that they recovered from the hands of an inoperative bureaucracy and that they managed to rebuild.

Urrea also claims the enormous national and international legitimacy: "Broad sectors of Mexican unions and civil society today actively support us, recognize us and adhere to our demands. Just like organizations around the world. This is already a great victory of our trade union struggle."

Another struggle, the same weapons

Almost 4,500 kilometers south of Mexico, a frontal trade union conflict broke out last December in the heart of Andean Peru. Its protagonists: the workers of the Andaychagua mine, in the department of Junín (44 thousand square kilometers). They demand that the *Volcan Mining Company*, owned by the Swiss multinational *Glencore*, sign a [Collective Bargaining Agreement](#).



Despite the fact that the Peruvian authorities had already recognized the legitimacy of the union demands, in the face of the employer's refusal to negotiate such an agreement, on December 20 of last year the Union of Metallurgical Mine Workers of Andaychagua called for the strike. After more than 60 days of conflict, the Peruvian government demanded that *Glencore's* subsidiary sit down to negotiate. The company rejected the official decision and chose to appeal to the courts, resorting to various formal pretexts.

"One of the possible root causes why the *Volcan* would not accept the negotiation is the union's decision to expand the scope of affiliation to outsourced workers," Gianina Echevarría, union advisor and member of the Labor Development Program (PLADES), an institution specialized in labor problems in Peru and Latin America, explains in an exclusive interview.

The Andaychagua mine, which is especially dedicated to the extraction of silver and zinc, has approximately 400 direct (plant) workers including administrative staff. Another 1,100 are workers of subsidiaries or contractors of the *Volcan*, so they do not enjoy the same rights as direct workers. Their temporary contracts may not be renewed without forcing the *Volcan* to pay compensation and social rights.



Demonstration of the workers of the Andaychagua Miners' Union

Echevarría recently visited Switzerland invited by Swiss organizations for the celebration of May 1 and to participate in several informative events on the trade union situation in her country. "Another level of tension, the trigger for the strike," he explains, "was the opposition of the *Employers of Volcan* to sign a Collective Agreement with the union. In July 2021, the latter proposed a list of demands that Glencore's subsidiary refused to negotiate."

According to this union advisor, who also represents the NVC International organization in Peru in the Netherlands, "the working conditions of outsourced workers are often worse than those of direct employees." They work hundreds of meters underground, in poorly ventilated spaces, with very high temperatures and without adequate safety equipment.



An authoritarian company that rejects parity dialogue

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the situation of miners has deteriorated further. This situation prompted the union at its December 2020 meeting to modify its statutes, in order to authorize the affiliation of its outsourced colleagues. The regional labour office approved this change, but *glencore's* subsidiary filed an appeal to invalidate it. The authorities rejected that appeal. The company then retaliated against the union and multiplied the formal legal obstacles to not negotiating with its union counterpart.

Respect for conventions and collective bargaining is a universal right recognized by the International Labour Organization and an essential instrument for workers. However, this right produces irritation in broad sectors of employers. The strike remains in some Latin American countries, an essential weapon of the trade union struggle.

Thousands of workers resort to this measure of struggle. Strikes that demand great personal sacrifices on the part of their protagonists. However, they see that their demands and struggles are in good health, they gather significant social support and, many times, even their exemplary commitment awakens and mobilizes international solidarity.

**Article in tribute to Victorio Paulón, friend-brother, fellow former political prisoner of the Argentine prison of Coronda during the last dictatorship, prominent Argentine trade union militant, who died on May 5, 2022 in Rosario, Santa Fe, Argentina.*

Sergio Ferrari from Bern to La Pluma, May 9, 2022

Edited by [María Piedad Ossaba](#)

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