

IN SOLIDARITY WITH WORKERS ON STRIKE AGAINST ASARCO, AND CONDEMNING GRUPO MEXICO'S VIOLATIONS OF LABOR, HUMAN AND ENVIRONMENTAL RIGHTS

Since Oct. 13, 2019, nearly 1,800 members of AFL-CIO-affiliated unions—the Machinists (IAM), Boilermakers (IBB), Electrical Workers (IBEW), Operating Engineers (IUOE), Plumbers and Pipe Fitters (UA) and the United Steelworkers (USW)—as well as members of the Teamsters (IBT), have been on an unfair labor practice strike against Asarco at five locations in Arizona and Texas. Asarco is owned by the Mexican multinational mining company Grupo México.

The strike is in response to the “bad faith” bargaining of Asarco’s Mexico-based management and its violations of U.S. federal labor laws. Asarco has refused to grant basic wage increases to employees for the past 10 years and has illegally imposed other draconian takeaway demands, including more than doubling workers’ health care premiums and freezing workers’ pension plans.

Recently, Asarco began hiring strikebreakers and may be permanently replacing striking workers, which the AFL-CIO sees as a violation of U.S. federal labor laws, the International Labor Organization’s core labor standards, and the labor chapter of the newly negotiated United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA).

Billionaire Germán Larrea Moto Velasco, Mexico’s second richest man, owns Asarco and several other mining operations throughout the Americas, along with railroads, port shipping terminals and movie theater chains. Larrea’s lack of compassion for the workers he employs and the communities he has polluted suggest that no fair settlement can be reached unless the governments of Mexico and the United States and the state of Arizona intervene.

- A 2006 explosion at a Grupo México mine buried 65 workers, trapping them underground while they slowly died from injuries, dehydration or suffocation. After recovering only two bodies, for the past 13 years Grupo Mexico made no effort to help recover workers’ bodies or adequately compensate their families.
- Workers at three mines in Mexico, represented by the National Union of Mine, Metal, Steel and Related Workers of the Mexican Republic (Los Mineros), have been on strike against Grupo México since July 30, 2007. In 2010, Grupo México used private security forces to violently evict miners at the Cananea mine in México who were protesting nonpayment of salaries owed to them by Grupo México. In 2012, the company again used force to attack striking workers at the San Martín mine in an attempt to impose a company-controlled “protection union.”
- In 2014, undertrained Grupo México contractors, bused in to break a strike at a Grupo México mine, released more than 10 million gallons of copper sulfate into the Rio Sonora watershed. This was the worst ecological disaster in Mexico’s

history. On Jan. 15, 2020, the Mexican Supreme Court, in a unanimous ruling, held that the reparations made for the damage done by Larrea's mining company "were not adequate."

- In 2014, an arbitrator ordered Asarco to restore withheld bonus pay to hundreds of Arizona workers under a 2011 labor agreement. Two federal district courts and a federal circuit court ruled in the employees' favor, but it took five years and a Supreme Court decision in October 2019 to force payment of more than \$10 million to affected workers.
- According to Good Jobs First's Violation Tracker, Asarco has racked up nearly \$400 million in environmental penalties and \$2 million in workplace health and safety penalties in the United States.

The USMCA, recently ratified by Mexico and the United States, requires both countries to respect international standards for environmental protection and internationally recognized worker rights, including freedom of association, collective bargaining and the right to strike. While the USMCA has not yet entered into force, it is clear that Germán Larrea and Grupo México have acted with complete disregard for these standards, as well as for the laws of both the United States and Mexico, and it is imperative that both governments act now to hold this rogue employer to account.

The AFL-CIO is fully committed in its support for striking miners at Asarco. The federation calls on Asarco's parent company, Grupo México, to negotiate a fair contract with the unions at the mines. Given the egregious nature of the contract violations, environmental degradation and disregard for communities, the AFL-CIO also urges the Business Roundtable to follow through on its Statement on the Purpose of a Corporation, which it issued in August 2019, and to condemn the actions of Grupo México and its subsidiary Asarco.

The AFL-CIO also will communicate with members of Congress, the executive branch, the Mexican government, and candidates for the 2020 presidential and congressional elections to seek a resolution for the nearly 1,800 miners who safely and responsibly mine some 66% of U.S. copper output.