



Mexican Mine and Metalworkers on the march in
Ciudad Lazaro Cardenas . . .



Lazaro Cardenas April 20, 2010



. . . joined by Steelworkers from District 7





District 7 Director Jim Robinson, District 1 Director Dave McCall, and District 12 Sub-Director Manny Armenta stand Honor Guard before the monument to the Martyrs of the Lazaro Cardenas strike of 2006.

Hector and Mario: the Martyrs of the 2006 strike in Lazaro Cardenas

In the 1990's a wave of privatization washed over Mexico. In Lazaro Cardenas, Michoacán, the steel mill built by the government in the 1970's, and operated by the government-owned company Sicartsa, was split and sold to two buyers.

The bar side of the operation was sold to Grupo Villacero (a group owned by the politically connected Villareal family). This part of the plant continued to operate under the name Sicartsa.

The slab producing side of the plant was sold to Ispat, the steel company owned by Lakshmi Mittal. The plant was run by the Ispat subsidiary Ispat de Mexico (I-Mexa).

In 2006, as the government and Grupo Mexico began their attack on the Mineros and their leader Napoleon Gomez, strikes broke out across Mexico as Sections of the Mineros demanded that their employers recognize Napoleon as the true leader of the union.

In Lazaro Cardenas, Section 271 struck. With Steelworkers President Leo Gerard acting as intermediary, Lakshmi Mittal and Napoleon Gomez quickly reached an agreement and the strike on the I-Mexa side of

the plant ended.

But the Villareals held out, hoping to break the union. At their request, on April 20 the state and federal governments sent in police forces to attempt to oust the workers from the plant and end the strike.

A helicopter circled the area of the main plant gate, where the primary group of workers maintained their presence, and police began shooting at the strikers. Two workers, Mario A. Castillo Rodriguez and Hector Alvarez Gomez, were killed with shots to the head.

Following the murder of the two workers, the strike ended, and the Villareals sold out to Mittal.

Since 2006, each April 20 has been marked by a march commemorating both the sacrifice of the lives of Hector and Mario and the heroic resistance of the members of Section 271 to the attack on their union.

In 2010 Steelworkers joined the march—beginning a tradition that will continue into the future.

Marching with the Mineros

By: Doug May, Editor of the award-winning Local 1899 newspaper THE METTLE POST

When USW District 7 Director Jim Robinson and Sub-2 Staff Rep. Dave Dowling invited me to participate in a spring Solidarity Trip on the Pacific coast of Mexico, I had no illusions that I was going to witness a beach full of beer bong and collegiate exuberance. However, I was unaware that Los Mineros members, the union representing miners and steelworkers in Mexico, would leave me with an uneasy feeling of being sent back in time.

The two days I spent in Lazaro Cardenas, on April 19 and 20th, commemorating the four-year anniversary of the death of two Section 271 Mineros steel mill workers, helped me to realize what can be done with determined grit and the vocal outpouring of support by unionists fighting for workers' rights. They're engaged in the same fights American labor organizations fought to achieve decent conditions and dignity over a century ago. To witness this in 2010 was an exciting experience that was as equally moving as it was disturbing.

A government intimidating the wives, sisters and mothers of striking workers by only allowing a one-hour supply of running water per-day to their homes. Shutting down a community family health clinic. A government-directed kidnapping of the wife of a union leader. The freezing of a union's bank accounts. Forcing into exile the National Union's president. Colorful banners and unionist enthusiasm that leads to spontaneous chants expressing solidarity towards reversing unfair and unsafe business practices by powerful corporations. Even if these incidents sound like a retelling of stories pulled from the robber baron era in the U.S., these episodes are currently going on right now, throughout Mexico, right here in North America.

Seventy-five District 7 USW members from all over the Indiana-Illinois region, as well as District 1 Director (and Chair of ArcelorMittal bargaining) Dave McCall, traveled to the industrial seaport town of Lazaro Cardenas on the Central Pacific coast, which was the site of a steel mill strike in 2006 by Los Mineros Section 271.

Our contingent spent the first of our two-day

stay in an informative workshop at the union hall where a couple hundred Mineros members treated us like true friends. We learned the background and history of the tensions that led up to the deadly attack against the workers. Napoleon Gomez, National President of Los Mineros, addressed our group in a webcast from his exiled Vancouver location.

The following day, our District 7 group participated in a display of international partnership between Los Mineros and the USW on the four-year anniversary of the two workers' tragic deaths. We joined thousands who marched along Lazaro Cardenas Blvd. to the memorial site at the main gate of the steel mill where statues depicting the two workers have been erected.

With the help of an interpreter, L.A. Garcia, of USW Local 1010 in East Chicago, one of many Spanish-speaking USW members who participated in our trip, I had a discussion with the Women's Front, a group of widows, wives and sisters of the striking Cananea miners. There was a contagious air of confidence exhibited by these women as they expressed a determination to raise public awareness to the abuses their husbands, fathers and brothers have been experiencing. This was as surreal to me as if I were reading a fictional novel. But their intensity and indignation was very real and well displayed as I marched alongside them heading towards the memorial at the main gate of the steel plant.

Few would argue that this is nothing less than a mirror image of U.S. workers battles during the industrial revolution. But some USW members may dismiss their problems and ask, "Why should we concern ourselves with the Mineros' troubles?" This Mineros experience is taking place 118 years after the Homestead Strike where seven steelworkers were killed at a Carnegie steel plant in Pittsburgh (predecessor of U.S. Steel) in a similar fight with the same corporate objective in both centuries-destroy the union. This is history repeating itself.

Global capital will continue crossing borders as will the multinationals' desire to exploit cheap labor. If we, as an organization and as a country, hope to raise Mexican citizens' standard of living to anything close to ours, as the NAFTA compact was naively designed, we must recognize these alliances have a greater need to become global as well. Crossing borders should become a strategic slogan between labor organizations, not a term used for pandering to the paranoia of nervous citizens.



Members of the Drum and Bugle Corps. from Cananea, where the Mineros have been on strike for nearly 3 years, were a highlight of the march.

When it was time for the Section 65 leadership to stand Honor Guard, the Corps. played a solemn tribute to the dead.



Scenes from April 20, 2010



Speakers at the Rally



Above Left: Jim Robinson, Director, District 7

Above Right: Jurki Reina, Gen.Sec., IMF

Below Left: Manny Armenta, Sub Director, District 12

Below Right: Mario Garcia Ortiz, Delegate, State of Michoacán

Below: Napoleon Gomez Urrutia, General Secretary, Mineros (shown speaking by video conference on Tuesday) addressed the crowd by cell phone held up to the microphone on stage

