Union Organizing of the ATC

Workers on farms and factories (often owned by a private company) face struggles such as exploitative labor practices, unfair wages, dangerous work conditions, and a lack of year-round work contracts. As a part of supporting campesinas and campesinos, the ATC encourages workers to organize in unions to collectively defend their rights. The ATC focuses on land workers, such as coffee farm workers in Jinotega and Matagalpa, banana workers in Chinandega, and tobacco workers in Estelí. The ATC also represents workers in a three-way dialogue between the government, the workers, and the private sector.

The ATC organizes informative meetings and workshops to discuss workers’ rights and offer worker training programs on occupational health and safety. Additionally, the ATC helps workers to organize unions and defend their rights under the Código de Trabajo de la República de Nicaragua—the Nicaraguan Worker’s Code. The Código states the workers’ rights to a just salary, overtime hours, housing, healthcare, compensation for accidents, and a labor contract. It was passed in 1945, but it was not implemented during the Somoza dictatorship because workers did not have the freedom to organize—if workers attempted to form unions, Somoza would put them in jail. The Worker’s Code was not applied until the triumph of the Sandinista Revolution in 1979.

Under the Worker’s Code, the ATC organizes to create, administer, and update unions with the government Work Ministry. To form a union, the workers must organize at least 20 affiliates and assign nine different secretary positions (General Secretary, Fiscal Secretary, Women’s Secretary, etc.). There are various types of unions: unions with one company, unions with several companies, community unions, and municipal unions.

The ATC has trained lawyers who support and accompany workers and worker unions in addressing grievances, with particular focus on supporting women in the workplace. Through the Movimiento de Mujeres del Campo (MMC), the ATC organizes meetings to support women and includes clauses in collective bargaining agreements that explicitly address the situation of women in the workplace.

The ATC is a Confederation of the 16 departmental ATC Federations, each of which are comprised of workers unions. At national meetings, union affiliates can connect with unions from different departments to exchange knowledge and experiences. In this way, the ATC unites unions and workers from across Nicaragua.

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