

# report

Region:  
**Latin America and the Caribbean**

Text:  
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## SEEKING SUSTAINABLE INDUSTRIAL POLICIES FOR LATIN AMERICA

**IndustriALL Global Union encourages its unions throughout the world to develop sustainable industrial policies. But this can be challenging, especially for IndustriALL affiliates in Latin America and the Caribbean - a developing region where neoliberal policies are once again back on the agenda and threatening workers' rights.**

Achieving sustainability involves working for a present and future where social and economic needs are satisfied without endangering the environment.

To that end, IndustriALL has been working on developing a sustainable industrial policy since 2013. The objective is to seek solutions to situations affecting everyone: particularly climate change and the environmental, economic and social crisis.

In 2015, 195 countries signed the Paris Agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and limit climate change at the global level. All of IndustriALL's sectors have significant impacts on the environment, but environmental regulations for those sectors are weak.

By getting actively involved, unions can prevent decisions on the future of industries, jobs and the planet from remaining exclusively in the hands of governments, multinational corporations and market forces.

Instead, they can ensure that the voice of industrial workers is heard when

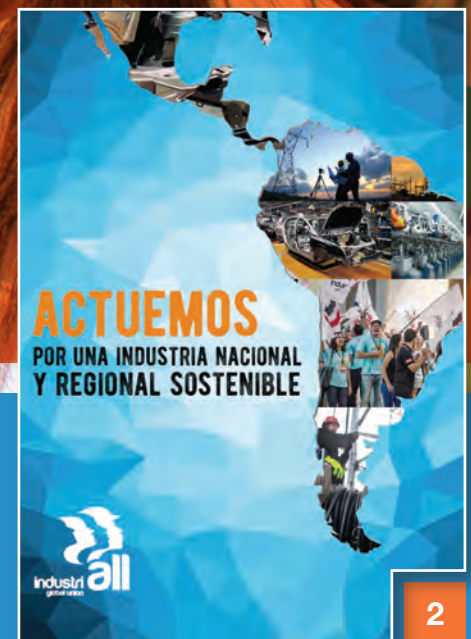
developing an industrial policy that allows for a Just Transition to a sustainable future, i.e. by seeking measures to safeguard existing jobs, create new ones, and ensure decent and sustainable workplaces.

"It must be remembered that a Just Transition is not an end in itself – it is a pathway to a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable future," says the director for health, safety and sustainability at IndustriALL, Brian Kohler.

### NEOLIBERALISM VS. A JUST TRANSITION IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Currently, many countries in the region have neoliberal governments that favour the interests of business above social and environmental rights, thereby obstructing a Just Transition to sustainability.

In Argentina, the government of Mauricio Macri is implementing an economic policy of "adjustment" which has led to an avalanche of layoffs. Macri is promoting the privatization of state



enterprises and the flexibilization of labour with the aim of making Argentina an investor-friendly country.

The same is happening in Brazil, where the government of Michel Temer who, after a parliamentary coup, is pursuing a pro-business and financial market agenda, while backing reforms that attack workers' rights. For example, Temer tried, unsuccessfully, to push through a decree that would allow mining companies to exploit a huge reservation in Amazonia.

To say, these examples will not lead to social, economic or environmental sustainability. Rather, they will lead to increasing environmental catastrophes and social distress. Workers, their families, and the communities that depend upon them will be forced to pay the price.

In addition to the examples above there are free trade agreements (FTAs). Negotiations are continuing with a view to signing an FTA between the Common Market of the South (Mercosur) and the European Union (EU), an agreement which the unions of Mercosur are opposing.

“The intent of such trade agreements is to enshrine and de-regulate business interests – particularly those of the finance industry – above national laws and above all other human and environmental interests. Let it be understood: there is nothing about the financial market that will bring about a sustainable future,” adds Brian Kohler.

The unions from Mercosur argue that what is emerging is not a genuine, fair and balanced association agreement, but rather an FTA prejudicial to national industries, and indeed the long-term sustainability of the less developed countries.

According to the unions, the FTA would promote unemployment in the Mercosur countries as, by lowering import tariffs on products manufactured in Europe, Latin American enterprises would be unable to compete and would go out of business.

In parallel, negotiations are underway for the renewal of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Mexico, Canada and the United States.

The unions of all three countries agree that since its beginning in 1994, the treaty has hurt workers’ rights, especially in Mexico. It has also been detrimental to the environment, and put pressure on social protections. Trade unions from the three countries have been pressuring the Mexican government to raise its labour standards and wages to prevent unfair competition with US and Canadian workers.

### THE UNIONS’ RESPONSE: ALTERNATIVES AND STRUGGLE

Faced with this situation, the unions have devoted their efforts to proposing alternatives and continuing to fight back.

Together with the Coordinating Centre of Southern Cone Labour Confederations, the International Labour Confederation, UNI Americas and other social movements, IndustriALL affiliates have participated in mobilizations against the World Trade Organization, which they consider is only interested in discussing an agenda that defends the interests of the big multinational corporations.

Unions affiliated to IndustriALL in Latin America also held a debate on democracy and fundamental labour rights throughout the world on 12 December 2017 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where they undertook to work toward political, social, economic, feminist and environmental alternatives that give priority to human rights and harmony with the environment.

Unions affiliated to IndustriALL in Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay also participated in the 2017 Day of Mobilization for Democracy and Against Neoliberalism on 16 November in Uruguay, an initiative of the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA).

As part of those activities, IndustriALL organized a seminar for the defence of sustainable national and regional industry with a view to showing that all the countries of the region are continuing to suffer job losses, falling industrial production and violations of workers’ rights, and that the time has come to seek a solution.

The unions have reaffirmed their commitment to oppose policies of precarious employment and harmful social policies of those intent on subjugating them. They agreed to continue work with IndustriALL to develop sustainable industrial policies, including measures to preserve and create secure, well-paid jobs, to ensure sustainable employment and to have a say in the decisions made by their respective industries.



“We have to act together and oppose the policies that encourage precarious work. We must deepen our experiences and debates among the unions so that we can think together, merge and build strong unions with capacity to generate proposals and negotiate on sustainable development,” says the regional secretary of IndustriALL in Latin America and the Caribbean, Marino Vani.

- 1 March for the Day for Democracy and Against Neoliberalism in Montevideo, Uruguay. *IndustriALL*
- 2 IndustriALL leaflet for the defence of a sustainable national and regional industry in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- 3 Marino Vani, IndustriALL regional secretary in Latin America and the Caribbean, at Seminar for the defence of a sustainable national and regional industry in Montevideo, Uruguay. *IndustriALL*
- 4 IndustriALL’s affiliates from Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay participate in the march for the Day for Democracy and against Neoliberalism in Montevideo, Uruguay. *IndustriALL*



## SHOWING THE WAY TO A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE: JUST TRANSITION

- ▶ IndustriALL affiliate, Industrial Chile, has been participating since 2016 in the Movement for Lithium, an initiative of social and union organizations to propose a National Lithium Policy. The goal is for the state to mine lithium and create a new industry which would be environmentally sustainable, and initiate a process of industrialization which presently does not exist in that country. They stress that demand for lithium will continue to grow in the renewable energy sector, and that non-metallic mineral can be used as an input in the manufacture of lithium carbonate batteries for electric cars and electronic appliances.
- ▶ In 2017, the unions of the CUT Brazil (also affiliated to IndustriALL) set up the Institute of Labour, Industry and Development (LID), a body that works to promote development in Brazil. They are seeking to establish sustainable public policies that promote industry as the main engine of social development. Their aim is to promote workers’ interests in decision-making forums, defend national industry and preserve jobs.
- ▶ The Trade Union Confederation of the Workers of the Americas (TUCA) has been promoting the Development Platform of the Americas since 2014, a proposal from the labour movement for sustainable growth of the continent in the political, social, economic and environmental fields as an alternative to neoliberal policies. The Platform is supported by the International Labour Organization’s Bureau of Workers’ Activities (ACTRAV/ILO), the FES Union Project and IndustriALL Global Union.