

Megamining, arrests and harassment in Andalgalá

Via [Contrahemonia Web](#)

The MARA extractivist project, without any kind of social license, continues to advance. Yesterday members of the El Algarrobo Assembly were detained in what they point out as an anti-democratic, fraudulent and pro-mining action of the provincial government.

Manuel Fontenla, member of Pucara “Pueblos Catamarqueños en Resistencia y autodeterminación”, (Catamarqueños Peoples in Resistance and autodetermination) tells us that on Monday the city of Andalgalá was under siege. Police from the province of Catamarca and special groups began a series of arrests in the morning of members of the El Algarrobo Assembly and neighbors who had been demonstrating peacefully, as they do every Saturday during the now historic “Walks for Life and Water” that the town has been carrying out for more than 10 years.

The orders to detain and interrogate the members of the people’s assembly were issued by prosecutor Soledad Rodriguez. Manuel says that it has been proven that she has worked as a lawyer for the mining companies. The arrests were made on Monday but the detainees are expected to be interrogated on Wednesday: “This procedure has no reason to exist. These arrests only demonstrate that the anti-democratic and fraudulent actions are trying to promote the MARA Project at all costs”.

The reason for the arrests lies in a series of disturbances that took place last Saturday in the offices that Agua Rica has in the center of the city and in the headquarters of the Frente para la Victoria, symbolic centers of the repressive state megaminerero apparatus.

In a communiqué on Saturday night, the El Algarrobo Assembly denied any connection with the violent incidents while publicly denouncing the police for liberating the area and sending infiltrators who started the fires and attacks against the buildings.

Manuel describes the hostile climate that had been perceived for days in the town, affirming the entry of many police vans and special groups with the apparent justification of the health situation in relation to the COVID. But all citizens knew that the situation had to do with the government's pro-mining policy and a clear repressive policy towards those who are demonstrating against this project. Weeks ago Jose Martiarena, member of the El Algarrobo Assembly, denounced that they were experiencing situations of intimidation where they were being filmed by the police and threatened for committing a crime, since they were preventing the development of mega-mining, an activity that has been catalogued as essential by decree of the National Government. Existential paradox since it puts at risk the quality and quantity of water necessary for the health care of the entire Department of Andalgalá.

Beyond Saturday's situation, the tension in Catamarca was rekindled when neighbors decided to carry out a selective blockade on March 22, when assemblies from all over the country gathered to mobilize for the World Water Day. These were selective road blockades in the districts of El Potrero and Choya, where the multinational mining company Yamana Gold has been trying to carry out an extractivist project that endangers water and life throughout the territory. The selective and informative blockade is located on the communal roads, which is where the company would pass towards the place where the exploitation will take place. A few days ago, the neighbors saw that the drilling and exploitation machines were beginning to climb the hill, which means the concrete start of the exploitation of Cerro Aconquiya and the beginning of the

MARA Project.

This is a project that does not have a social license. The different environmental organizations affirm its illegality, since the company is violating two resolutions issued by the former provincial Mining Secretariat (now Ministry) in 2009, which prohibits mining traffic on the Choya and Potrero roads, the two accesses that the assembly has been selectively blocking for two weeks. In Andalgalá, municipal ordinance 029/16 is still in force, which “prohibits all metalliferous mining activity, in the open-pit mode, and nuclear mining activity, in any form, in the upper basin of the Andalgalá River”. In addition, the MARA project violates the Glaciers Law, the General Environmental Law, and Article 41 of the Constitution. It also does not have the Environmental Impact Reports approved as required. The arguments, reasons and evidence have been presented a thousand times by assemblies of Catamarca, by national universities, by national and international researchers.

The claims of the people of Andalgalá against the Agua Rica mega-mining project are protected by the aforementioned ordinance 029/16, unanimously approved in 2016. The same prohibits megaminera activity in the upper basin of the Andalgalá River. Agua Rica is located right at the headwaters of the Minas River, which is one of the tributaries that make up the Andalgalá River which provides water to the entire department. This development where the mine is to be built is 17 km from the town. Not by chance, one day before Christmas Eve 2020, the ordinance was declared unconstitutional by the Court of Justice of Catamarca, but not unanimously.

Ana Chayle, member of the Assembly El Algarrobo, says in a radio interview in “El Grito de la Tierra”[4] (Radio Sudaca) that they understand that there were bribes in that instance since there were judges with a history of having presented projects to prohibit the mega-mining activity: “We understand that their change of mind cannot be due to anything other than

a bribe because no one can change sharply in such a brutal turn". In addition, it was declared unconstitutional just when the judicial fair was starting to give the mining companies time to begin their work, but as soon as the fair was lifted, both the municipality and the assembly appealed the measure, which is currently in litigation, so it has no final sentence.

Ana states that they find a lot of ambivalence in the statements of the mayor Eduardo Córdoba who, in the media, says he is very angry with the mining state advance, expressing his desire to accompany the struggles of the people. But, from the assembly, they demand that it is necessary that this desire be materialized in concrete actions: "He should decree the prohibition of mega-mining because Eduardo Cordoba won the elections expressing his rejection to these extractive projects celebrated by the cry of the people "the snow-capped mountain is not touched". We need that cry to become a reality. We need him to act to stop this ecocide. We need him to represent the people who voted for him".

In this context, the arrival of the contingent of 60 police from special groups of the province to "take care" of the people of Andalgalá due to the COVID 19 pandemic, while the Hospital has neither hot water for the sanitation of the hospitalized people, nor supplies, nor medical personnel in a building that was built with mining royalties and that the people in favor of mining take as a monument to progress: "We do not even have a traumatologist in Andalgalá. We know that the police come to assure the companies that they will be able to work in peace" – says Ana in the aforementioned radio interview.

Meanwhile, as an Assembly, its members have been doing the work that should be done by their democratically elected representatives, including the police themselves. During all this time, since 10 years ago and before starting with the blockades and the camp, in the accesses leading from Andalgalá

to the mine, trucks and machinery circulated freely, violating the two resolutions of the current Ministry of Mining. Ana says: "So we decided to enforce what should have been enforced by the police. And we have to put our lives and our jobs on the back burner in order to be there 24 hours a day for 7 days, many of us putting our health at risk. However, on Friday, several vans passed by guarded by police vehicles to assure them of their work."

The path of the El Algarrobo Assembly

José tells us that the assembly's struggle began more than a decade ago, in 2009, as a reaction to a new mega-mining installation project in the province of Catamarca: "We had 12 years of experience with Alumbraera, which began in 1997 and was one of the largest mining operations in South America. We already knew about the poverty it brought and the social divisions that extractivism generates in our towns".

Once the assembly was created, as a way of protest they began to take walks, many of them multitudinous, every Saturday going around the square twice.

Today, 23 years after the installation of Alumbraera, the province is the second poorest in the country. The myths of employment and wealth generation are only supported by lies. During these 11 years, the company has worked to further deepen the social gap generated by extractivism within the towns where they want to develop: links with the various sectors of society in order to achieve a certain degree of legitimacy. The focus is on intervening in schools, clubs, retirement centers, cultural spaces and, above all, in the media, which make the problems and struggles that are being carried out invisible. In a town of approximately 20,000 inhabitants "80% do not want the mine and 20% do want it. Among the latter are obviously the businessmen and the majority of the political class".

In this action of the companies in conjunction with the different dominant sectors of each territory, it is important to highlight the arrival of different servile NGOs that are working to create consensus. For example, the NGO "Eco-Conscience" of Rodolfo Tarraubella (subsidized by the UN). These are inserting themselves in the Andalusian society and generating a sort of dialogue tables where they assure socio-environmental controls that do not exist, crossing this type of actions with charity actions and cultural events, managing to confuse the population and fomenting this gap in relation to the social license that they do NOT have in the towns.

From the El Algarrobo Assembly they assure that they are strong, organized and with the conviction to fight until the end. In the words of Ana: "Andalgalá is a town of 500 years of resistance. "Bronca and sadness. Because it is incredible that our life will always be like this. Always alert, always fighting. We are so close to losing everything and that is why we need that, not only Andalgalá accompanies us, but the whole country and all Latin America, because we are in the same fight for the defense of our territories."

#AguaRicaIsIllegal

#NoTienenLicenciaSocial

#OutWaterRica

#OutYamanaGold

#Andalgalá

#AndalgaláResists